Same As It Ever Was

Nuclear Alarmism, Proliferation, and the Cold War

Francis J. Gavin

Many scholars and practitioners share the view that nuclear proliferation and its effect on U.S. national security interests constitutes the gravest threat facing the United States, that it is worse than ever before, and that new, more effective policies are needed to confront the problem. At the same time, the history of nuclear proliferation—in particular, the history of the Cold War—reveals little about contemporary nuclear dangers and possible policy solutions. According to this view, the so-called Long Peace offers few meaningful lessons that can be applied to the complex and dangerous world we face today.

This view, which I term "nuclear alarmism," transcends even partisan differences. During their 2004 presidential debates, for example, candidates John Kerry and George W. Bush agreed on one point: "nuclear proliferation" was "the most serious threat" to U.S. security.[1] Four years later, Republican presidential candidate John McCain declared, "No problem we face poses a greater threat to us and the world than nuclear proliferation."[2] Barack Obama called it "the most significant foreign policy issue that we confront."[3] During a presidential debate before the New Hampshire primary, moderator Charles Gibson asserted, "The next president of the United States may have to deal with a nuclear attack on an American city. . . . The best nuclear experts in the world say there's a 30 percent chance in the next 10 years. . . . Graham Allison at Harvard says it's over 50 percent."[4] In a nonscientific poll of leading security experts conducted by Senator Richard Lugar in 2005, 62 percent of the respondents

Francis J. Gavin is Tom Slick Professor of International Affairs and Director of the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin.

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1. Craig Gilbert, "Nuclear Threat Seen as Top Issue for Nation," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 10, 2004.
2. John McCain, "Remarks by John McCain on Nuclear Security," University of Denver, Colorado, May 27, 2008, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20163&prog=zgp&proj=znpp.
3. "The Democratic Debate in New Hampshire," transcript, *New York Times*, January 5, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/05/us/politics/05text-ddebate.html?pagewanted=all.
4. Ibid.

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(49 of 79) said that the chance of a nuclear attack somewhere in the world over the next ten years was between 10 and 50 percent. Only one respondent put the probability at 0 percent.[5] As William Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova observe, "Today it is hard to find an analyst or commentator on nuclear proliferation who is not pessimistic about the future."[6]

Many experts contend that this terrifying new world bears little resemblance to that of the past. In the words of David Von Drehle, "During the Cold War, the world's security was built on a handful of interlocking truths that were dreadful to contemplate, but blessedly stable . . . every brick of that deterrent edifice is now crumbling."[7] The success of Cold War deterrence is less relevant today, however, because "the world is no longer a stand-off of the titans."[8] Or as one expert claims, "These are really twenty-first-century nuclear challenges that we're attempting to address using twentieth-century post–World War II international agreements."[9] In 2007 four prominent former policymakers, two Republicans and two Democrats, warned that "unless urgent new actions are taken, the U.S. soon will be compelled to enter a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically costly than Cold War deterrence."[10] David Ignatius observes, "We inhabit a world that makes the Cold War seem like the good old days."[11]

Should the notion of nuclear alarmism be accepted at face value? In my view, the answer is no: its claims are overstated and, in some cases, wrong, emerging from a poor understanding of the history of nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation.

Nuclear alarmism is based on four myths. The first myth is that today's nuclear threats are new and more dangerous than those of the past. The second myth is that unlike today, nuclear weapons stabilized international politics during the Cold War, when in fact the record was mixed. The third myth conflates the history of the nuclear arms race with the geopolitical and ideological competition between the Soviet Union and the United States, creating

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5. Richard G. Lugar, "The Lugar Survey on Proliferation Threats and Responses" (Washington, D.C.: Office of Richard Lugar, June 2005), http://lugar.senate.gov/reports/NPSurvey.pdf.
6. William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, "Divining Nuclear Intentions: A Review Essay," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Summer 2008), p. 159.
7. David Von Drehle, "The Yikes Years: Life as the World's Lone Superpower Is Beginning to Make the Cold War Look Easy," *Washington Post Magazine*, November 21, 2004.
8. Derek D. Smith, *Deterring America: Rogue States and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 10.
9. Abraham Denmark, quoted in Matthew B. Stannard, "Tauscher in Hot Seat for Key State Dept. Post," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 9, 2009.
10. George P. Schultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2007.
11. David Ignatius, "New World Disorder," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2007.

an oversimplified and misguided portrayal of the Cold War. The fourth myth is that the bipolar military rivalry during the Cold War was the only force driving nuclear proliferation in the decades following the end of World War II. In championing this myth, nuclear alarmists ignore or underplay other important drivers of postwar international relations, such as decolonization, questions surrounding the political status of postwar Germany, and regional security issues.

My argument is not based on Kenneth Waltz's contention that "more may be better," nor do I suggest that nuclear proliferation is not an important policy challenge.[12] By overreacting to current dangers while mischaracterizing those of the past, however, nuclear alarmists drive misguided policies that could threaten international stability and U.S. interests today and in the future. The world was far more dangerous in the decades following the end of World War II than it is today, and the challenges presented by nuclear weapons were more complex. There are important lessons to be learned from this history. Current proliferation challenges have deep roots in the past, and for U.S. policies to be successful, an understanding of this history is vital.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section presents the nuclear alarmists' main argument. The second section debunks the four myths perpetuated by nuclear alarmists and offers a history of postwar nuclear politics that is more nuanced than the received wisdom. The conclusion considers some of the lessons of this new interpretation and suggests changes in how the scholarly and policymaking communities should think about nuclear nonproliferation policy today and in the future.

Nuclear Alarmism and the Second Nuclear Age

Nuclear alarmists argue that (1) the spread of atomic weapons has become more likely and more dangerous, and (2) that it is the greatest threat to both U.S. national and international security. Nuclear proliferation, in what has been labeled the "second nuclear age," is more likely for two reasons: the end of bipolarity and the emergence of so-called tipping points.[13] During the Cold War, international politics were dominated by two superpowers of nearly

12. For an optimistic view of the effects of nuclear proliferation on peace and stability, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, Adelphi Papers, No. 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981).

13. Most analysts agree that "the second nuclear age began in 1991." Michael Krepon, *Better Safe Than Sorry: The Ironies of Living with the Bomb* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 94. Paul Bracken, however, suggests that it began with India's 1974 "peaceful" nuclear explosion. Bracken, *Fire in the East: The Rise of Asian Military Power and the Second Nuclear Age* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 109.

equal military strength, the United States and the Soviet Union. Both constructed large alliance systems and offered security guarantees to their client states, in some cases backed by a promise to use nuclear weapons if attacked. Given the bipolar structure of the international system and the relatively equal strength of each side's alliances, small or medium powers had little incentive to develop or acquire nuclear forces.

The end of the Cold War and bipolarity following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 increased states' incentives to acquire nuclear weapons. As Ignatius writes, "The moment of maximum danger, [Herman] Kahn warned, would be in moving from a bipolar to a multipolar world."[14] According to Benjamin Frankel, "Bipolarity inhibits the spread of nuclear weapons while multipolarity induces their proliferation." Frankel predicted that in the post–Cold War era, "nuclear arms proliferation will likely intensify," and "the owners of these weapons will likely brandish them more openly to advance their political objectives." He warned that their "inherent complexity . . . dooms multipolar systems to instability, making them susceptible to crisis and war." Thus, the "end of bipolarity means that superpower guarantees—the most effective instrument to moderate the effects of systemic characteristics—will be reduced and weakened."[15]

Although the predictions of Kahn, Frankel, and others have yet to materialize, many observers believe that it is only a matter of time before the disappearance of bipolarity yields more nuclear states. As Stephen Rosen notes, the future could see "multipolar nuclear interactions," a phenomena that "we're totally unfamiliar with. We're used to dealing with a bipolar U.S.-Soviet nuclear deterrent relationship which was stable over a number of decades."[16] Many experts believe this change will be disastrous. According to a senior U.S. Defense Department official from the George W. Bush administration, "We know how nukes worked in a two-player situation (the US and Russia), or even on the Indian subcontinent. But we don't know how it works in a multiplayer situation. . . . The risk of catastrophic misuse rises dramatically. I don't think the international community has addressed it with sufficient urgency."[17]

The second reason nuclear alarmists believe that proliferation is more likely

14. Ignatius, "New World Disorder."
15. Benjamin Frankel, "The Brooding Shadow: Systemic Incentives and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation," in Zachary S. Davis and Frankel, eds., *The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p. 36.
16. Joe Palca with Stephen D. Rosen, "North Korea and Nuclear Proliferation," *Talk of the Nation*, transcript, National Public Radio, October 9, 2006, p. 6.
17. Greg Sheridan, "Nuclear-Armed Iran Changes World," *Australian*, July 3, 2008, http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23959567-7583,00.html.

is because the world has reached a "tipping point." Changes in the international environment, starting with the end of the Cold War and accelerating after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks have tempted nations that once foreswore nuclear weapons to reconsider their utility. These alarmists fear that even democratic states and signatories to the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) might begin to pursue "hedging" strategies that would allow them to develop a nuclear weapons capability quickly.[18]

Many nuclear alarmists assert that a nuclear chain reaction is imminent. Former U.S. State Department Director of Policy Planning Mitchell Reiss claims, "In ways both fast and slow, we may very soon be approaching a nuclear 'tipping point,' where many countries may decide to acquire nuclear arsenals on short notice, thereby triggering a proliferation epidemic."[19] A leading group of nonproliferation experts agrees, arguing, "The world has arrived at a nuclear tipping point."[20] According to former Senator and current Chair of the Nuclear Threat Initiative Sam Nunn, "We are at the tipping point. . . . And we are headed in the wrong direction."[21] In other words, actual or threatened proliferation, particularly by one or two states within unstable regions such as East Asia or the Middle East, might cause governments that previously eschewed nuclear weapons to reconsider their decision. If North Korea's nuclear program is not eliminated, for example, policymakers in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan might feel little choice but to develop a nuclear capability, perhaps followed by Australia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. A nuclear Iran might drive Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey into the nuclear club.

