

# CURRENT HISTORY

November 2006

*“The fundamental requirement today is to establish a basis of cooperation between the most powerful state—the United States—and the others, without which pressing proliferation problems cannot be solved.”*

## The End of the Nonproliferation Regime?

GEORGE PERKOVICH

The effort to constrain the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons is perhaps the most ambitious attempt ever made to extend the civilizing reach of the rule of law over humankind's destructive capacity. The United States, the Soviet Union, and other states laid the foundation for this mission in the 1960s with the negotiation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The treaty enshrines three basic bargains at the core of the nonproliferation regime. States that had not tested nuclear weapons before January 1, 1967, promised not to seek the transfer or manufacture of nuclear weapons, while the states that had already tested nuclear weapons promised to work seriously toward eliminating their nuclear arsenals. States with advanced nuclear capability promised to assist non-nuclear weapon states to develop “the applications of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.” And, less formally, states with nuclear weapons (primarily the United States and the Soviet Union) pledged to come to the assistance of non-nuclear-weapon states if they were threatened with nuclear attack.

In the decades since, states have evolved rules and institutions to govern nuclear exports, to safeguard and account for nuclear materials, and to control and even reduce the number of nuclear weapons. But the rules are not self-enforcing, as North Korea's October 9 nuclear test, and painful experience in Iraq, Iran, and elsewhere have shown. Moreover, states and international agencies must struggle to mobilize the power needed to enforce and adapt the rules as conditions change. Doing so involves difficult trade-offs as states seek benefits commensurate with the options they forgo and the costs they bear.

Compared with the dangers and costs of frequent military actions to combat nuclear proliferation, a rule-based nonproliferation system is cheap and highly beneficial to civilization. But maintaining and strengthening a rule-based system requires much more intense and creative leadership to confront a number of structural flaws.

The first flaw in the nonproliferation regime is the problem of maintaining political legitimacy and the will to enforce rules built on a double standard: one standard, less restrictive, for a few countries that possess nuclear weapons; and another, more demanding, for the vast majority that do not. A second flaw is the political failure of the UN Security Council's permanent members to cooperate in enforcing rules in tough cases. Third, the current rules for managing exports and the nuclear fuel cycle need to be updated in light of technological change and experience. Finally, the nuclear weapon states have failed to take seriously a core bargain obliging them to move toward nuclear disarmament.

### INSECURITY DILEMMAS

In 1995, to strengthen the nonproliferation regime, the signatories to the NPT agreed to transform its original 25-year term into an open-ended commitment. In doing so, they committed themselves to a stringent bargain. One hundred and seventy-three states reaffirmed their renunciation of nuclear weapons in return for an explicitly reaffirmed commitment by the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom to eventually eliminate their nuclear arsenals. All states did so with the understanding that while the treaty was demonstrably imperfect, it nonetheless made them all safer—individually and collectively.

At the time, there was good reason for optimism. The cold war was over. The number of

---

GEORGE PERKOVICH is vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

states possessing nuclear weapons had declined, and the number of weapons was falling. But soon, the picture darkened. Almost overnight, it seemed the elaborate nonproliferation system built around the NPT was in danger of failing.

In May 1998, India announced it had exploded five nuclear devices. Two weeks later, Pakistan boasted of five nuclear explosions of its own. Neither country had signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Pakistan had received vital nuclear weapon design and production assistance from China and from private actors based in NPT member states in the West. Suddenly, the prospect loomed of a nuclear war in South Asia that could kill millions and irradiate a quarter of the globe. Neither the NPT nor the broader nonproliferation regime had stopped two major countries from crossing the nuclear threshold.

Three years later, the events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated that shadowy movements, not under the control of any state, could commit sophisticated attacks of mass terror. After 9-11, what had been an important problem—the transfer and proliferation of nuclear technology—suddenly became an urgent one.

In 2003, news emerged that a network of scientists, engineers, and middlemen from Pakistan, Dubai, the United Kingdom, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and Turkey had for years been selling nuclear bomb designs and equipment necessary to produce nuclear weapons. Customers included North Korea, Iran, Libya, and perhaps others.

