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# New Approaches for Addressing the Threat of WMD Proliferation

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This article will confine itself to the problem of nuclear proliferation and state possession of nuclear weapons, not because state possession is the principal problem, but because state possession is the route to non-state possession. The only way that one can make a nuclear weapon is to acquire plutonium or highly enriched uranium. These two materials do not occur in nature. People must make them and it takes a great deal of time, effort, and money to produce them. So far in human history, only governments have been able to marshal the resources over time to make these materials. Consequently, doing so is well beyond the reach of even well-organized terrorist groups, especially al-Qaeda, given the pressure it is currently facing. The only way terrorists are going to acquire nuclear materials is from a government.

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Proliferation today is limited to a few specific governments. This article will examine several of the most prominent cases of proliferation. The toughest case of nuclear proliferation today is North Korea. My first encounter with the North Koreans, as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, involved planning an air strike on the nuclear complex at Yongbyon in 1994. Had we carried it out, we could have destroyed the reactor, the fuel fabrication facility, the reprocessing facility, and the two other reactors under construction in North Korea all in a short period of time. We would have destroyed the operating reactor—a graphite moderated reactor—without causing a radiological problem, which is no easy feat. By using precision air strikes, we were highly confident that we could entomb the uranium fuel and prevent the highly flammable graphite in the reactor from burning and thereby spreading nuclear fallout downwind. While we determined that the air strikes would be successful, we were concerned about North Korea's response to this attack. There was a possibility that a U.S. strike on North Korea's reactor might lead to a North Korean invasion of South Korea. While the United States military would have prevailed in this scenario, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of South Koreans might have died in the wake of a North Korean onslaught.

Although nobody wanted to strike the reactors and despite the anticipated North Korean response, the United States was prepared to execute the mission because the risk of North Korea getting nuclear weapons seemed so grave. Nuclear weapons in the hands of the North Korean government would have been a direct military threat to us, to the Japanese, and to the South Koreans. North Korean nuclear weapons could have catalyzed a domino effect of proliferation across East Asia. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and others would have looked around and said, "If North Korea can develop nuclear weapons and get away with it, perhaps we ought to rethink our own stand." What does it mean to the integrity of the nonproliferation regime if the world's most erratic, Stalinist throwback gets nuclear weapons and nobody does anything about it?

The problem becomes worse if these nuclear weapons leave the hands of the North Korean government. North Korea appears to be willing to sell everything it makes and North Korea is not going to be around forever. This regime is going to topple off the cliff of history at some point, and who knows into whose hands its plutonium will fall at that moment? For all these reasons, what is happening in North Korea is a disaster.

War was averted in 1994 by the negotiation of the Agreed Framework, which was far from perfect but stopped the North Koreans from reprocessing the fuel rods at Yongbyon for eight years. Over the last



five years the Agreed Framework has unraveled and the biggest disaster in nonproliferation history has unfolded. Furthermore, from the experience of negotiating with the North Koreans, it is clear that they do not care about the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Whenever anyone spoke of the NPT or the United Nations, the North Koreans would ignore them. Other generally accepted approaches to nonproliferation also do not work against the North Koreans. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to interdict shipments of prohibited materials is useful in other contexts, but will not help with North Korea. It is not possible for the United States or its allies to catch the North Koreans if they are determined to export a softball-sized piece of plutonium. So, none of the generally accepted solutions to the problem of WMD proliferation will work with North Korea. These mechanisms are terribly important things, but the North Koreans are masters at making themselves an exception to every rule.

The United States is belatedly trying to talk the North Koreans out of their nuclear program. However, the North Koreans have gotten away with murder for the last five years, and it may not now be possible to convince the North Koreans to abandon their nuclear weapons program. Because it is unclear whether we can negotiate a solution, we need to ask ourselves what should be done otherwise. The political, military, and economic policies that we can pursue in the absence of a negotiated agreement can be called Plan B for North Korea.

There are several things one can do, and will have to do, if one cannot convince North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program. These actions include but are not limited to military action. It is incumbent upon our government to have a Plan B, even as it is incumbent upon

us to give Plan A—diplomacy—a chance; it might work. Plan A and Plan B mutually reinforce one another. If the United States and its allies have a strong Plan B and the North Koreans know it, that may clarify their thinking about accepting a diplomatic outcome. Plan B is a plan of pressure, coercion, and possibly the elimination of the North Korean regime. It is not something the United States can do unilaterally. The Chinese, the South Koreans, and others are able to provide relief to North Korea from almost any pressure that we can apply short of military action. Therefore, it is important to have the support or at least the acquiescence of those countries for a strategy of pressure. The United States will never obtain this support unless it has exhausted the diplomatic option. And so Plan A is essential to Plan B and Plan B is essential to Plan A. We need both for dealing with North Korea. At any rate, the NPT and the PSI, wonderful as they are in other contexts, do not apply to North Korea.