Nuclear alarmists also contend that proliferation is a greater threat to U.S. interests than it was in the past and that it therefore demands a more vigorous U.S. response. The first nuclear age, according to nuclear alarmists, was a challenging but ultimately predictable period in history. As dangerous as the Soviet Union was, its rulers were rational. Its weapons of choice were bombs delivered by airplanes, submarines, or missiles. Most important, the Soviets

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18. Ariel E. Levite, "Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), pp. 69–73.
19. Mitchell B. Reiss, "The Nuclear Tipping Point: Prospects for a World of Many Nuclear Weapons States," in Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Reiss, eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), p. 4.
20. George Perkovich, Jessica T. Mathews, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller, and Jon B. Wolfsthal, "Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security" (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2005), p. 19, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/UC2.FINAL3.pdf.
21. Michael Crowley, "The Stuff Sam Nunn's Nightmares Are Made Of," *New York Times*, February 25, 2007.

and the Americans were constrained by their mutual vulnerability to devastating nuclear attacks. Both sides understood that pushing too far risked a catastrophic war.

According to nuclear alarmists, the second nuclear age is less predictable, involves more complex and dangerous rivalries, and includes new and far more terrifying actors than existed during the Cold War. According to one commentator, "In the first nuclear age, centered on Europe and the cold war, we were on familiar ground. The second, though, is happening across a swath of Asia and is steeped in historic grudges, suppressed national pride and regional ambitions that the West poorly understands, let alone controls."[22] To many observers, the Cold War—with its stable list of players and its known conventional and nuclear arsenals—has little relevance to today's nuclear world, and offers few, if any, lessons for the future.

During the first nuclear age, concerns about nuclear proliferation were secondary to other strategic and political issues. Controlling vertical proliferation, or the strategic arms competition between the Soviet Union and the United States, was seen as more important. And even though nuclear proliferation was officially frowned upon by the United States, policymakers did not go to great lengths to force Cold War allies (including France, Great Britain, Israel, Pakistan, and South Africa) out of the nuclear business. On balance, the support these states provided in the geopolitical struggle against the Soviet Union outweighed U.S. concerns about nuclear proliferation. This approach, according to nuclear alarmists, is no longer acceptable.

The Cold War, to these observers, was the "Long Peace," a phrase coined by the historian John Lewis Gaddis.[23] As Michael Dobbs writes, "While U.S. leaders hated the idea of their communist adversaries possessing the bomb, Washington at least trusted Moscow and Beijing to act in their own self-interest and refrain from blowing up the entire planet."[24] Nuclear weapons stabilized international politics during the Cold War, preventing political disagreements between the United States and the Soviet Union from escalating into armed conflict; few (if any) political goals were worth the risk of mutual annihilation. Since the "cold-war world was a bipolar world, stabilized by a

22. Bill Keller, "The Thinkable," *New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 2003.
23. John Lewis Gaddis, "The Long Peace: Elements of Stability in the Postwar International System," in Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 215–246; and John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56.
24. Michael Dobbs, "The World's Most Terrifying Danger, Then and Now," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2004.

nuclear balance between two superpowers," Thomas Friedman opined, it was far less frightening than today's nuclear environment.[25]

Today's "rogue" states and terrorist organizations, the nuclear alarmists argue, may not be as deterrable as the Soviets and the Americans were during the first nuclear age. Their leaders may not be rational; they might value human life so little that they would be willing to use nuclear weapons despite the threat of retaliation; or they could find nonconventional and nontraceable ways of delivering nuclear weapons. Dobbs argues, "Four decades later, the word is in an infinitely more complicated—and in some ways more dangerous—place than it was during the Cuban missile crisis. Back then we knew who the enemy was and where he would be most likely to strike. These days, we cannot be sure who the enemy is or who possesses the power to destroy worlds."[26]

Nuclear Alarmism: Four Myths

In this section I examine the four myths on which nuclear alarmism is grounded. In addition, I demonstrate that the alarmists' mischaracterization of the nuclear past leads them to advocate policies that potentially threaten not only international stability but U.S. national interests.

OLD THREATS IN NEW CLOTHING

The three threats alarmists focus on—"rogue" regimes, tipping points, and most frighteningly, nuclear terrorism—are not new, and are often overstated, especially compared with the apocalyptic challenges confronting the world following the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945. In addition, alarmists often mischaracterize the past, especially the so-called Long Peace, while conflating nuclear history with Cold War history and Cold War history with post–World War II history.

ROGUE STATES. Rogue states are seen as those that participate in unsavory behavior: violating international norms; threatening violence against their neighbors; supporting terrorist organizations; and committing human rights violations against their citizens. Before the 2003 invasion, Saddam Hussein's Iraq was identified as a rogue state, a definition that still applies to Iran and North Korea.

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25. Thomas L. Friedman, "The Post-Post-Cold War," *New York Times*, May 10, 2006, http://select.nytimes.com/2006/05/10/opinion/10friedman.html?_r=1.
26. Dobbs, "The World's Most Terrifying Danger."

Nuclear alarmists assert that the threats posed by rogue states are unprecedented. Consider this assessment of the likely consequences of a nuclear Iran: "Its leaders are theologically motivated and believe Israel should be wiped off the map. It is the chief global sponsor of terrorism through groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Middle East experts believe a nuclear-armed Iran would soon be followed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and perhaps others as well."[27]

In this view, rogue states do not adhere to the logic of nuclear deterrence that kept the Cold War from becoming "hot." As the scholar and former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Keith Payne has claimed, "We believed we had great insight into the thinking of the Soviet leadership, could communicate well with its officials, and that those leaders ultimately would behave in well-informed and predictable ways. Consequently, we could be wholly confident deterrence would 'work.' But today, there is no basis for comparable faith with regard to rogue regimes."[28] To some nuclear alarmists, this perceived unpredictability justifies the use of preemptive strikes against rogue states seeking atomic weapons. Ashton Carter and William Perry have written, "Should the United States allow a country openly hostile to it and armed with nuclear weapons to perfect an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear weapons to U.S. soil? We think not."[29]

Neither rogue regimes nor the fear they inspire, however, is new. Analysts have been deeply worried about nuclear weapons falling into the hands of noxious regimes since the start of the atomic age. Fred Iklé expressed this concern in 1965, "People fanatically dedicated to some revolutionary cause may have no concern for the survival of their country. . . . To carry out such 'nuclear anarchism' or acts of personal revenge, modern delivery systems would not be needed; it would suffice if the weapons could be sneaked close enough to a target clandestinely."[30]

Throughout the post–World War II period, analysts worried that proliferation among small or unstable countries could increase the "likelihood of nuclear war."[31] Such "deterministic" assessments rested on the assumption that

27. Sheridan, "Nuclear-Armed Iran Changes World."
28. Keith B. Payne, "Nuclear Deterrence for a New Century," *Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 10 (Spring 2006), p. 53.
29. Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, "If Necessary, Strike and Destroy: North Korea Cannot Be Allowed to Test This Missile," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2006.
30. Fred C. Iklé, "Possible Consequences of a Further Spread of Nuclear Weapons," January 2, 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, National Security File (NSF), Committee File, Committee on Nuclear Proliferation, Box 7.
31. Moeed Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation: The History of the Future of Nuclear Weapons," Brookings Institution Foreign Policy Paper Series, No. 11 (Washington D.C.: Brookings, January 2009), p. 25.

these countries "would act less maturely with nuclear weapons under their belt, thus inevitably leading to regional, and in turn global, instability."[32] Yet no nuclear crisis involving a small country has remotely approached the danger and risk levels seen during confrontations between the superpowers during the Cold War.