North Korea's test of a nuclear device this fall has added considerably to concerns about nonproliferation. It has also fueled speculation about other countries that might follow suit. Recently, some Brazilian and Japanese political leaders have openly suggested that their countries should reconsider their nuclear weapon options, while Egypt may seek to follow an Iranian course of acquiring ambiguous nuclear capabilities. In the summer of 2004, South Korea admitted that its engineers had produced highly enriched uranium and weapon-grade plutonium outside of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, contrary to NPT requirements. The discovery rekindled a debate in South Korea about why it is restricted from possessing a complete set of nuclear fuel-cycle capabil-

ities when its neighbors are not. Deeper problems underlie these uncertainties.

The first major problem is what international relations scholars dub the "security dilemma." State A fears states B and C and develops military power and doctrine to be able to defeat them. States B and C see this acquisition of capability as threatening and react by building up their own power. As long as these states cannot convince each other that they do not actually pose threats, they will feel insecure and seek military capability sufficient to deter or defeat whatever adversaries they have. The security dilemma arises even among relatively benign, defensively minded states. When aggressive, revolutionary states or states with unrequited territorial claims on their neighbors are involved, insecurity grows greater still. And when one or

more antagonists possesses nuclear weapons, the others are tempted to think they need them too.

The NPT has helped mitigate

nuclear security dilemmas by reassuring states that their neighbors will not acquire nuclear weapons, so they need not do the same. The five states recognized to possess nuclear weapons in the NPT also are, as was noted, supposed to reduce non-nuclear-weapon states' anxieties by pledging not to use nuclear weapons against them and by coming to their assistance if they do find themselves under nuclear threat. During the cold war, the security alliances that the United States and the Soviet Union extended around the world also reduced some anxieties. The Americans provided a nuclear and conventional military shield for NATO countries, Japan, South Korea, and other allies, thereby obviating their possible interest in acquiring nuclear weapons of their own. The Soviet Union did the same over its dominions. Over the longer term under the NPT, progress toward verifiably eliminating nuclear arsenals was to reassure all states that they did not need to acquire these weapons.

Unfortunately, neither security alliances nor the uneven promises of the NPT eliminated the insecurities that Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and other countries experienced at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. Saddam Hussein's Iraq had invaded Iran in 1980. When Iraq used chemical weapons on Iran, the international community did nothing—the United States sided with Iraq at that time, despite evidence of Iraq's use of chemical weapons.

---

*Demand for nuclear weapons will not diminish if the states that already possess the weapons continue to flaunt them as emblems of great power.*

---

Iran began its secret quest for uranium enrichment technology in the late 1980s. North Korea also was left behind as the cold war ended. Starving, isolated, underdeveloped, and abandoned after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it feared US military power and sought nuclear weapon capability as a deterrent and an asset to leverage for regime survival and financial gain.

No doubt North Korea, Iran, and Iraq scare their neighbors as much as they are scared by them—this is why the proliferation risks in northeast Asia and the Middle East are regional. If Iran acquires the capability to make nuclear weapons, and if North Korea conducts more weapons tests or otherwise intensifies its threatening behavior, their neighbors will be increasingly tempted to hedge their nuclear bets. Of course, if these three countries somehow were established democracies, they would be less insecure and would cause less insecurity in others. But as long as the leaders of countries fear that internal opponents or outside powers may try to force political change on them, nuclear weapon capability may be desired for regime protection.

Demand for nuclear weapons also will not diminish if the states that already possess the weapons continue to flaunt them as emblems of great power. French President Jacques Chirac this year seemed to place great emphasis on them for French security. Russia recently has trumpeted its nuclear capability. And the United States has not convinced the world that nuclear weapons are being deeply devalued. India and the United States have with much fanfare negotiated a nuclear cooperation agreement that much of the world sees as a celebration of India's status and value as a nuclear power. As long as a nuclear weapon capability is a highly valued currency, others will want to possess it.

