Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide

A Full-Court Press Against Nuclear Anarchy

The Stanley Foundation

By Steve E. Biegun and Jon B. Wolfsthal

April 2007

Stephen E. Biegun *is vice president of International Governmental Affairs for Ford Motor Company. Prior to joining Ford, he served as national security advisor to the Senate Majority Leader. He worked in the White House from 2001 to 2003 as executive secretary of the National Security Council. Prior to joining the White House staff, he served for 14 years as a foreign policy advisor to members of both the House of Representatives and the United States Senate. During this time, he held the position of chief of staff of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.*

Jon B. Wolfsthal *is a senior fellow with the international security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He worked in the 1990s for the United States Department of Energy on a variety of nuclear security and nonproliferation programs and served as the US government's on-site monitor at North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear facilities in 1995-1996. He is the coauthor of* Deadly Arsenals: Tracking Weapons of Mass Destruction. *He served as the chairman of the nonproliferation advisory team for the 2004 Presidential Campaign of Senator John Kerry and as a nonproliferation advisor on the 1992 Campaign of then Governor Bill Clinton.*

What Is the Nuclear Threat?

A small-yield nuclear weapon detonates near the White House. How often have we wondered whether this might happen or worried that it will happen? What have we done to prepare in case it should happen? And most critically, have we done all that we could do—and would do, with the benefit of hindsight—to make sure it does not happen? These are the questions we must address, as will many future generations of Americans, unless urgent action is taken now.

What is it about nuclear proliferation that really troubles us? Is it the challenge to American power that comes from a weaker adversary acquiring the ultimate asymmetric threat? Is it the degree to which the possession of "the bomb" makes a small state potentially impervious to our pressure, challenge, or threat? Is it the concern that the weapon will be used by another nation or a terrorist movement against our friends or allies—with devastating human consequences and the realignment of regional power structures? Or, is it the deep, chilling fear that it will be used against us, destroying in a single flash of fire and devastation our people, our homes, our industry, and our economy, shaking the fabric of our nation to its very core and perhaps permanently altering the fate of our nation? It is, of course, all of the above.

Concern about proliferation is not a phenomenon peculiar to the 20th century, nor is it limited to the spread of nuclear weapons. Civilizations across the millennia have been challenged by the spread of technologies and weapons that have altered the relative power of adversaries and even at times raised the specter of existential threats. The long bow, gunpowder, the rifle, modern battleships, air power, over-the-horizon combat systems, and stealth technology, to name only a few, have revolutionized military capabilities and changed the course of history—for better and for worse. Today's proliferation threats—nuclear, biological, chemical and, to a lesser degree, missiles—may appear to us much more consequential than any in the past, but that is because our unprecedented power has blunted all other threats. We are so militarily strong at this moment that nothing besides weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threatens our existence.

While the proliferation of any WMD poses significant threats and challenges to the United States, it is the nuclear threat which today is the most

grave and one that requires an urgent response. Chemical weapons are horrendous in their effect and, if deployed for maximum damage, can cause severe casualties whether used by terrorists or on a battlefield. Yet chemical weapons can also be defended against, remediation is within our capabilities, and ultimately their value as a weapon is limited to tactical or terrorist purposes.

Biological weapons are undoubtedly capable of causing far more damage than chemical weapons. It is even conceivable that the casualties from a biological weapon attack could exceed those of a nuclear blast. The human toll, the economic consequences, and the difficult remediation from a biological attack put these weapons in contention as potentially the most dangerous for the United States. But ultimately, people will be able to recover from any biological weapons attack. This is not to minimize the threat of biological weapons or deny the fact that, unlike chemical weapons, they can be used as a strategic weapon. Nonetheless, with biological weapons there is a prospect of recovery and remediation, a hope that after the attack itself has run its course, the consequences can be limited and, in some cases, even prevented or reversed.

The comparative permanence of a nuclear weapons attack's impact makes this, for us, the gravest threat we face as a nation. In a split second, the blast from a nuclear weapon could destroy every structure within its range. Every living creature within the blast would be incinerated. The immediate area of the blast would be so thoroughly irradiated that it would be uninhabitable for long periods of time. The secondary consequences from radioactive fallout, economic disruption, and perhaps even the decapitation of the US government would be incalculable. The devastation would carry across generations and the nation would be fundamentally altered.