More important, contemporary analysts often forget that two of the United States' communist adversaries whose "rogue" status, by current definitions, was unparalleled in the atomic age, pursued nuclear weapons: the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The United States dreaded the Soviet Union's acquisition of the bomb. Joseph Stalin's Russia was both a murderous and secretive regime; it violated international norms and pursued aggressive foreign policies even before it tested an atomic bomb. The Soviet Union's behavior after its August 1949 atomic test seemed to realize the worst fears of President Harry Truman's administration when Moscow's client, North Korea, attacked South Korea without any apparent concern over the U.S. response. During the winter of 1950–51, the United States was convinced that nuclear weapons had so emboldened the Soviet Union that a third world war might be unavoidable.[33] In 1953, however, fighting on the Korean Peninsula ended and tensions with the Soviets eased. Although the Soviet Union's nuclearization would remain a serious threat, in time, the United States developed policies to cope with this challenge.

In 1964, when the PRC tested its first nuclear device, China was perhaps the most "rogue" state in modern history. Mao Zedong's domestic policies caused the death of tens of millions of China's citizens. Moreover, he had pursued an aggressive foreign policy before the atomic test. Examples include attacking India, fighting the United States directly in Korea and by proxy in Vietnam (where it armed a nonstate actor, the Vietcong), and threatening war over Taiwan. Mao made a series of highly irresponsible statements about the PRC surviving and even thriving in a nuclear war. No country in the post–World War II period—not Iraq, Iran, or even North Korea—has given U.S. policymakers more reason to fear its nuclearization than China.[34]

Within five years of the PRC's nuclear test, however, the United States and China initiated a covert dialogue. In less than a decade, they began an anti-Soviet alliance that put great pressure on Russia and helped to bring the Cold

32. Ibid., p. 47.
33. See Marc Trachtenberg, "A 'Wasting Asset': American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949–1954," in Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 100–152.
34. Francis J. Gavin, "Blasts from the Past: Proliferation Lessons from the 1960s," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter 2004/05), pp. 100–135.

War to an end. Nuclear weapons did not make China more hostile. If anything, its foreign policies became less aggressive and more mature over time. Today China has one of the most restrained and most responsible nuclear force postures and deployment policies of any nuclear power; it maintains a minimal deterrent under tight command and control while eschewing a first-use doctrine.[35]

That Iran—surrounded by rivals with nuclear ambitions and singled out by the United States, the largest military power in the world—has an interest in nuclear weapons is not surprising. Even assessments that view Iranian behavior as a challenge to U.S. interests in the Middle East do not consider the regime as threatening as the PRC was during the 1960s. As Shahram Chubin writes, "It is not overtly confrontational or given to wild swings in behavior or to delusional goals; it has not denounced arms control treaties to which it formally adheres; and there is evidence of pluralism and some debate within the country."[36] Nuclear weapons could make Iran more aggressive. Or, as with China, they could provide international legitimacy and security, making Iran less aggressive than it has been. As one recent analysis put it, "If anything, Iran might find that possession of a nuclear weapon actually diminishes its options in the Middle East and forces it to act with greater restraint."[37] A deeper understanding of nuclear history and the underlying geopolitical circumstances Iran faces makes the prospect that it would take actions (such as supplying Hamas or Hezbollah with nuclear weapons) that could invite its own destruction highly unlikely.[38]

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35. See Jeffrey Lewis, *The Minimum Means of Reprisal: China's Search for Security in the Nuclear Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), especially pp. 1–25.
36. Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), p. 44.
37. Frank Procida, "Overblown: Why an Iranian Nuclear Bomb Is Not the End of the World," *Foreign Affairs Snapshots*, June 9, 2009, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65127/frank-procida/overblown.
38. Iran's desire for a nuclear deterrent likely increased after the surprise and devastation of the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War, which included an Iraqi chemical weapons attack. The overwhelming victory of U.S. forces against Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War has no doubt fueled this desire. Iran, a Persian and Shiite state, is viewed with suspicion and even hostility by many of its Arab Sunni neighbors. And like France and India, for example, Iran takes great pride in its independence and in demonstrating its scientific prowess. Iran's interest in a nuclear deterrent was obviously heightened after 2002 by the increased presence of the United States in the region, as a result of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is a broad consensus among Iranian political elites that the United States is a revolutionary state implacably hostile to its regime. Even though Iran and the United States are foes, they share important overlapping interests, including a desire to see a stable Afghanistan rid of the Taliban and a stable, unified, democratic Iraq (ruled by the Shiite majority). There is some evidence that Iran's abhorrent rhetoric toward Israel and its support for Palestinian extremists is partly driven by domestic politics and a desire to gain influence in the region by outflanking its Arab Sunni rivals. Few in Iran see the Palestinian question as a core Iranian national interest. Finally, Iran has likely learned a valuable lesson in observing two decades of failed international efforts to keep North Korea nonnuclear while it considers its own strategy vis-à-vis

Nuclear weapons are often most desirable to countries that are located in unstable regions or that acquired statehood in ways that make them feel particularly vulnerable to claims against their legitimacy, whether or not they are considered "rogue." Before acquiring nuclear weapons, many nuclear powers faced strong challenges to their security and legitimacy. These include India and Pakistan, born of a violent civil war and bitter partition; the PRC, unrecognized by the United States until 1979; Israel; apartheid-era South Africa; and of course, an artificially divided Korea.

U.S. regional security dynamics and the historical origins of the state in question may be more important than regime type in determining whether a state will want nuclear weapons and how it might behave once it acquires them. For example, the nuclearization by Germany, Japan, or especially Taiwan—all open, tolerant, market-oriented liberal democracies—might destabilize regional and world politics and undermine U.S. interests, more than Iran's or North Korea's nuclear weapons programs.

TIPPING POINTS. One of the greatest fears of nuclear alarmists is that if a key state acquires nuclear weapons, others will follow. This idea of a nuclear tipping point, chain reaction, or "domino" effect, however, is by no means new. Consider this headline—"Many Nations Ready to Break into Nuclear Club"—from a front-page article in the *Washington Post* from June 1981.[39] Articles with similar titles can be found from almost every year since at least the early 1960s.

Fears of a tipping point were especially acute in the aftermath of China's 1964 detonation of an atomic bomb: it was predicted that India, Indonesia, and Japan might follow, with consequences worldwide, as "Israel, Sweden, Germany, and other potential nuclear countries far from China and India would be affected by proliferation in Asia."[40] A U.S. government document identified "at least eleven nations (India, Japan, Israel, Sweden, West Germany, Italy, Canada, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Rumania, and Yugoslavia)" with the capacity to go nuclear, a number that would soon "grow substantially" to include "South Africa, the United Arab Republic, Spain, Brazil and Mexico."[41] A top-secret, blue-ribbon committee established to craft the U.S. response contended that "the [1964] Chinese nuclear explosion has increased the urgency

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both the United States and the international community. See Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions;* and Procida, "Overblown." None of these facts should prevent the creation of a realistic strategy of how to deal with Iran, but few have been incorporated into the failed alarmist perspective.

39. Ronald Koven, "Many Nations Ready to Break into Nuclear Club," *Washington Post,* June 15, 1981.

40. Henry Rowen, "India's Nuclear Problem," memorandum, December 24, 1964, Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS), Doc. No. CK3100154493, p. 6.

41. R. Murray, "Problems of Nuclear Proliferation outside Europe," December 7, 1964, DDRS, Doc. No. CK3100281620, p. 1.

and complexity of this problem by creating strong pressures to develop independent nuclear forces, which, in turn, could strongly influence the plans of other potential nuclear powers."[42]

These predictions were largely wrong. In 1985 the National Intelligence Council noted that for "almost thirty years the Intelligence Community has been writing about which nations might next get the bomb." All of these estimates based their largely pessimistic and ultimately incorrect estimates on factors such as the increased "access to fissile materials," improved technical capabilities in countries, the likelihood of "chain reactions," or a "scramble" to proliferation when "even one additional state demonstrates a nuclear capability." The 1985 report goes on, "The most striking characteristic of the present-day nuclear proliferation scene is that, despite the alarms rung by past Estimates, no additional overt proliferation of nuclear weapons has actually occurred since China tested its bomb in 1964." Although "some proliferation of nuclear explosive capabilities and other major proliferation-related developments have taken place in the past two decades," they did not have "the damaging, systemwide impacts that the Intelligence community generally anticipated they would."[43]

In his analysis of more than sixty years of failed efforts to accurately predict nuclear proliferation, analyst Moeed Yusuf concludes that "the pace of proliferation has been much slower than anticipated by most." The majority of countries suspected of trying to obtain a nuclear weapons capability "never even came close to crossing the threshold. In fact, most did not even initiate a weapons program." If all the countries that were considered prime suspects over the past sixty years had developed nuclear weapons, "the world would have at least 19 nuclear powers today."[44] As Potter and Mukhatzhanova argue, government and academic experts frequently "exaggerated the scope and pace of nuclear weapons proliferation."[45]