## **LOOPHOLES AND DEFECTS**

On the supply side, Iran and North Korea both have benefited from weaknesses in other nations' export controls, and from lacunae in the NPT itself. The illicit proliferation network headed by Pakistani nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan understood that national export control officials might block transfers of whole factories or machines, but would be unlikely to detect transfers of subcomponents. So the network recruited and orchestrated technology vendors (mostly from Europe) who supplied thousands of specialized parts and components that passed through export control filters and then could be assembled in Iran, Libya, North Korea, or elsewhere. Because most of the components involved

are not exclusively used for nuclear weapons, the suppliers were not found guilty of illegal acts even when suspicious exports were intercepted. Indeed, since export controls are a national responsibility and since it is not an international crime to transfer nuclear weapons or related technology and material, smart proliferators do not risk jail time.

The difficulty in building legal barriers against such exports stems in part from the claim that under the NPT all states are entitled to operate facilities to enrich uranium and separate plutonium—thereby potentially making fuel for nuclear weapons—as long as they follow international accounting and inspection procedures to verify that material is not being diverted for bombs. States such as Iran can exercise this “right” and acquire technologies that bring them to the very brink of nuclear weapon capability without explicitly violating the NPT, and can then leave the treaty without penalty.

To date, the world's states have shown more determination to resist any narrowing of their rights to nuclear technology than to limit the spread of uranium enrichment and plutonium separation facilities to additional countries. This resistance to further limiting the “rights” of non-nuclear-weapon states makes it much more difficult to establish and enforce controls on exports, which in turn provides opportunities for actors like the Khan network to proliferate.

The United States and likeminded countries are trying to strengthen international norms and requirements on individual countries to adopt and enforce effective export controls. The United States and others, including the director general of the IAEA, Mohammad ElBaradei, also want to establish new rules so that uranium enrichment and plutonium separation are confined to countries that already conduct such activities, and do not spread elsewhere. But these rule-tightening efforts meet resistance that shows no signs of diminishing.

## **COMPLIANCE AND RESISTANCE**

A rule-based system such as the nonproliferation regime needs enforcers. The proper objective is universal compliance with the norms and rules of a toughened nuclear nonproliferation regime. “Compliance” means more than signatures on treaties or declarations of good intent—it means actual performance. And “universal” means that all actors must comply with the norms and rules that apply to them. The burden of compliance extends not only to states that are hedging their commitments not to obtain or sell nuclear weapon capabilities; it applies

equally to nuclear weapon states that are failing to honor their own nonproliferation pledges.

The United States is the only country that has the will and capability to project power globally. It could use this power for its own narrow purposes, or to enforce international norms, rules, and agreements—or all of the above. Depending how other states regard Washington's intentions, US power can stimulate or reverse proliferation. If states fear American intentions and capabilities, they may seek nuclear weapons to deter Washington, or, conceivably, could change their behavior to avoid pain the United States might inflict on them. Governments that believe the United States is determined to remove them whether or not they change particular behaviors may be more inclined to seek nuclear weapons for deterrence.

While American exercise of power to enforce compliance with nonproliferation rules can be problematic, no major proliferation challenge (excluding South Africa, perhaps) has been resolved without US leadership. The other members of the UN Security Council have not mustered the will or the capability to tackle proliferation challenges, while the IAEA does not have this mission.

Many European and developing country commentators argue that "compliance" evokes images of the United States acting as a rogue cop, knocking down walls and violating the sovereignty of other states without the authorization of legitimating institutions, particularly the UN Security Council. Reacting to the Iraq experience, many in the world fear the exertion of US power more than the failure of the nonproliferation regime.

Yet the proliferation of nuclear weapons poses such grave threats to international peace and security that rules and enforcement must be strengthened. National sovereignty remains vitally important, but as actors within state boundaries acquire the capability to threaten large numbers of their neighbors or even distant populations, the international community's obligation to prevent such threats necessarily expands. As destructive technologies evolve and the reach of nonstate actors grows, the balance between national sovereignty and international security imperatives must evolve, too.

Understandably, however, developing countries that have only recently wrested sovereignty from colonial masters are especially reluctant to accept the notion that certain global standards must be enforceable across sovereign borders. And Russia and China, veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council, are reluctant to support enforcement of international norms in other countries because

they worry that many of these norms have been produced in the West. To the extent that Moscow's and Beijing's own actions may violate international norms of human rights, for example, they do not want to strengthen precedents for sanctions or other punitive actions against violators of norms.