The next proliferator of concern is Iran. Iran is a very different case, and the bad news is that the Iranians are effectively manipulating the United States and Europe. They know exactly how to walk up to the line and walk along the line. However, the Iranians seem to actually care what the rest of the world thinks; that is, they actually *see* a line. They do so for both economic and political reasons and therein lies the germ of possible diplomatic success. This is not the case with North Korea; the North Koreans do not care how the international community sees them. The Iranians do. That means that, over time—and from a technical point of view, the situation in Iran is much less urgent than the North Korean situation—the United States and its allies may be able to turn Iran around diplomatically.

In order to do so, the United States and its allies are going to have to address two facts. One is that the Iranian nuclear program is not driven by the Iranian leadership's desire for nuclear weapons. It is driven by an Iranian desire for nuclear weapons.. The goal of nuclear weapons is widely shared in Iranian society. Reformers and mullahs alike think that it might be a good idea for Iran to have a bomb.

The other problem is that Iran wants a civil nuclear fuel cycle. In February 2004 in a speech at National Defense University, President Bush proposed a number of nonproliferation initiatives, some of which relate directly to the fuel cycle question. These initiatives included expanding the PSI; strengthening the laws and international controls that govern proliferation; expanding programs like the Nunn-Lugar program that keep Cold War-era weapons out of the wrong hands; closing loopholes that allow regimes to produce nuclear material for weapons under the cover of civilian nuclear programs; allowing only countries who have signed the

Additional Protocol of the NPT, which provides for stronger safeguards and monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to import equipment for civilian nuclear programs; and suspending any state under investigation for violation of the NPT from serving on the IAEA Board of Governors. These initiatives are very important and are directly related to Iran. They are also an example of how action at the global level actually applies locally.

The last country of significance is India. Prime Minister Singh and President Bush reached an important deal in July 2005. Much of the discussion—and controversy—around the India deal focuses on its nuclear aspects. When its nuclear aspects alone are considered, it is a bad deal for the United States. Washington recognized Delhi's nuclear status in return for little in the way of additional restraints on India's nuclear arsenal or help with combating nuclear proliferation beyond what India was already inclined or committed to give. At the same time, the deal came at significant cost to U.S. nuclear nonproliferation objectives in other critical regions. However, it seems clear that President Bush did not view the India deal through a nuclear-only lens. Instead, the United States gave the Indians what they have craved for thirty years—nuclear recognition—in return for a “strategic partnership” between Washington and Delhi. Washington gave on the nuclear front to get something on the non-nuclear front. A strategic partnership with India is in the deep and long-term security interests of the United States. Nuclear recognition in exchange for a strategic-partnership is therefore a reasonable framework for a deal with India.

India obtained *de facto* recognition of its nuclear weapons status: the United States will behave, and urge others to behave, as if India were a nuclear weapons state under the NPT. Beyond these technicalities, nuclear recognition confers an enormous political benefit on India. In effect, it allows India to transcend the nuclear box that has for so long defined its place in the international order, jettison at last its outdated Non-Aligned Movement positions and rhetoric, and occupy a more normal and modern place in the diplomatic world.

Other supposed benefits of the deal, however, do not survive close scrutiny. Energy security, for example, is terribly important to both India and the United States. We want India's huge population to satisfy its energy needs without contributing further to the problems of dependence on Middle East oil, pollution, and global warming. Nuclear power will not solve India's energy problems, although it can and should play a role. Nuclear power does nothing to address the principal oil-consuming sector of the Indian economy—cars and trucks. These do not run off the electrical

grid and won't for a long time. Moreover, the type of nuclear assistance the United States is best positioned to provide—light water reactors operating on low-enriched uranium fuel—is at odds with India's vision of a civil nuclear power program built primarily around breeder reactors. The deal will require India to improve its laws and procedures for controlling exports or diversions of sensitive nuclear technology in order to prevent the emergence of an Indian equivalent to the A.Q. Khan proliferation network. India, however, already has a good record of controlling nuclear exports. Since India is already bound by UN Security Council Resolution 1540 which requires such conduct, on paper at least, Delhi has not promised anything new in terms of export controls. In any event, the United States intends to justify the nuclear recognition of India to other nations around the world on the grounds that India's nuclear proliferation behavior is already exemplary.