Nor is there compelling evidence that a nuclear proliferation chain reaction will ever occur. Rather, the pool of potential proliferators has been shrinking. Proliferation pressures were far greater during the Cold War. In the 1960s, at least twenty-one countries either had or were considering nuclear weapons re-

42. *Prevention of the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Digital National Security Archives,* No. NP01103, National Security Action Memorandum, January 21, 1965, Collection: Nuclear Non-Proliferation, p. 1.
43. See National Intelligence Council, "The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation: Balance of Incentives and Constraints," September 1985, http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0000453458/0000453458_0001.gif.
44. Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation," p. 61.
45. Potter and Mukhatzhanova, "Divining Nuclear Intentions," p. 166. See also p. 159 n. 42, where they catalogue works that discuss tipping points and chain reactions.

search programs. Today only nine countries are known to have nuclear weapons. Belarus, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Libya, South Africa, Sweden, and Ukraine have dismantled their weapons programs. Even rogue states that are/were a great concern to U.S. policymakers—Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea—began their nuclear weapons programs before the Cold War had ended.[46] As far as is known, no nation has started a new nuclear weapons program since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.[47] Ironically, by focusing on the threat of rogue states, policymakers may have underestimated the potentially far more destabilizing effect of proliferation in "respectable" states such as Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

NUCLEAR TERRORISM. The possibility of a terrorist nuclear attack on the United States is widely believed to be a grave, even apocalyptic, threat and a likely possibility, a belief supported by numerous statements by public officials. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, "the inevitability of the spread of nuclear terrorism" and of a "successful terrorist attack" have been taken for granted.[48]

Coherent policies to reduce the risk of a nonstate actor using nuclear weapons clearly need to be developed. In particular, the rise of the Abdul Qadeer Khan nuclear technology network should give pause.[49] But again, the news is not as grim as nuclear alarmists would suggest. Much has already been done to secure the supply of nuclear materials, and relatively simple steps can produce further improvements. Moreover, there are reasons to doubt both the capabilities and even the interest many terrorist groups have in detonating a nuclear device on U.S. soil. As Adam Garfinkle writes, "The threat of nuclear terrorism is very remote."[50]

Experts disagree on whether nonstate actors have the scientific, engineering, financial, natural resource, security, and logistical capacities to build a nuclear

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46. Figures taken from Perkovich et al., "Universal Compliance," pp. 19–20.
47. There is uncertainty about the nature and timeline of nuclear research in Syria. See "Nuclear Weapons Programs," *GlobalSecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/syria/nuke.htm.
48. Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation," p. 49. Much of the nuclear terrorism literature is alarmist. A good if unduly pessimistic assessment, which evaluates past actions and recommends further measures, is Matthew Bunn, *Securing the Bomb, 2008* (Cambridge, Mass., and Washington, D.C.: Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard University, and Nuclear Threat Initiative, September 2008), http://www.nti.org/securingthebomb.
49. Although the Khan case is disturbing, the network did not aid nonstate actors and was ultimately discovered and shut down. Michael Levi notes that Khan's trade did not involve nuclear weapons or explosive materials, the most sensitive part of the Pakistani nuclear program. See Levi, *On Nuclear Terrorism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 24.
50. Adam Garfinkle, "Does Nuclear Deterrence Apply in the Age of Terrorism?" *Footnotes*, Vol. 14, No. 10 (May 2009), http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/1410.200905.garfinkle.nucleardeterrenceterrorism.html.

bomb from scratch. According to terrorism expert Robin Frost, the danger of a "nuclear black market" and loose nukes from Russia may be overstated. Even if a terrorist group did acquire a nuclear weapon, delivering and detonating it against a U.S. target would present tremendous technical and logistical difficulties.[51] Finally, the feared nexus between terrorists and rogue regimes may be exaggerated. As nuclear proliferation expert Joseph Cirincione argues, states such as Iran and North Korea are "not the most likely sources for terrorists since their stockpiles, if any, are small and exceedingly precious, and hence well-guarded."[52] Chubin states that there "is no reason to believe that Iran today, any more than Sadaam Hussein earlier, would transfer WMD [weapons of mass destruction] technology to terrorist groups like al-Qaida or Hezbollah."[53]

Even if a terrorist group were to acquire a nuclear device, expert Michael Levi demonstrates that effective planning can prevent catastrophe: for nuclear terrorists, what "can go wrong might go wrong, and when it comes to nuclear terrorism, a broader, integrated defense, just like controls at the source of weapons and materials, can multiply, intensify, and compound the possibilities of terrorist failure, possibly driving terrorist groups to reject nuclear terrorism altogether." Warning of the danger of a terrorist acquiring a nuclear weapon, most analyses are based on the inaccurate image of an "infallible ten-foot-tall enemy." This type of alarmism, writes Levi, impedes the development of thoughtful strategies that could deter, prevent, or mitigate a terrorist attack: "Worst-case estimates have their place, but the possible failure-averse, conservative, resource-limited five-foot-tall nuclear terrorist, who is subject not only to the laws of physics but also to Murphy's law of nuclear terrorism, needs to become just as central to our evaluations of strategies."[54]

A recent study contends that al-Qaida's interest in acquiring and using nuclear weapons may be overstated. Anne Stenersen, a terrorism expert, claims that "looking at statements and activities at various levels within the al-Qaida

51. Robin M. Frost, *Nuclear Terrorism after 9/11*, Adelphi Papers, No. 378 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, December 2005); and Garfinkle, "Does Nuclear Deterrence Apply in the Age of Terrorism?" See also William Langewiesche, "How to Get a Nuclear Bomb," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 2006, pp. 80–98, http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200612/langewiesche-nukes. Langewiesche writes, "In the end, if you wanted a bomb and calculated the odds, you would have to admit that they were stacked against you, simply because of how the world works. . . . [For example,] the existence of suitcase bombs has never been proved, and there has never been a single verified case, anywhere, of the theft of any sort of nuclear weapon." Like Levi, Langewiesche shows the difficulty that terrorists have at each stage in acquiring the needed nuclear materials, then assembling, transporting, delivering, and detonating a bomb in the United States.

52. Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 91.

53. Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, p. 52.

54. Levi, *On Nuclear Terrorism*, p. 141. The earlier quotes were taken from pages 144 and 151–152.

network, it becomes clear that the network's interest in using unconventional means is in fact much lower than commonly thought."[55] She further states that "CBRN [chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear] weapons do not play a central part in al-Qaida's strategy."[56] In the 1990s, members of al-Qaida debated whether to obtain a nuclear device. Those in favor sought the weapons primarily to deter a U.S. attack on al-Qaida's bases in Afghanistan. This assessment reveals an organization at odds with that laid out by nuclear alarmists of terrorists obsessed with using nuclear weapons against the United States regardless of the consequences. Stenersen asserts, "Although there have been various reports stating that al-Qaida attempted to buy nuclear material in the nineties, and possibly recruited skilled scientists, it appears that al-Qaida central have not dedicated a lot of time or effort to developing a high-end CBRN capability. . . . Al-Qaida central never had a coherent strategy to obtain CBRN: instead, its members were divided on the issue, and there was an awareness that militarily effective weapons were extremely difficult to obtain."[57] Most terrorist groups "assess nuclear terrorism through the lens of their political goals and may judge that it does not advance their interests."[58] As Frost has written, "The risk of nuclear terrorism, especially true nuclear terrorism employing bombs powered by nuclear fission, is overstated, and that popular wisdom on the topic is significantly flawed."[59]

U.S. officials have worried about nuclear terrorism, the unconventional delivery of nuclear weapons, and the problem of "no return address" since the dawn of the atomic age. As early as 1946, Edward Condon, a prominent U.S. nuclear scientist warned, "In any room where a file case can be stored, in any district of a great city, near any key building or installation, a determined effort can secrete a bomb capable of killing a hundred thousand people and laying waste to every ordinary structure within a mile."[60] The Central Intelligence Agency began warning about the danger of a nuclear weapon be-

55. Anne Stenersen, *Al-Qaida's Quest for Weapons of Mass Destruction: The History behind the Hype* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft, 2008), p. 89.
56. Ibid., p. 84.
57. Ibid., p. 69. Al-Qaida may also have had less money than is commonly thought, both before and after the September 11 terrorist attacks. See John Roth, Douglas Greenburg, and Serena Wille, for the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *Monograph on Terrorist Financing: Staff Report to the Commission*, http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/staff_statements/911_TerrFin_Monograph.pdf; and Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), pp. 194–197.
58. Levi, *On Nuclear Terrorism*, p. 11.
59. Frost, "Nuclear Terrorism after 9/11," p. 7.
60. Edward U. Condon, "The New Technique of Private War," in Dexter Masters and Katharine Way, eds., *One World or None: A Report to the Public on the Full Meaning of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946), quoted in Dan Stober, "No Experience Necessary," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (March/April 2003), pp. 56–63, at p. 63.