The challenge is to reassure states that the rules and their enforcement are judicious, fair, and balanced, not a new form of colonialism or American hegemony. The United States, as the power that others increasingly seek to constrain, must take special care to persuade those nations that it acts fairly and judiciously, and that enforcement of the rules applies to the United States as well. International institutions serve this legitimating function, which is one reason to support and strengthen them.

### THE CONFLICTED COUNCIL

Today, the UN Security Council enjoys more international legitimacy than other institutions or individual states. Its imprimatur does not guarantee that rule breakers will comply with its resolutions, but enforcement of rules without this imprimatur, or that of a regional body in the area involved, is difficult to sustain. The Security Council is the designated authority to which cases of noncompliance with safeguards requirements are to be reported, and is widely perceived to be the most legitimate enforcer of the NPT.

Herein lies a problem. The five permanent members of the Security Council are also the five states recognized by the NPT to possess nuclear weapons. They see the nonproliferation challenge almost exclusively in terms of keeping others away from nuclear weapons while retaining their own prerogatives to deploy nuclear weapons with international legitimacy. Many of the countries without nuclear weapons see the challenge differently. They increasingly ask what they are getting in a bargain whereby they eschew nuclear weapons, are asked to accept still greater limitations on technology transfer, are asked to impose sanctions on an oil-supplying country such as Iran, and are told that the United States, Russia, China, France, and perhaps others are not willing to seriously pursue elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

The general legitimacy problem in the current nonproliferation regime does not necessarily make it impossible to enforce rules in particular cases. It depends on whether the veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council are united. More precisely, enforcement is possible if none of the permanent members would veto enforcement measures agreed to by the others.

Two recent cases—North Korea and Iran—illuminate the problem of Security Council discord. North Korea ratified the NPT in 1985, encouraged by the Soviet Union's offer to build nuclear reactors there in return, but IAEA inspections did not begin until 1992. Inspections soon raised profound concerns that North Korea had secretly reprocessed plutonium, contrary to its obligations. After threatening to withdraw from the treaty in 1993, North Korea negotiated an agreement with the United States in 1994 to quell the immediate crisis. However, implementation of the US–North Korean Agreed Framework was fraught with delays and disputes for years, and when US intelligence reported in 2002 that North Korea had secretly begun a uranium enrichment program, a new crisis ensued.

North Korea declared its withdrawal from the NPT in 2003 under Article X of the treaty, which does permit withdrawal under certain conditions. Customary international law and basic common sense do not allow a state to violate the terms of a treaty and then withdraw from it in order to escape consequences, as North Korea sought to do. Yet the UN Security Council took no action, despite the hugely important precedent North Korea was potentially setting. The United States approved this stance because the Bush administration did not want politically to diminish its own prerogatives to withdraw from treaties. For a number of years the administration was paralyzed, not wanting to talk directly with a regime it regards as odious, perhaps hoping it might eventually collapse. But nuclear programs develop at a much faster pace than fundamental political change. Partly as a result, nothing happened to prevent North Korea from crossing the nuclear threshold.

The IAEA reported Iran's noncompliance with its safeguards obligations to the UN Security Council on April 28, 2006, after three years of unsatisfactory negotiations between Iran and the IAEA, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The Security Council fitfully negotiated Resolution 1696, which gave Iran until August 31, 2006, to "suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development." This resolution is legally binding, yet Iran rejected its terms and acted as if it were the aggrieved party, rather than the object of a proper enforcement proceeding.

In the months of negotiations leading to Resolution 1696, the Security Council was divided on

whether sanctions should be invoked if Iran did not comply, and if sanctions were to be applied, what form they should take. The United States, France, and the United Kingdom wanted to back the resolution with a clear commitment to adopt sanctions if Iran refused to comply; Russia and China preferred to be vague. The desire for consensus, and to avoid a veto, resulted in the softer, slower approach being taken. Thus, Iran has experienced no penalty for defying IAEA and UN Security Council demands to provide the transparency necessary to verify that Iran's nuclear activities are solely for peaceful purposes and, in the meantime, to cease activities related to producing material that could be used in nuclear weapons.

