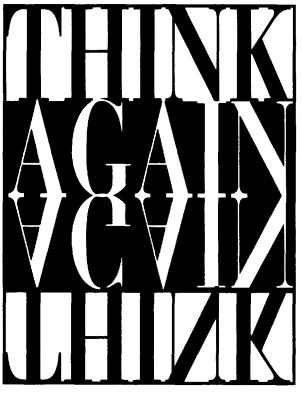
NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION



Why do nations want nuclear weapons? To preserve national security? Not necessarily. Some countries see entry into the nuclear club as the fast track to prestige. Elsewhere, a well-timed nuclear test can bolster public support for a government. For too long, security analysts have tended to dismiss the politics behind the bomb, leaving themselves vulnerable to nasty surprises.

by George Perkovich

Nuclear-Weapons Tests in South Asia Prove That the Nonproliferation Regime Has Failed

Wrong. The recent Indian and Pakistani tests only confirm what we already know: that these two countries have been developing nuclear weapons for decades. They are exceptions to the rule. Since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was put into force in 1970, the nonproliferation regime has succeeded beyond the expectations of its founders. Back in 1963, President John Kennedy had fretted that 20 to 30 states would build nuclear weapons by the 1970s. Today, only four countries besides India, Israel, and Pakistan cause proliferation alarm: Iran (whose technical capabilities are growing, but remain limited), Iraq (whose program was destroyed), Libya (whose capabilities are insignificant), and North Korea (whose program is frozen—for now). Most importantly, no country has joined this watchlist in years. Conversely, during the 1980s and 1990s, Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Kazakhstan, South Africa, South Korea,

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Ukraine abandoned their nuclear-weapons and/or nuclear-explosives programs. Yet this overwhelmingly positive trend could be reversed if the remaining nuclear-weapons states fail to maintain the global norm against nuclear weapons.

India's and Pakistan's Nuclear-Weapons Tests Will Prompt Nuclear Proliferation Elsewhere

Probably not. Two distinct categories of proliferation danger are relevant here: first, the possibility that the Indian and Pakistani tests will spur other nations to seek nuclear weapons and, second, that the tests will weaken international support for the nonproliferation regime.

The first risk is minimal. As long as India and Pakistan keep centralized control over their nuclear devices and materials, they do not pose realistic nuclear security threats to any countries but each other and China. Moreover, other nations are unlikely to seek enhanced prestige by imitating Pakistan or India. Nuclear weapons will not redress India's and Pakistan's real security problems or their more pressing political-economic difficulties, offering other states little motivation to emulate such behavior.

The more plausible danger is a weakening of international will to enforce the nonproliferation regime. In the longer term such apathy could lead to proliferation. But here again, the cause would not be the Indian and Pakistani tests. Just days *before* the May blasts, the parties to the NPT convened a preparatory conference in anticipation of the treaty's five-year review in 2000, only to break up in bitter disagreement over ways to strengthen the regime. One major source of discord was the frustration of Egypt and other Arab states over Israel's refusal to offer any plan for controlling and eventually eliminating its suspected nuclear arsenal.

After the Indian and Pakistani tests, Egypt and others turned their ire on the major powers for ignoring Israel's bomb, even as the permanent five members of the Security Council condemned India and Pakistan. This double standard—along with the more obvious double standard that allows the original five declared nuclear-weapons powers to retain nuclear weapons indefinitely while denying them to everyone else—may undermine the broad international support required to toughen inspections and maintain sanctions on states such as Iraq that violate the regime.

The Threat of Mutual Destruction Will Keep a Lid on Regional Conflicts

Not necessarily. French sociologist Raymond Aron noted in 1966 that nuclear deterrence may inhibit states from engaging in strategic conflict, while giving them cover to conduct low-intensity conflict. For the past eight years, Indian and Pakistani troops have fought one another across the Line of Control in Kashmir, each knowing the other had nuclear-weapons capabilities. The actual possession of nuclear weapons, therefore, seems unlikely to diminish Pakistan's support for Kashmiri militants or India's determination to hold onto the Kashmir Valley.

However, nuclear deterrence could keep India and Pakistan from escalating conflict into all-out war. Indeed, many Indians and Pakistanis argue that this was *already* the case during crises in 1987 and 1990 and afterwards. If nonweaponized deterrence worked for the past eight years, then India and Pakistan have broken something that did not need fixing.