ing smuggled into the United States only months after the Soviets detonated a nuclear device.[61]

An October 1962 U.S. government study suggested that the future would hold complex and unforeseen nuclear threats, including those from rogue states and nonstate actors: "Nuclear weapons will become increasingly economical" and may become available by "theft, commercial purchase, or diplomatic trading." New nuclear powers would not need sophisticated strategic forces or ballistic missiles: "A fishing boat or a cheap airplane might have been an adequate means of delivery for, say, the Algerian Nationalists against Marseilles, or Castro's Cuba against Baltimore or Miami."[62] An aide to U.S. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger wrote, "Nuclear raw materials . . . if captured by terrorists, can be made into crude atomic bombs or exploded to cause contamination. (This is a real threat, not science fiction.)"[63] In 1970 the National Security Council warned of "terrorist actions against nuclear installations, or involving nuclear material," emphasizing the psychological effects of the "panic" that would follow such an attack, and arguing that "we are not in a very strong position" to deal with these situations.[64] At the time, worries over nuclear terrorism, dirty bombs, and covert weapons did not receive more prominence because the potential of a nuclear war with the Soviets or the PRC was considered far greater and more likely to be devastating.

Even some of the current fears surrounding a nuclear explosion with no return address are similar to those from the Cold War. During the 1960s, for example, U.S. policymakers worried that France might use its nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union—which might not be able to determine the origins of the attack—as a trigger to force the United States to launch a retaliatory strategic nuclear weapons attack in support of its ally.[65] Dwight Eisenhower's administration even exploited elements of this logic to its advantage, as its "massive retaliation" strategy would have held the Soviet Union responsible

61. Central Intelligence Agency, "Capabilities of the USSR to Employ Unconventional Attack Involving the Smuggling of Atomic Weapons into the United States," January 19, 1950, DDRS, Doc. No. CK3100165674, p. 1.
62. "A Report on Strategic Developments over the Next Decade for the Interagency Panel," October 1962, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, NSF, Box 376, pp. 51–53.
63. Richard T. Kennedy, "Status of USG Actions against Terrorism," memo for Henry Kissinger, November 25, 1972, DDRS, Doc. No. CK3100525361, p. 1.
64. Will Kriegsman to Peter Flanigan, "Saboteur or Terrorist Actions against Nuclear Installations," October 23, 1970, National Security Council Institutional Files, National Security Decision Memorandum, Box H-180, Nixon Presidential Materials, U.S. National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
65. For a sense of the angered U.S. response to this scenario—including an extraordinary threat by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk against France—see Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 338 n. 193.

for any nuclear attack emerging from the communist world, including China. This may have forced the Soviets to rein in their more aggressive neighbors, fostering a split with China.[66] Today a similar strategy could be effective against Iran, that is, warn the Iranians that if they develop nuclear weapons, their relationship with terrorist organizations would mean that Iran would be held responsible for any suspicious atomic detonation against the United States or its allies anytime or anywhere.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE LONG PEACE

The so-called Long Peace was not as peaceful or stable as nuclear alarmists claim. During the Cold War, the United States, the Soviet Union, and their allies spent trillions of dollars, fought proxy wars and overthrew governments, and dramatically transformed their domestic institutions for five decades in what many considered a life-and-death struggle. The competition was not predictable or free of crisis. To give just a few examples: between 1950 and 1953, a civil war in an area of questionable geopolitical significance to the United Sates, the Korean Peninsula, threatened to escalate into a global conflagration in large measure because of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union. In the 1950s the Soviets issued nuclear threats against the British and the French during the Suez crisis, and the United States threatened the PRC over disputes in the Taiwan Strait. Between 1958 and 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a standoff over the isolated city of Berlin, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis.

Even after the emergence of mutual vulnerability during the 1960s, there were periods of marked instability, uncertainty, and danger. Wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan killed hundreds of thousands and threatened to escalate into broader conflicts. In 1963 the United States approached the Soviet Union about a preemptive nuclear attack on the PRC; in 1969 the Soviets approached the Americans with the same proposal. Richard Nixon's administration issued nuclear threats on several occasions. At different times, each superpower received false information—as late as 1979 for the United States and 1983 for the Soviet Union—that its adversary was planning a nuclear attack.

To be sure, the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States did not lead to world war. If, however, one defines stability as the absence of crisis, uncertainty, and risk-taking behavior that could lead to war, then this rivalry looks different indeed.[67] Upon close historical inspection, nuclear weapons of-

66. See Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, p. 274.
67. As Dale C. Copeland argues, "To make a theory of major war relevant to the nuclear era, as well as to the pre-nuclear era, we must explain why states would move from peaceful engagement

ten caused and exacerbated dangerous Cold War crises between the superpowers, for two basic reasons: nuclear weapons affected statecraft in ways that often undermined international stability, and the particular strategies employed by the United States were often the cause of crises that would never have occurred in the prenuclear world.[68]

Nuclear weapons destabilized international politics in several ways during the Cold War that are often overlooked by contemporary alarmists. They nullified the influence of other, more traditional forms of power, such as conventional forces and economic strength, allowing the Soviet Union to minimize the United States' enormous economic, technological, and even "soft power" advantages.[69] Nuclear weapons also changed military calculations in potentially dangerous ways. It has long been understood that in a nuclear environment, the side that strikes first gains an overwhelming military advantage. This meant that strategies of preemption, and even preventive war, were enormously appealing. It was for this reason that both the United States and the Soviet Union considered attacking China's nuclear weapons program before China could deploy a strategic nuclear force.[70] Throughout the 1950s, NATO explicitly grounded its strategy on the advantages of preemption.[71] A military strategy based on a rapid, forceful preemptive strike affords diplomats little time or leeway to end a crisis. Even after the establishment of parity, analysts in both the United States and the Soviet Union supported nuclear force structures and strategies grounded in maintaining a first-strike capability.[72]

The most destabilizing aspect of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, however, was how the dynamics of a nuclear crisis often emphasized balance of resolve considerations over balance of power concerns. As historian Marc Trachtenberg argues, in the prenuclear world, "more or less objective factors—above all, the balance of military power" helped to determine the outcome of political conflicts. "The weak tended to give way to the strong," and "the military balance gave some indication as to how a dispute would be worked out."

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to a destabilizing cold war rivalry, or from such a rivalry into crises with the types of risks witnessed in the Cuban missile crisis." Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 3.

68. As Keir A. Lieber explains, "The logic of extended deterrence required a first-strike capability." Lieber, *War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 145.

69. Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, No. 80 (Fall 1990), pp. 153–171.

70. See William Burr and Jeffrey T. Richelson's excellent account in "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 54–99.

71. Marc Trachtenberg, "The Nuclearization of NATO," in Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, p. 162.

72. Lieber, *War and the Engineers*, pp. 140–148.

In the nuclear world, the likelihood of a state risking the use of nuclear weapons may be more important than the number or types of weapons it possesses. "The side with the greater resolve, the side more willing to run the risk of nuclear war, has the upper hand and will prevail in a showdown," writes Trachtenberg. In such a world, there would be a "great premium on resolve, on risk-taking, and perhaps ultimately on recklessness."[73] Measuring resolve is a more subjective exercise than measuring capabilities, making it easier for either or both sides to miscalculate in a crisis; it also encourages each side to be more rigid than it might otherwise be. As Thomas Schelling put it, one or, more dangerously, both sides might decide to manipulate the risk inherent in nuclear confrontations to accomplish important political goals.[74] Such a conflict might become a dangerous contest in risk taking that could easily lead to war.

The Berlin and Cuban missile crises reveal the importance of balance of resolve considerations in understanding how the crises both began and ended. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev generated four years of crisis by pushing Soviet demands over Berlin's status between 1958 and 1962, despite a strategic balance that overwhelmingly favored the United States.[75] Throughout this period, the Soviet premier believed that "so long as the Soviet Union was the weaker superpower, it had to practice brinkmanship to keep its adversary off-balance."[76] In 1961, for example, some believed the United States could carry out a devastating first strike against the Soviets without incurring much damage.[77] Yet according to Khrushchev, the Soviet Union did not need to fear such an attack because the United States would not risk even one or two Soviet weapons hitting U.S. territory.[78] "'Missiles are not cucumbers,' he liked to say.

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73. Marc Trachtenberg, "Waltzing to Armageddon?" *National Interest*, No. 69 (Fall 2002), pp. 144–152, at p. 149. Robert Jervis and other defensive realists acknowledge that balance of resolve considerations were paramount during these nuclear crises, but they do not see this fact as destabilizing. See Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 38; and Stephen Van Evera, *The Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 245. But as Trachtenberg points out, "Why would anyone think that a world of that sort, where political outcomes are up for grabs and victory goes to the side with the strongest nerves, would be particularly stable?" Trachtenberg, "Waltzing to Armageddon?" p. 149.