When a state like Iran defies the Security Council, the council can accept defeat and allow the dangerous behavior in question to continue and its own credibility to plummet, or it can adopt various forms of sanctions or even authorize military action

to compel the state to comply. Problems that are grave enough to require Security Council action generally are not resolved in one step; often a progression of political

statements and sanctions of increasing intensity occurs. The more powerful the noncompliant state is, the more cautiously the Security Council acts.

But this becomes a dangerous, circular process: aggressive Iranian leaders pursue a strategy of brazen noncompliance with international demands, hoping that international actors will back down; international actors appear intimidated and do not respond to a series of defiant acts; the nation's aggressive leadership claims success, silences internal opponents who seek greater cooperation with the international community, and acts still more boldly; the international community reports the problem to the divided Security Council, where Russia makes clear it will not support strong enforcement measures; the Iranian leadership reaffirms the effectiveness of its hard-line strategy and concludes it cannot be stopped. Given the veto power held by the five permanent members of the Security Council, a noncompliant state can resist enforcement if it is confident that at least one permanent member will block consensus on sanctions and, ultimately, the use of force.

A range of conflicting interests prevents the permanent members from cooperating to address urgent problems in the nonproliferation regime.

---

*The United States at this time does not have the international legitimacy to take the lead to form new rules to regulate nuclear technology.*

---

Clearly, Russia and China are concerned about the United States' exceptional power in the international system and welcome opportunities to balance it, or at least to keep it from growing. While Russia and China do not welcome nuclear weapon proliferation, they also recognize that nuclear weapons are perhaps the only way that other players can deter or contain the United States from projecting its great conventional military power. If North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapon capabilities complicate the freedom of US power projection, Russia and China may not see this as entirely bad.

The autocratic governments in Moscow and Beijing also resent American democracy promotion efforts. If the United States wants to use UN Security Council sanctions as a means to coerce regime change, then Russia and China will resist as a matter of direct interest and to prevent the precedent for sanctions that could someday be sought against them. Russia and

China could veto any attempted UN sanctions, but they wish to avoid the political embarrassment of having to do so by down-

grading the general use of sanctions. In this sense, Washington's grand strategy of promoting democratization around the world, through regime change if necessary, clashes with the interest in persuading Russia and China to support sanctions to alter Iran's nuclear behavior.

The tensions and multiple agendas among the Security Council's permanent members raise enormously important questions about the future of efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. For example, will Russia and China ever be prepared to support enforcement actions that may carry costs for them? The North Korean test poses this question with stark clarity, especially for China. Is Beijing willing to take nonproliferation seriously enough to impose costs on North Korea that could also make life for China more difficult? More generally, to the extent that Russia and China resist sanctions or other tools to enforce international norms and rules that have been largely articulated by democracies, what instruments can the Security Council use to enforce compliance with nonproliferation obligations? If the likelihood of strong enforcement is small, what are the implications for a rule-based international order? How can or should the permanent members be encouraged to cooperate

more effectively? How should the US government tailor its approaches to Russia and China—and the Security Council—to improve enforcement of nonproliferation rules? These are fundamentally political questions and can be answered only if and when the governments involved decide to address them.

## THE NUCLEAR POWER PREDICAMENT

Many people expect or urge a tremendous expansion of nuclear energy generation in the coming decades to fuel economic growth with fewer emissions of climate-changing gases. Most advocates of nuclear power expansion insist that new technologies and rules must be developed to ensure that nuclear weapon proliferation does not result. Yet governments and industry have not specified new standards for proliferation resistance, nor have they suggested that expansion of nuclear

power production should wait until improved rules and technologies have been adopted.

Much needs to be done in this regard, but perhaps

the most important challenge concerns uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing technology. The same centrifuges that enrich uranium for fuel in peaceful nuclear power reactors can be used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons. And the same plant that separates plutonium from spent nuclear fuel in order to reuse it as reactor fuel can also extract plutonium for weapons.