The risk today is that deployments of ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads could undermine deterrence and, short of that, weaken both states economically and politically. Leaders and pundits in India and Pakistan dismiss this fear as an American-Soviet pathology that they will avoid by eschewing the elaborate nuclear doctrine and command and control systems of the Cold War.

However, it is the very lack of such elaborate systems that is cause for worry in regional arms races, whether in East Asia, the Middle East, or South Asia. These countries may not have the satellites needed to monitor deployment of ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads, or the sophisticated early warning systems to detect launches in real time or to determine whether aircraft entering air space are carrying nuclear weapons. Proximity is also an issue. For instance, given the three-to-ten minute missile and aircraft flight times in South Asia and the six-to-thirty-five minute flight times in the Middle East, there is little opportunity to gather real-time information about potential preparations to launch nuclear warheads.

On the one hand, these uncertainties could actually bolster deterrence, as neither side may believe it could use nuclear weapons to great military effect. On the other, the lack of monitoring and warning systems means that during crises government leaders may be faced with speculations, assumptions, and unverifiable intelligence reports that generate worst-case pressures either to use nuclear weapons or to make

Let's Make a Deal

The United States induced North Korea to freeze and eventually to suspend its nuclear-weapons program through pressure and, more importantly, through positive incentives, such as a promise to deliver 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil annually. Similarly, financial incentives and security assurances motivated Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to give up nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union. To persuade Japan and Germany not to build nuclear weapons, the United States guaranteed their security with the blood of American soldiers and, through extended deterrence, put the American homeland at risk of nuclear annihilation. This form of inducement has been much more costly than, say, the North Korean framework agreement.

However, the North Korean case prompted outcries in Congress and among many nonproliferation specialists that "paying off" bad actors set a terrible precedent that would prompt other states to build or threaten to build nuclear weapons.

This popular argument suffers a number of flaws. First, only a few potential bad actors exist. Second, in the North Korean case, other alternative responses were either ineffective, expensive, or too risky: The sanctions that North Korea's neighbors might have accepted were too weak to work, and war entailed unacceptable dangers and costs. Third, for all the talk of setting a bad precedent, no state has ever shown any interest in seeking to build nuclear weapons in order to turn around and sell these assets as part of a nonproliferation deal.

If the handful of states with peaceful nuclear programs that could become bomb makers were willing to forswear the acquisition of reprocessing or enrichment facilities, and/or to dismantle existing ones in exchange for a carefully tailored set of inducements, America should accept the bargain. The United States is spending less than one-tenth of 1 percent of this year's defense budget of $273 billion to eliminate the North Korean threat. Such an expenditure elsewhere—if needed—would provide more security bang for the buck than our nuclear weapons ever have.

—*G.P.*

robust threats to do so. To avoid these dangers, as Indian and Pakistani leaders say they wish to do, they must implement real arms-control and confidence-building measures. Until they do, they will be much safer keeping nuclear weapons nondeployed.

Security Threats Drive States to Seek Nuclear Weapons

Not always. Political scientist John Mearsheimer recently observed that India and Pakistan "live in an area of the world that is remarkably dangerous and, therefore, they want to go to great lengths to make sure that they have the wherewithal to protect themselves." Yet this narrow focus on external security does not answer the question, "Why now?" Indeed, it misses at least half the picture in South Asia and, actually, the rest of the world.

Israel, Pakistan, China, the Soviet Union, and the United States clearly acquired nuclear-weapons capabilities to redress objective threats to their existence or, at least in the latter three cases, to their systems of government. Yet in other countries—France, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom—factors beyond security drove the acquisition of nuclear weapons: the quest for national grandeur, prestige, and independence; the ambition and persuasiveness of leading scientists attracted by the technological challenge and the desire to display personal and national prowess; domestic political jockeying. All these elements stand out as important components of proliferation.

"We don't want to be blackmailed and treated as oriental blackies," a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesman said in 1993. "Nuclear weapons will give us prestige, power, standing. An Indian will talk straight and walk straight when we have the bomb." French security experts believe that a core purpose of their nuclear arsenal is to preserve France's permanent seat on the Security Council. Irrelevance is the only "clear and present danger" against which France's nuclear weapons defend. Security imperatives did not compel Pakistan to test nuclear weapons: Its leaders had confidence in their nuclear capability. Political pressures drove them to perform the six tests, even at the risk of sanctions that could do more damage to their state's security than India ever could.