74. See Thomas C. Schelling, "The Manipulation of Risk," in Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 92–125.

75. Nor did the Soviet Union mobilize its strategic nuclear forces, despite the United States having done so. Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 193 n. 37.

76. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 6.

77. For details of how U.S. policymakers came to this belief, see Fred Kaplan, "JFK's First-Strike Plan," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2001, pp. 81–86.

78. Fursenko and Naftali reveal that the Soviet premier believed, incorrectly, that the United States and its Western allies had backed down during the Suez crisis in 1956 and in Iraq in 1958 because of Khrushchev's successful nuclear brinksmanship.

'One cannot eat them and one does not require more than a certain number in order to ward off an attack.'"[79] But U.S. plans, like those of Khrushchev, also counted on the other side backing down. The special adviser to President John F. Kennedy, Dean Acheson, argued that the issue was "essentially one of US will"; if the "US were genuinely ready to fight for Berlin the Soviets would relent and war would be unnecessary."[80] As Secretary of State Dean Rusk stated, "One of the quickest ways to have a nuclear war is to have the two sides persuaded that neither will fight."[81]

Khrushchev's gambits, conceivable only in the nuclear age, nearly forced the stronger and less reckless power to initiate military actions that could have led to a nuclear war or accept an overwhelming geopolitical defeat.[82] As Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali claim, Khrushchev's brinksmanship would have been a "dangerous strategy at any time in history, but in the nuclear age this approach was potentially suicidal."[83] The Nixon administration also employed nuclear brinksmanship on multiple occasions to achieve policy goals in crises in Vietnam, South Asia, and the Middle East that were far from vital to U.S. national security interests.[84]

This emphasis on resolve and the credibility of commitments often distorted geopolitical calculations in unusual and destabilizing ways. Consider how different the United States' Cold War policy might have been in a wide range of situations in a nonnuclear world. Based on traditional calculations of the balance of power, losing South Korea, Vietnam, or even Berlin may not have been considered disastrous to the United States in a nonnuclear world.[85] None of these entities added much to the United States' material strength, nor would

79. Fursenko and Naftali, *Krushchev's Cold War*, pp. 243–244.
80. Meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordinating Group on Berlin Contingency Planning, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961–1963*, Vol. 14, p. 121.
81. Western foreign ministers' meeting, December 11, 1961, United States Department of State, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 14, p. 656.
82. For example, Kennedy would have publicly agreed to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey and may not even have responded if the Soviets attacked them. Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters, 1957–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 126–127.
83. Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, p. 6.
84. See Scott D. Sagan and Jeremi Suri, "The Madman Nuclear Alert: Secrecy, Signaling, and Safety in October 1969," *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 150–183; and Francis J. Gavin, "Nuclear Nixon: Ironies, Puzzles, and the Triumph of Realpolitik," in Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969–1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 126–145.
85. Eisenhower thought that it "had been a terrible mistake at the end of the war to create Berlin as a western island in the Soviet zone," and he was eager to work out a political compromise with the Soviets. Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, p. 204. For further evidence of Eisenhower's and Kennedy's lack of enthusiasm for the U.S. commitment to Berlin, see Campbell Craig's fascinating account in *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

they have augmented the strength of the communist bloc if they had been lost to the Soviet Union.[86] In each of these crises, however, U.S. policymakers were determined to demonstrate resolve to prove that the United States' commitments to geopolitically important regions were credible.[87] A struggle dominated by resolve rather than capabilities is far more prone to blackmail, miscalculation, and overcommitment. What would a Berlin or Cuba crisis have looked like in a world without nuclear weapons—assuming one had occurred at all?[88]

The need to demonstrate resolve—the most valued currency of the nuclear age—not only expanded U.S. military commitments, but it also shaped the types of nuclear strategies the United States embraced during the Cold War. To demonstrate the credibility of its commitment to defend its allies, the United States sought nuclear superiority and eschewed (to this day) promises not to use nuclear weapons first. In the absence of this commitment and the strategy that backed it, countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and West Germany might have obtained nuclear weapons to guarantee their security. Ensuring that these states remained nonnuclear was an important U.S. objective, as their nuclearization would have deeply unsettled international politics.[89]

This history of the Cold War demonstrates the importance of understanding the particular nuclear strategies that states employ before one can assess the influence of nuclear weapons on world politics. If a state seeks only to protect its homeland, where there is no question of its resolve and interest, its nuclear force requirements may be small and its strategies nonprovocative. A state that seeks to extend its nuclear shield to defend far-flung commitments around the

86. For example, the major realist intellectuals of the postwar period—George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Kenneth Waltz—were against the U.S. military intervention in South Vietnam; none believed its loss would affect the balance of power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. See Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

87. According to Jervis, the nuclear revolution means that "small issues will often loom large, not because of their intrinsic importance, but because they are taken as tests of resolve." What happens "in peripheral areas . . . is not important; whether the United States and the Soviet Union are seen as having lived up to their commitments in these disputes may be crucial." See Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, p. 39. Jervis is correct, although it is hard to understand how this focus on resolve and credibility over material and geopolitical interests makes for a more stable, less crisis-prone, and peaceful world order.

88. In a nonnuclear world, how could the United States protect a city deep in enemy territory, facing an adversary with substantial conventional superiority? And in the absence of nuclear weapons, the United States could have quickly and easily eliminated a Soviet military presence in Cuba.

89. For the importance of security guarantees in dampening proliferation, see Makreeta Lahti, "Security Cooperation as a Way to Stop the Spread of Nuclear Weapons? Nuclear Nonproliferation Policies of the United States towards the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel, 1945–1968," University of Potsdam, 2008.

world faces a different calculus. To convince Japan and South Korea to remain nonnuclear, or to protect an allied city deep in enemy territory against superior conventional forces, the United States employed strikingly different forces and strategies. To demonstrate resolve and credibility in places and in situations where it was not obvious its survival was at stake, the United States sought nuclear superiority and embraced strategies that called for the early, massive use of atomic weapons. Not only were these potentially destabilizing and expensive choices, but they encouraged proliferation among nations outside the United States' extended deterrence umbrella.

POLITICS, NOT WEAPONS

Too often, alarmists focus on the how the nature and qualities of nuclear weapons shape the international environment, as if the possession of nuclear bombs, absent political intent, diplomacy, motivations, or particular strategies, drives world politics. For example, nuclear alarmists often fail to fully explore the underlying political and security interests that make Iran and North Korea willing to take extraordinary political risks to acquire the bomb. Much of their analysis emerges from a view of the past that conflates nuclear history with the history of the Cold War.

A widely held view portrays the U.S.-Soviet rivalry largely through the lens of the nuclear arms race. According to this analysis, the Cold War presented a classic security dilemma. In a dangerous world, the United States and the Soviet Union took steps to protect themselves, but the other side easily misunderstood these defensive measures. Strategies and weapon systems deployed for defensive purposes were frequently seen by a nervous adversary as aggressive and offense oriented, launching a dangerous, unnecessary, and largely unwanted arms race.[90] Nuclear weapons heightened the security dilemma, because the side that launched weapons first could have tremendous advantages.

In this reading, the Cold War was a tragedy, born from the anarchic nature of international relations, which drove a military competition that increased the likelihood of an unwanted and potentially catastrophic war.[91] The only way to dampen this competition was to negotiate arms control treaties that allowed

90. Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167–214. Interestingly, Jervis no longer believes that the Cold War is an example of a security dilemma. See Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 36–60.

91. For a summary of this view, see Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, p. 147. See also Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).

both sides to restrain the deployment of particularly destabilizing weapons without fear that the other side might take advantage.[92] Other observers believed that the anarchic nature of the international system and the intense pressures for survival made it impossible to end this competition, as states would continue to find ways to achieve military advantage.[93]

Shifting power balances, highlighted by dramatic changes in military technology, no doubt strongly influenced U.S. and Soviet policies and their outcomes.[94] Nuclear weapons changed the international environment, often in profound ways. But the core issues driving Cold War crises were explicit geopolitical (and ideological) clashes of interest between the Soviet Union and the United States, clashes that may have been as sharp in a nonnuclear environment.

Focusing solely or even largely on nuclear weapons, to the exclusion of geopolitics, ideology, and diplomacy, provides a caricatured view of both the Cold War and international politics today, drained of important political and diplomatic components. Even in a nonnuclear world, the superpowers would have disagreed about such important and unresolved geopolitical questions as the postwar status of Germany and Japan or control of the Middle East. Arms control treaties resulted from improved political conditions between the United States and the Soviet Union. These treaties were motivated as much by a desire to settle outstanding geopolitical questions as to limit arms.[95]

Consider, again, arguably the most dangerous period of the Cold War—the four years that began with Khrushchev's November 1958 ultimatum on Berlin and ended with the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. Khrushchev proved receptive to taking risks, and to exploiting balance of resolve considerations in a nuclear environment, despite the Soviet Union's strategic inferiority. But to what end?