The dual-use nature of key nuclear technologies was recognized at the beginning of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. But at that time experience and political will did not exist to create strong barriers between peaceful and military applications of dual-use capabilities. Instead, individual countries were given the benefit of the doubt in acquiring and operating uranium enrichment or plutonium separation facilities. As long as the IAEA could monitor accounting records and procedures to verify in a timely manner that no significant quantities of nuclear material were being diverted from peaceful uses, states could build and operate these facilities. However, experience with Iraq during the 1980s, and since then with North Korea and Iran, has raised overwhelming doubts about the wisdom of allowing non-nuclear-weapon states to acquire and operate inherently dual-use capabilities. Verifying after the fact that these facilities and

---

*If North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapon capabilities complicate the freedom of US power projection, Russia and China may not see this as entirely bad.*

---

the materials they produce are not being misused is too risky.

Yet the original nonproliferation bargain promised countries that forswore nuclear weapons that they could in principle enjoy the same benefits of peaceful atomic energy as the nuclear weapon states. Attempting to limit additional states from newly acquiring fuel-production capabilities can be seen as redefining the bargain at the cost of the non-nuclear-weapon states. One way to encourage acceptance of a new bargain would be to obviate a country's interest in indigenous reactor fuel production by ensuring an economically advantageous supply from international sources. This is the logic behind several ideas now circulating in the international system, including proposals from IAEA Director General ElBaradei and President Bush to confine fissile material production to countries that already operate such facilities, or to internationalize management of new fissile material production for civilian purposes.

Clearly, the United States at this time does not have the international legitimacy to take the lead to form new rules to regulate nuclear technology. The Bush proposal has been widely ignored. But it is also true that without US leadership, other proposals, including those of ElBaradei, will not be implemented.

Another important idea could be implemented more readily. Countries must be discouraged from using international cooperation under the NPT to build up the capability to produce nuclear weapons and then, having acquired fissile materials, leaving the treaty without penalty. France has proposed UN Security Council passage of a new resolution making a state that withdraws from the NPT nonetheless responsible for violations committed while it was still a party to the treaty. The Security Council should also bar states that withdraw from the treaty—whether in violation of its terms or not—from legally using nuclear assets acquired internationally before their withdrawal. All states should agree to suspend nuclear cooperation with countries that the IAEA cannot certify are in full compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations.

Yet, here, too, general doubts about the fairness of the nonproliferation regime today and divisions within the Security Council engender resistance to what most observers would agree is a reasonable idea. To give up what are widely perceived as “rights” that are materially and symbolically important, the majority of the world's countries want to receive benefits that they think are equal to their concessions.

## THE DISARMAMENT BARGAIN

As a matter of realpolitik, non-nuclear-weapon states will resist agreeing to and enforcing new rules that limit the conditions under which they can acquire or use nuclear technology as long as the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea do not convincingly devalue nuclear weapons as a source of international power and prestige.

The core disarmament bargain can be neither ignored nor wished away. It underpins the international security system and shapes the expectations of citizens and leaders around the world. The majority will not cooperate in enforcing rules on the non-nuclear-weapon states if they feel that the nuclear weapon states are not enforcing the rules that apply to themselves. NPT member states recognized this in 2000 when they agreed to establish benchmarks toward the “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.”

For decades, a treaty to ban all nuclear weapons testing has been recognized as the most significant and achievable step that all nuclear weapon states could take toward implementing the NPT's disarmament provision. All five of the NPT nuclear weapon states (plus Israel) signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996 and have voluntarily eschewed nuclear testing since the mid-1990s. But in 1999, the US Senate refused to ratify the treaty, preventing it from entering into force. This failure by Security Council members to maintain cohesion in living up to an important part of the nonproliferation bargain has weakened the overall nonproliferation regime.

The effect could be seen during the 2005 conference of parties to review the treaty. Discord was so great that even an agenda could not be agreed on. No significant work was done, despite a long list of issues that needed to be addressed, including Iran, North Korea, the need to strengthen export controls to prevent repeats of the Khan network's activities, and new rules to prevent abuse of the NPT's withdrawal clause.