Mearsheimer is correct in his assertion that India and Pakistan live in a "remarkably dangerous" environment. Yet most of the pressing dangers are internal. Within Pakistan, rampant corruption, economic dysfunction, sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis, and between Mohajirs and native Sindhis in Karachi, and the general absence of "civic virtue" pose greater threats than India. Within India, tensions along caste and Hindu-Muslim lines, secessionist move-

ments, misgovernment, and structural economic flaws affect national strength and security far more than the nuclear arsenals of Pakistan and China. The "external-security" rationale for nuclear weapons purposely obscures the technological, political, and nationalistic impulses that make attaining such weapons seem a short cut to great status for otherwise struggling states.

The Spread of Democracy Helps Curb and Roll Back the Spread of Nuclear Weapons

Probably not. Democracy has many virtues, and lately a literature has emerged arguing that democratic states are much less likely to go to war with each other. [For a critique, see "Think Again: Democracy" in FOREIGN POLICY, Spring 1998.] From this general assumption, people conclude that democracy will also help prevent and reverse proliferation. The historical record and a close analysis of the nonproliferation problem suggest a much more mixed picture.

Democracy may inhibit states from acquiring nuclear weapons because democracies generally, though not always, cluster together and make safe neighborhoods and alliances. In democracies, citizens can express concerns over the costs and normative implications of going nuclear. This tendency is seen in the scores of democracies that have readily signed the NPT. Democratic constraints also kept India from undertaking a crash nuclear-weapons program during the last four decades.

Democracy causes problems, however, when nonproliferation requires "unproliferation"—rollback, reductions, or controls over nuclear-weapons capabilities. With the exceptions of Argentina and Brazil, no democracies with publicly known nuclear-explosives programs have initiated nuclear rollback. Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine decided to relinquish their inherited nuclear weapons before they had made the transition to democratic government, and, indeed, the process of democratization impaired Ukraine's rollback. Authoritarian governments in South Korea and Taiwan abandoned secret nuclear-weapons programs. Former South African president F.W. De Klerk decided in secret to eliminate his country's undeclared nuclear-weapons stockpile and to sign the NPT before the South African public and parliament even knew the state had ever possessed such weapons. Two established democracies—Sweden and Switzerland—abandoned nascent nuclear-weapons programs, but the programs were kept secret

and the decisions to close them were not open to debate. Not only do democracy and openness fail to correlate well with unproliferation, but democracy actually correlates strongly with dogged possession of nuclear weapons. Seven of the eight states now clinging to nuclear weapons are democracies—all but China.

The democratic liability springs from the changes that a country undergoes when it acquires a publicly known nuclear-weapons capability. Whatever the original motivations, a whole new set of psychological, political, economic, and bureaucratic attachments form around nuclear weapons and the establishments that produce them. Scientific institutions win deference for their genius and for the high-paying jobs and large revenues they bring to the communities that house them. The military cohorts that command nuclear weapons generate officer billets and other institutional ties. In democracies, politicians who try to break these attachments by urging the elimination of nuclear weapons meet opposition that draws on the now-threatened interests extending beyond genuine security concerns. Symbols, emotions, language, and institutional interests can easily be mobilized against such politicians in mass-media politics.

Poignantly, this dynamic appears in India and Pakistan today much as it did in the United States during the Cold War. The recent history of Britain's Labour Party provides another vivid example. In the 1980s (and earlier), when Labour advocated unilateral nuclear-arms reductions and disarmament, it consistently lost elections. Then, paradoxically, as the Cold War ended and the security rationale for British nuclear weapons diminished, new leaders within the party abandoned the disarmament plank in a bid to become electorally marketable. Electoral success has discouraged the government of British prime minister Tony Blair from undertaking a meaningful reevaluation of the United Kingdom's nuclear policy, despite reasonable questions about its security rationale in the late 1990s.