The Soviet Union believed that its vital national interests were threatened by the rise of West Germany's military power, its potential possession of nuclear weapons, and its unwillingness to accept the division of Germany. Combined with related concerns, including a desire to redress the strategic balance, thwart a Chinese challenge to Soviet leadership of the world communist revolution, and stabilize East Germany, West Germany's emerging power was so

92. Francis J. Gavin, "Wrestling with Parity: The Nuclear Revolution Revisited," in Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The International History of the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).
93. See Lieber, *War and the Engineers*, pp. 143–148.
94. Trachtenberg, "A 'Wasting Asset.'" See also Francis J. Gavin, "Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950–1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 56–89.
95. See Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace;* and Gavin, "Blasts from the Past."

concerning to the Soviets that they were willing to initiate crises and even risk war to prevent West Germany from growing stronger.[96] Initially, the United States was neither well aware of the intensity of Soviet concerns nor willing to alleviate Soviet worries by taking steps it feared would weaken NATO.[97] Over time, however, the Kennedy administration came to appreciate and even share the Soviet Union's concerns and, as such, moved to guarantee West Germany's nonnuclear status and stabilize the political status quo.[98]

The core geopolitical clash of interests generating hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States was, if not fully resolved, greatly eased, leading to a relaxation of tensions by 1963. The danger of nuclear war decreased dramatically, and despite ongoing differences and conflicts, the superpowers even managed to recognize areas of mutual interest, including slowing nuclear proliferation. This "détente" began well before the two countries achieved strategic parity and almost a decade before the Antiballistic Missile and Strategic Arms Limitation treaties were signed.[99]

The Cold War did not represent a security dilemma,[100] and both sides developed and deployed weapons for their own political purposes. A 1,000-plus-page top-secret scholarly study commissioned by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger concluded, "The facts will not support the proposition that either the Soviet Union or the United States developed strategic forces only in direct immediate access to each other."[101] According to the study, "Surges in strategic force deployments sprang from interaction between a scientific community producing basic technical developments and political leaders affected by immediate crisis events."[102] Given the difficulty of finding a clear-cut case of a

96. See Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War.*
97. Jervis argues that the side defending the status quo enjoys the advantage in a nuclear crisis. See Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution,* pp. 29–35. But in Berlin, it was not always clear who was defending and who was challenging the status quo: the Soviets, who wanted to end the West's legal rights in the city, or the United States, who appeared to be looking the other way as West Germany sought an independent nuclear capability. Furthermore, maintaining a defenseless city within your enemy's territory hardly seems an obvious definition of the status quo, nor is it clear what would be defined as moving first in a Berlin crisis.
98. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace.* See also Georges-Henri Soutou, *L'alliance incertaine: Les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands, 1954–1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), pp. 203–265; and Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution, and Reconstruction,* trans. Louise Willmot (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), pp. 513–712.
99. For an excellent account of President Lyndon B. Johnson's efforts to achieve détente with the Soviets, see Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).
100. Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?"
101. Ernest R. May, John D. Steinbruner, and Thomas W. Wolfe, *History of the Strategic Arms Competition, 1945–1972,* Pt. 2, ed. Alfred Goldberg (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office, March 1981), Department of Defense-Freedom of Information Act, p. 810.
102. Ibid., p. 828.

modern war unambiguously caused by the security dilemma, an arms race, or a loss of control, this finding should not be surprising.[103]

A simplified and misleading view of the Cold War distorts much scholarly analysis of nuclear issues today. Building on Cold War assumptions, both the academic intelligence communities have long predicted massive increases in the quality and quantity of China's nuclear forces, with one analyst suggesting that the PRC would develop "3,000–5,000 warheads by 2010" and another forecasting the "aggressive deployment of upwards of 1,000 thermonuclear warheads on ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles] by 2015."[104] As Jeffrey Lewis points out, however, "None of the U.S. intelligence community's dire predictions have come to pass." China's nuclear forces "today look remarkably like they have for decades."[105] India, Israel, and Pakistan have also built and deployed their nuclear forces in a more modest and less aggressive way than most analysts had predicted.[106]

China chose nuclear policies far different from those that the arms race/security dilemma model would have predicted, because a minimal deterrent in a nonready posture under centralized control meets its political and strategic interests. Might Iran pursue a similar path? Not unlike China in the 1960s and 1970s, Iran finds itself in an extraordinarily difficult security situation, surrounded by enemies and nuclear powers. Understanding and perhaps alleviating these pressures might go further toward making the region and the world safer than demanding Iran cease its nuclear activities.

POSTWAR IS MORE THAN COLD WAR

In the midst of the Cuban missile crisis, the most dangerous nuclear event of the Cold War, the authors of a top-secret U.S. study reflected on the uncertainties and dangers in the world that had little to do with the bipolar military clash: "A useful exercise is to speculate on the strategic problems the United States would face if the Soviet Union quietly disappeared. . . . It won't; but thinking about it helps to remind us that taming the Soviets in the years to come (or defeating them militarily) would not end our strategic problems. It can also quicken our appreciation that many latent problems are suppressed

103. Marc Trachtenberg, "The Past and Future of Arms Control," *Daedalus*, Vol. 120, No. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 203–216; and Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, p. 88.
104. Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation," p. 35.
105. Lewis, *The Minimum Means of Reprisal*, p. 206.
106. Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation," p. 45. According to Yusuf, "For instance, K. Subrahmanyam, India's most prominent strategic thinker, argued that the 'main purpose of a third world arsenal is deterrence against blackmail,' and that new nuclear powers had the benefit of learning from the 'highly risky and totally non-viable policies' of the superpowers and would not repeat their mistakes."

by the main East-West antagonism, and some may be tardily recognized because of our preoccupation with the central threat."[107]

Scholars and practitioners often assume that the Cold War was the most important factor shaping world politics during the decades following World War II. From a military perspective, it was: from the end of that conflict until the late 1980s, two states possessing the most fearsome military power in history confronted each other with varying degrees of intensity and in nearly every part of the world. This conflict, understandably, dominated the concerns of leaders and citizens in both countries, and it casts an enormous shadow over understanding the second half of the twentieth century. It was not the only issue animating international relations, however, nor was it the only factor driving nuclear proliferation.

The United States and the Soviet Union developed nuclear weapons and their ensuing strategies in large part because of their geopolitical rivalry with each other. This fact has prompted many U.S. strategists, policymakers, and scholars to view the entire post–World War II period solely through a Cold War lens.[108] The remaining seven states that developed nuclear weapons as a result of programs begun during the Cold War, however—France, Great Britain, India, Israel, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, and South Africa—did so for reasons that went beyond, and at many times had little to do with, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Robert Jervis, for example, notes, "The most important change in world politics—decolonization—was one that neither offended nor was engineered by either superpower."[109] The unwinding of empires, European integration, tensions in the Middle East, and the changing balance of power in East and South Asia, while connected to the Cold War, were often as and at times more important drivers of nuclear proliferation. This assessment supports the position of those who argue, "Countries by in large acquire nuclear weapons because of local problems and local threats."[110]

Why, for example, did France and Great Britain develop nuclear weapons

107. "A Report on Strategic Developments over the Next Decade for the Interagency Panel" (Camp David, Md.: October 1962), p. 51.

108. For one of the first and still best arguments for diplomatic historians to go beyond the "Cold War lens," see Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post–Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); and the relevant chapters in Anthony G. Hopkins, ed., *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). For a slightly different argument—that Cold War scholarship should be "de-centered" and focus on nonsuperpower actors—see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

109. Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, p. 34.

110. Palca and Rosen, "North Korea and Nuclear Proliferation," p. 7.

when they were under the U.S. nuclear security umbrella? To be sure, they feared the Soviet threat to Western Europe. But they had other security concerns as well.[111] Both countries worried that the United States might abandon Western Europe after World II, leaving them to defend themselves. Moreover, both were concerned about the future political orientation of Germany and wanted to protect themselves against the reemergence of an aggressive regime in Central Europe. Could either state gamble that, at some point in the future, another expansionist Germany would not emerge, this time armed with nuclear weapons? Both France and Great Britain began their nuclear programs before World War II, possessed empires that created worldwide security commitments, and perceived themselves as potential great powers. Both underwent a painful and at times dangerous decolonization process that dominated the concerns of policymakers as much, and at times more than, fears of the Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons, French and British policymakers hoped, might preserve their countries' great power status, or at least slow their decline, and provide a measure of independence from the superpowers.