The United States should expect a number of strategic benefits over the long run from the India deal. First, India should provide immediate diplomatic support to curb Iran's nuclear program. India will need to abandon its long-standing policy of rhetorical support for the spread of nuclear fuel-cycle activities and compromise, to some extent, its friendly relations with Iran. Second, India should serve as a potential counterweight to China. Although no one wants to see China and the United States fall into strategic competition, this cannot be ruled out. It is reasonable for the United States to hedge against a downturn in relations with China by improving its relations with India, and for India to do the same. Third, the United States should expect Indian assistance in a Pakistan contingency. Avoiding and responding to dangers from Pakistan is a common interest that is awkward for either India or the United States to acknowledge. Pakistan, alongside Russia, belongs at the center of our urgent concern about nuclear terrorism. The exposure of the A.Q. Khan network in Pakistan makes clear that Pakistan must be regarded as a potential source of vital materials for nuclear terrorists—whether by theft, sale, diversion by internal elements with access to bombs or materials, the replacement of President Musharraf's government by a radical regime, or some sort of internal chaos. For now, the Pakistan contingency, like the China counterweight, remains a hypothetical and future benefit of the India Deal. Fourth, the United States might expect Indian cooperation in joint military operations outside of a United Nations context. India has historically refused to join the United States military in operations outside of the context of a United Nations mandate and command. In the future, when the United States needs partners in disaster relief, humanitarian intervention,

peacekeeping missions, or stability operations, the United States can reasonably expect India to cooperate.

Fifth, the United States military may gain access and basing rights in India. At first this might be limited to port access for U.S. naval vessels transiting the Indian Ocean and overflight rights for U.S. military aircraft, but in time it could lead to such steps as use of Indian training facilities for U.S. forces. Sixth, the United States might get preferential treatment for the U.S. nuclear industry in India's civil nuclear expansion. Seventh, the United States might expect preferential access for U.S. defense firms to the Indian market. India is expected to increase the scale and sophistication of its military, in part by purchasing weapons systems abroad. In view of its concessions in the India deal, the United States can reasonably expect preferential treatment for U.S. vendors relative to Russian or European vendors. Finally, many commentators and non-proliferation experts have recommended that the administration pursue an agreement on certain additional measures, not spelled out in the Bush-Singh joint statement, to balance the nuclear portion of the deal. These proposed additional steps by India include: agreeing to cease production of new fissile material for weapons, as the other recognized Nuclear Weapons States have done; agreeing to forego indigenous enrichment and reprocessing for its civil nuclear power program in favor of the international fuel cycle initiative proposed by President Bush in February 2004; separating its civil and military nuclear facilities permanently and in such a manner that all reactors producing electricity are declared civil; and joining the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Most of the benefits of the deal's strategic partnership are hypothetical and lie in a future that neither side can predict. This is certainly the case with regard to balancing China and assisting in a Pakistan contingency. Other issues, such as Iran's nuclear program, will unfold sooner. The United States can certainly hope that India will behave as a true strategic partner in the future across the full range of issues. We may also find, when we ask India to do something they are reluctant to do, that we come to regret having played our big diplomatic card—nuclear recognition—so early in the process. India, as befits a great nation on its way to global leadership, will have its own opinions about the content of strategic partnership. No government in Delhi can turn decades of Indian policy on a dime or commit it to a broad set of actions in support of U.S. interests; only a profound and probably slow change in the views of India's elites can do this.

If one examines locations of non-proliferation concern around the world today, none of the situations covered—North Korea, Iran, and

India—is close to being under the control of U.S. policy. All of what the U.S. Department of Defense calls the eight Ds—dissuasion, diplomacy, disarmament, denial, defusing, deterrence, defense, and destruction—are in play in different ways in each of these cases. It is not a simple choice between military action and negotiations. This is a problem that is so important that it has no easy solution. The United States has no choice but to employ a variety of approaches. The debate should not focus on whether one policy or approach or another is most important to non-proliferation. Around the world, different circumstances require somewhat different approaches in which all of these policy approaches play a role, but with different weights. We can not afford to have theological debates amongst ourselves. We need to get on with the job of working to address these problems, because proliferation does not happen in global regimes; it happens in particular places.

None of the approaches to non-proliferation can work unless good intelligence supports our understanding of proliferation. The case of Iraq illustrates that we are far from being well prepared with respect to intelligence on WMD. There are, however, a number of things in the world of technology and analytical processes that can make a material difference in our ability to detect, characterize, and counter nuclear proliferation. Ultimately, non-proliferation policy requires a nuanced approach to each particular situation. What works for India will not work for Iran, and what works for Iran will not work for North Korea. Recognizing this aspect of non-proliferation is crucial in developing and implementing an effective non-proliferation regime. ■