But is not arms control a more achievable objective than rollback? Here, too, recent history suggests that democracy is an obstacle. The U.S.–Russian relationship only recently became "democratic," and the two states' efforts to deal with the hangover of nuclear problems inherited from earlier decades have been complicated badly by the Duma and Congress. In India, knowledgeable observers say that the BJP government worries that if it signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Congress Party, whose leaders proclaimed the treaty's wisdom in the 1990s, would try to bring down the BJP for signing it. Not

The Price of Living Dangerously

Not many nations can afford crash programs to build and command and control nuclear-armed missiles—the cost would dwarf the expense of building warheads. According to a four-year study recently completed at the Brookings Institution, warhead construction accounted for only 7 percent of the total costs incurred by the U.S. nuclear-weapons program from 1940 through 1996 [see graphic]. Indeed, when countries such as India and Pakistan become declared nuclear powers, the costs of their nuclear arsenals will rise dramatically. Nuclear ambiguity allows political leaders to fudge the numbers game and keep costs relatively low, but declared nuclear deployments lead to comparative counting that is hard to fudge. Even if deterrence does not require equal numbers, opposition politicians are likely to use any perceived "missile gaps" to charge government leaders with weakness, surrender of national sovereignty, and other evils. "No price is too high for national security," will be a mantra harder to resist. And, given the chronic weakness of governments in India and Pakistan, such political compulsions will be difficult to rebuff. But in the process of fulfilling them, the diversion of precious resources will weaken both countries, potentially further undermining their stability.

Not Shown: Victims of U.S. nuclear weapons—$2.1 billion/.04%. Nuclear secrecy—$3.1 billion/.05%. Congressional oversight of nuclear-weapons programs—$.9 billion/.02%.

Note: All costs in constant 1996 dollars. Includes average projected future-year costs for nuclear-weapons dismantlement, fissile-materials disposition, environmental remediation, and waste management. Total actual and estimated expenditures through 1996 were $5,481.1 billion.

Source: *Atomic Audit*, edited by Stephen I. Schwartz, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998).

only will the selfish dynamics of partisan politics undermine the prospects for arms control and unproliferation, they will push India and Pakistan toward an escalating arms race.

Democratic features also complicate the scenario in Iran. Although Iran can hardly be characterized as a liberal democracy, it does have a competitive, factionalized political system and elected leaders who are held directly accountable to the public. Since the revolution, successive Iranian governments have denied that their country seeks nuclear weapons. This denial has helped keep the issue off the popular political agenda. To the extent that leaders denounce American claims of Iranian proliferation ambitions, little public pressure is generated to build bombs. Yet, if the controversy between the United States and Iran over nuclear proliferation escalates, the issue will become more salient, making it harder for an elected Iranian president to accede to international agreements that limit Iran's acquisition of proliferation-sensitive technologies. This possible scenario is a strong argument for quiet nonproliferation diplomacy.

Nuclear Disarmament Is the Ultimate Goal of Nonproliferation

Yes . . . if you want to succeed. Article VI of the NPT links nonproliferation and disarmament by committing the parties to pursue negotiations "in good faith" to end the nuclear-arms race and to achieve "nuclear disarmament." Top U.S. officials (and British, French, and Russian officials) acknowledge in private that they view Article VI as an inconvenience to which they must pay occasional lip service. They argue that their nuclear weapons do not threaten countries such as India or Pakistan or Iran, so any attempt to tie nonproliferation to nuclear disarmament is merely political pretext to cover regional and domestic motivations for seeking nuclear weapons. This argument has merit, but not as much as defenders of the nuclear status quo think.

The high military value that the nuclear-weapons states put on their arsenals throughout the Cold War, and their unwillingness to devalue them significantly since 1991, have undoubtedly influenced other states. Nations can readily claim a chain of security threats that lead back to the five declared nuclear-weapons states: For instance, Pakistan's nuclear ambitions stem from India's, which stem from China's, which stem from those of Russia and the United States. Meanwhile, Iran says it is threat-

ened by American and Israeli nuclear weapons. The nuclear powers can and should marshal strong arguments that in fact India (and by extension Pakistan), Iran, and Iraq would derive less security from building adequate nuclear forces to counter their putative threats than from pursuing bilateral, regional, and international diplomacy to reduce tensions. However, the international community must also deal with the political psychology shaping these states' nuclear policies.