India and Israel, as new states with uncertain legitimacy, unresolved territorial disputes, and troubling regional security problems that would have existed in some form or another even if there had been no Cold War, felt compelled to explore nuclear weapons programs almost from the start of their nationhood. For India, nuclear weapons not only provided security against China and Pakistan; they also allowed it to resist pressure to ally with either the United States or the Soviet Union and instead position India as a leader of the nonaligned world. For Israel, nuclear weapons provided security in the face of hostile, larger neighbors in a world where it had few reliable allies. Largely because India's and Israel's interest in nuclear weapons fell outside a Cold War framework, narrowly defined, the United States was unable to offer meaningful security guarantees or persuade either country, despite great efforts, to abandon its weapons programs.

Other states developed nuclear weapons for reasons only tangentially related to the Cold War. Pakistan's weapons program was developed in response to India's. South Africa developed nuclear weapons because, among other things, it was worried about a "possible race war between the apartheid re-

111. Maurice Vaisse, *La France et l'atomique Française, 1945–1958* (Bruxelles: Bruylant, 1994); Jacques E.C. Hymans, *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially pp. 85–113; Susanna Schrafstetter and Stephen Twigge, *Avoiding Armageddon: Europe, the United States, and the Struggle for Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1945–1970* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004); and Lorna Arnold and Mark Smith, *Britain, Australia, and the Bomb: The Nuclear Tests and Their Aftermath* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

gime and black African nations."[112] Other near-nuclear programs, including those of Argentina, Australia, South Korea, and Taiwan, were motivated as much by regional security issues as by the superpower rivalry. Even states with weapons programs of most concern in recent years—Iran, North Korea, and preinvasion Iraq—began during the Cold War. Few would argue, however, that Cold War logic drove these states toward proliferation.

Even the United States had reasons beyond competing with the Soviet Union for how it deployed nuclear weapons and developed its strategies. At various points over the last sixty-plus years, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and West Germany wanted their own nuclear weapons. Each had unresolved territorial disputes and uneasy relations with its neighbors. Acquisition of nuclear weapons by any of these countries would have been deeply unsettling to friends and foes alike, with untold but potentially troubling consequences for U.S. interests. By providing security commitments (often backed by a promise to use nuclear weapons if necessary), the United States dampened these proliferation pressures.

Distinguishing Cold War history from the larger post–World War II history offers a better understanding of the forces driving proliferation today. Looking back, it does not appear that regime type or the structure of the international system was the most important factor determining who acquired weapons, when they acquired them, and what their strategies were. Nor did the NPT or the emergence of nuclear parity and assured destruction between the superpowers halt proliferation, as might have been expected; the 1970s witnessed intense nuclear proliferation pressures in many regions.

It is always more useful to understand the political and security environment in which a state finds itself when attempting to understand the strategies it might employ. In considering contemporary Iran, for example, Tehran's calculations about developing a nuclear weapons capability may have more in common with Brazil, France, India, or Japan than analysts recognize.[113] As a state in a dangerous neighborhood surrounded by nuclear adversaries, Iran's attempts to provide for its security are understandable and long running. Iran began its nuclear program under the shah, restarted it under the ayatollahs, and might continue it even if it one day becomes a democracy. Despite the claims of the nuclear alarmists, Iran may want these weapons purely for deterrent purposes. If so, it is unlikely to pose a threat to the United States greater

112. Palca and Rosen, "North Korea and Nuclear Proliferation," p. 7.
113. For a comparison of Iran to France in the 1950s and 1960s, see Serre Lodgaard, "Challenge from Within: The Case of Iran," p. 7 n. 18, presented at the "Nobel Symposium: Peace, Stability, and Nuclear Order: Theoretical Assumptions, Historical Experiences, and Future Challenges," Drøbak, Norway, June 25–27, 2009.

than that of the medium-sized states that acquired weapons during the Cold War.

Conclusion

Nuclear alarmists exaggerate and oversimplify contemporary nuclear threats while underplaying those of the past. Terrorists, rogue states, and the fear of tipping points did not suddenly appear or become more dangerous after the September 11 terrorist attacks. Understanding nuclear proliferation during a far more dangerous period—the Cold War—provides useful insights into the nuclear dilemmas and challenges states currently confront. The most important lesson of this rich, complex, and at times contradictory history is the value of humility, as it highlights how little scholars and practitioners know about how nuclear weapons affect international relations. Although this should give any commentator pause, there are at least four other lessons from our nuclear history that policymakers would be wise to heed.

First, the idea of a Long Peace based on nuclear stability during the Cold War is misleading, if not belied by the facts. The bipolar period witnessed greater proliferation pressures than theorists predicted, and forces only indirectly related to the Cold War—such as decolonization—were more significant than have been acknowledged. During the Cold War itself, extraordinarily dangerous great power crises occurred, even after the United States and the Soviet Union entered the era of mutual vulnerability. Does this mean that more nuclear weapons will automatically destabilize contemporary international politics? Not necessarily, because it was the purposes to which these weapons were used during the Cold War (e.g., protecting Berlin from superior conventional forces), the strategies employed (massive preemption), and the forces required (e.g., nuclear superiority, hard-target counterforce) that made these superpower crises more likely and more dangerous.

Absent these types of higher-risk strategies (or the underlying geopolitical circumstances that fuel them), a nuclearized environment need not be more dangerous. It would seem that most nuclear powers—even "rogue" states such as Iran and North Korea—seek these weapons to deter attacks on their homelands. Arguably, it has been the United States, more than any other state, that has pursued aggressive strategies, by offering extended deterrence, seeking nuclear superiority, eschewing no-first-use promises, and even making nuclear threats. As Richard Betts reminds us, "Washington had a more frequent interest in nuclear blackmail than Moscow did."[114]

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114. Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1987), p. 11.

The second lesson is that nonproliferation policies can be costly, and overreaction can be as dangerous as inaction.[115] Preventing states from pursuing weapons they consider vital to their security may actually increase the chance of their use. As Betts notes, "There is an inherent tension between striking a threat at its source, and that action eventually contributing to the very source of the threat."[116] Likewise, making security commitments to prevent states from acquiring nuclear weapons can be expensive, exposing the protector—invariably the United States—to the possibility of being pulled into unwanted conflicts and leaving it vulnerable to manipulation by its client states. The trade-offs and costs of nonproliferation policies are rarely rigorously calculated.

Third, nuclear weapons have not upended the basic tenets of international politics. For example, identifying the nuclear arms race as the driving force behind the Cold War—instead of the geopolitical and ideological conflicts between the Soviet Union and the United States—has led many analysts to overstate the importance of arms control treaties and regimes, both in the past and today. Although the nuclear balance played an important role in shaping superpower crises, Cold War tensions eased considerably well before the United States and the Soviet Union reached nuclear parity, as important geopolitical issues were resolved. When Cold War tensions reemerged, the cause was more political than technological. To paraphrase a National Rifle Association slogan: Weapons don't cause wars, states do. U.S. foreign policy might be better served if it downplayed its often singular and obsessive focus on nuclear proliferation and instead paid more attention to the political and security circumstances in which potential proliferators find themselves.

Fourth, attempting to predict proliferation or nuclear attacks by terrorists is not only difficult but often counterproductive, particularly when it produces alarmist forecasts. As Yusuf concludes, "Overall estimates from the intelligence community and, even more so, from academic sources exaggerated concerns regarding nuclear weapons."[117] Alarmist language and predictions of catastrophe are often irresponsible. For example, writing about chemical weapons in April 1999, al-Qaida's number-two leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, told another senior al-Qaida leader, Mohammed Atef: "The enemy started thinking about these [chemical] weapons before WWI. Despite their extreme danger, we only became aware of them when the enemy drew our attention to

115. This is one of the key points in John Mueller's trenchant analysis in *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).
116. Richard Betts, summarized in Smith, *Deterring America*, p. 157.
117. Yusuf, "Predicting Proliferation," p. 68.

them by repeatedly expressing concerns that they can be produced simply with easily available materials."[118]

This article does not propagate a Pollyannaish view of nuclear weapons. Their potential to cause unthinkable devastation is beyond dispute. This reality requires that the scholarly and foreign policy communities think more clearly and more soberly about the causes and consequences of nuclear proliferation. Alarmism is not a strategy: nuclear threats are not new or more dangerous than those of the past; and ignoring the continuities and lessons from the past is foolish. Understanding the history of nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation and, in particular, how and why the international community escaped calamity during a far more dangerous time against ruthless and powerful adversaries is more relevant than ever.

118. Alan Cullison, "Inside Al-Qaeda's Hard Drive," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 2004, pp. 55–70, http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200409/cullison. See also the discussion of U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen's bag of sugar (anthrax) speech in Martin C. Libicki, Peter Chalk, and Melanie Sisson, *Exploring Terrorist Targeting Preferences* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2006), p. 54.