US opposition to the test ban is almost entirely confined to the Republican Party, and may be a legacy of opposition to the Clinton administration. The United States has followed a moratorium on nuclear testing since 1992, and the Bush administration, after six years, remains pledged not to conduct nuclear tests. If the United States were to resume nuclear weapon testing, it is nearly certain that Russia, China, India, and Pakistan would quickly follow suit. India and Pakistan would

focus on developing and proving thermonuclear weapon capabilities, which would greatly increase the destructiveness of their arsenals. In such a dramatically “nuclearized” global environment, political forces in Japan and South Korea would demand that their governments reconsider their commitments to shun nuclear weapons. Iran could point to its north, east, and west and exclaim that rising nuclear threats justify its interest in a full-service nuclear program.

North Korea’s nuclear test—and the urgent importance of preventing other nations from following suit—underscores the need for the United States to reconsider the test ban treaty. A test ban does not itself guarantee that no one will test—a country could cheat or break out. But a treaty would significantly raise the costs of testing and increase the likelihood that the international community could be rallied to punish the tester and try to prevent a cascading wave of tests that would shake the world.

Revealingly, while a test ban treaty is more than some elements in the United States and other nuclear weapon states can stomach, the majority of the world views it as grossly insufficient to fulfilling the disarmament obligation. Observers note that the United Kingdom is the only nuclear weapon state that has begun to analyze the steps that would be necessary to achieve nuclear disarmament. No other nuclear weapon state has even one full-time employee tasked with exploring the desirability and feasibility of mutual, verifiable elimination of nuclear arsenals, despite the treaty commitment to pursue this objective.

In fairness, it is not evident whether thousands of nuclear weapons and uncounted thousands of tons of fissile materials can be verifiably decommissioned and secured in ways that would make the world safer and more stable. But, rather than endlessly and uselessly argue whether nuclear disarmament is a good idea, it might be informative for government experts, the IAEA, and others to produce detailed road maps of the technical and institutional steps that would have to be taken to verifiably eliminate nuclear arsenals. By defining the level of transparency and accounting accuracy necessary to verify elimination of all nuclear weapons, this process would begin to illuminate whether total disarmament is actually feasible—and if it is not, what alternative actions would fulfill the nuclear weapon states’ obligations under the NPT.

The sort of accounting—and therefore international inspections—necessary to reassure the world that countries were getting rid of all their

nuclear weapons is so precise that implementing it would revolutionize international affairs. Can one imagine Russia, China, Israel, Pakistan, and the United States, to name only a few, agreeing to provide such exacting information and allowing international agencies to verify it? How many developing countries would actually favor this sort of accounting and transparency as an international norm? Exploring the materials accounting innovations that would be necessary would trigger an unprecedented global political debate. Indeed, only a world of open societies could establish and maintain the sort of accounting and monitoring system necessary to give the world confidence that nuclear disarmament is a safe and secure prospect.

## A CHALLENGE FOR STATESMEN

The nuclear nonproliferation regime is actually one of history’s greatest success stories. Attempting to keep the vast majority of nations from acquiring the most potent technology on earth, while establishing rules under which a small minority manage these technologies, the nonproliferation system has been “defeated” by only one country that acquired nuclear weapons illegally: North Korea. The system is being tested by another, Iran, and has been bypassed by three others: Israel, India, and Pakistan. Although much of the world would say the system is flawed insofar as the states with nuclear weapons are not pursuing disarmament seriously enough, this disaffection does not necessarily portend a collapse of the regime.

This record makes the nonproliferation regime worth preserving and strengthening despite the difficult challenges it faces. Perhaps the most important point to remember, and the easiest to forget in the post-cold war, post-9-11 era, is that the basic framework and success of the nonproliferation regime were built on cooperation between the superpowers in a bipolar world system. That system is gone. The fundamental requirement today is to establish a basis of cooperation between the most powerful state—the United States—and the others, without which pressing proliferation problems cannot be solved.

The sole superpower cannot solve the North Korean and Iranian cases, or change the rules regulating nuclear technology. It must find ways to induce other key powers to cooperate with it even as they also wish to balance, influence, and perhaps reduce America’s power. This is what statesmen do, and nonproliferation is a problem of statesmanship more than it is of military power. ■