Security professionals often regard this reality derisively, but adherence to the nonproliferation regime is ultimately a political decision. Nothing in politics animates people as much as perceived inequity and unfairness. This scenario is particularly true in former colonial countries, where questions of race and religion infuse regard for the nonproliferation regime. Indian officials began referring to the regime as a form of "apartheid" in the late 1960s. They have continued publicly and privately to emphasize its racial overtones. Leaders in Islamic states cite a perceived anti-Muslim bias in the regime and point to the lack of American pressure on Israel as proof. One does not have to agree with arguments about racism and religious prejudice to recognize their political power. Thus, when Argentines, Brazilians, Indians, Indonesians, Iranians, South Africans, and others insist on genuine commitments to universal nuclear disarmament as necessary to win their accession to, or active support for, nonproliferation, they are expressing a political-ethical narrative that has greater meaning to them than the security narrative that American policymakers tend to follow.

Instead of defensively and cynically proclaiming an interest in eliminating nuclear weapons, the United States and other nuclear-weapons states should go on the offensive. They should declare their aim to create the political and security conditions that allow for the elimination of nuclear weapons and of all weapons of mass destruction. But they should explain that achieving this politically equitable goal requires resolution of regional disputes. Regional crises create the threats that animate the declared five's political and security interests in nuclear weapons. This strategy also requires transparency in the nuclear programs of all states, particularly those with nuclear-weapons capabilities and/or ambitions.

Adopting these measures means that the Kashmir dispute and the Sino-Indian border conflict must be settled as part of a program to eliminate nuclear weapons, just as genuine and durable peace must be established between Israel and the Arab states. Likewise, Persian Gulf insecurities must be resolved, particularly Iraq's ambitions and capabili-

ties and the relationship between Iran and Iraq. In Northeast Asia, a stable security regime among China (including Taiwan), Japan, and North and South Korea must be established.

In stabilizing and securing these relationships, these states and others will have to allow intensive monitoring of their nuclear programs to assure against cheating in the disarmament process. To reinforce this transparency, states must tolerate and even protect the culture of whistle-blowing as an added social warning system against nuclear cheating. The basic message should be that the nuclear-weapons states are prepared to get serious about eliminating their arsenals—and here is what getting serious means.

By ducking the goal of denuclearization, the United States has allowed the international community to avoid wrestling with the means to achieve it. Yet these means are vital to future regional and international security, with or without nuclear weapons. The prospects for building global political pressure to achieve regional security and transparency will be enhanced if the process is framed within the equitable objective of eliminating nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Rather than lose international support by continuing to resist global denuclearization, the United States should use the process of denuclearization to place greater responsibility on other states to enhance international security.

Want to Know More?

Scott Sagan of Stanford University ponders three theoretical models in an attempt to answer the question **"Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?"** (*International Security*, Winter 1996–97). Arguing that security considerations alone do not drive nuclear proliferation, Sagan urges academics and policymakers to pay closer attention to domestic politics and "nuclear symbolism."

Two articles that examine the view from Paris are David Yost's **"France's Nuclear Dilemma"** (*Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996) and Stanley Sloane's **"French Defense Policy: Gaullism Meets the Post–Cold War World"** (*Arms Control Today*, April 1997). The rise and fall of South Africa's nuclear-weapons program is chronicled in David Albright's **"South Africa and the Affordable Bomb"** (*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January 1994) and Waldo Stumpf's **"South Africa's**

Nuclear Weapons Program: From Deterrence to Dismantlement" (*Arms Control Today*, December 1995/January 1996). In his paper ***Nuclear Illusions: Argentina and Brazil*** (Washington: Henry L. Stimson Center, December 1995), John Redick of the University of Virginia examines the confidence-building process that preempted a nuclear-arms race in South America. And in his article **"The North Korean Nuclear Crisis: From Stalemate to Breakthrough"** (*Arms Control Today*, November 1994), Selig Harrison of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars examines how internal political struggles prompted Pyongyang to threaten withdrawal from the NPT in 1993.

Entry into the nuclear club requires hefty membership fees. ***Atomic Audit***, edited by Stephen Schwartz, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1998) estimates that the total cost of the U.S. nuclear-weapons program since 1940 has surpassed $5 trillion. The authors maintain that several factors—including flawed assumptions about the cost-effectiveness of nuclear weapons, overreaction to the Soviet threat, pork barrel politics, and excessive secrecy—all drove the United States to a nuclear arsenal larger than what many security analysts deemed necessary for deterrence.

For regular updates and analyses, researchers can download **"Proliferation Briefs"** from the Web site of the Non-Proliferation Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. For links to this and other relevant Web sites, as well as a comprehensive index of related articles, access **www.foreignpolicy.com**.