Any assessment of this threat begins with the question of identifying the international actors that have the wherewithal to acquire a nuclear weapon. Today nine countries are known to have nuclear weapons: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. Iran is aggressively pursuing a nuclear weapon capability, and others in the Middle East, confronted by the regional implications of Iran's nuclear weapons program, are actively considering their nuclear options. This latter group includes Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States. Add to this list the more than 40 states that possess either weapon-usable nuclear materials, the means to produce such materials, or the technical capability to produce nuclear weapons in weeks, months, or years.

In addition to the known and prospective nuclear powers, there are the nonstate actors. Terrorist movements, especially Al Qaeda, have long expressed a wish to acquire any kind of nuclear device. Rogue and criminal elements within the established nuclear powers have surely contemplated how they would acquire and profit from a nuclear weapon stolen from their nation's arsenal. It is entirely plausible that as North Korea—and perhaps Iran—acquire nuclear weapons, the difficulty of transferring them to terrorist movements will be eased substantially. And if a terrorist movement were to acquire a nuclear device, it is almost certain that the constraint on its use will be lowered even more.

Ultimately, there are many scenarios for how a nuclear weapon could be acquired for use against the United States. One possibility would be the transfer—intentional or otherwise—of a nuclear device from Iran, North Korea, or Pakistan to a terrorist organization. Also feasible is the theft and transfer of a

The Stanley Foundation's Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide project brings together pairs of foreign policy and national security specialists from across the political spectrum to find common ground on ten key, controversial areas of policy. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of their organizations or the Stanley Foundation. The series is coedited by Derek Chollet, senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security; Tod Lindberg, editor of the Hoover Institution's journal *Policy Review*; and Stanley Foundation program officer David Shorr.

weapon from Russia's nuclear arsenal. A terrorist movement might also acquire materials to build their own nuclear weapon from any of the aforementioned countries or some other source, though this would require additional equipment and know-how. At the less likely end of the spectrum would be the theft of a weapon from the other nuclear powers—the United States itself, China, France, the United Kingdom, or Israel. Finally, the threat of a nuclear exchange among the nuclear powers themselves cannot be dismissed, perhaps precipitated by some regional conflict or other unforeseeable sharp rise in tensions. It is ironic that, given the Cold War preoccupation with possible war between the major nuclear powers, this latter scenario seems to be the least alarming of all the potential threats.

Considering which governments have recently acquired or are actively seeking a nuclear weapon, and understanding the likelihood that a nuclear-armed terrorist movement might not be far behind, it is impossible to avoid the sense that we are losing control of nuclear weapons proliferation. Priorities for action must be identified right away. Policymakers must assess where the threats are greatest and where the proliferation chain is most vulnerable, and clarify what steps must be taken immediately and what can wait in order to formulate an effective response. At this juncture, no good idea should be put aside, and every element of policy must be vigorously reenergized—from multilateral diplomacy to military preemption. The consequences of failure are too catastrophic to approach the issue with anything less than the utmost urgency.

Why Do States and Terrorist Groups Want the Bomb?

Another key to understanding the proliferation challenge is to focus on why states seek nuclear weapon capabilities. For the most part, states seek to acquire nuclear weapons for security purposes. From the Manhattan Project to North Korea's nuclear efforts (and numerous cases in between), security motives have traditionally been at the core of nuclear development efforts. Some motives have been defensive, with states seeking to acquire nuclear weapons to deter an attack by an adversary, while others have sought to enhance their security by using nuclear weapons to demonstrate their power and wield influence. While some countries have sought nuclear weapons for their global security interests, others have focused on regional security problems or imbalances.

For states outside the international economic or legal mainstream, nuclear weapons acquisition is sometimes a means of achieving general political goals, helping to fend off any outside interference in their plans. Sometimes the aim of such "rogue states" is to alter the regional or global balance of power. Yet even in these cases, it is ultimately a quest for security (to shield a regime from any countering actions) that underlies the interest in nuclear weapons.

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by any new state poses a threat to the security of the United States, affecting our ability to protect the United States, our allies, or our national interests. In some cases, such as North Korea and Iran, this is a key part of their desire to acquire a nuclear capability: to affect US security calculations. While other potential proliferators may not present a direct or as immediate a challenge to US interests, all such cases threaten to complicate the international order by directly spurring subsequent proliferation, reinforcing the trend toward a more nuclear world, or increasing the chances of the loss of control over nuclear assets.

Security is not the sole driver for proliferation, however. Throughout the nuclear age, different states have acted out of a complex set of motives as they work to acquire nuclear capabilities. Nationalism and the desire for international prestige are growing as motivations for pursuing nuclear technology since, in many parts of the world, nuclear technology is still a potent symbol of development, advancement, and independence. Moreover, due in part to the behavior of the established nuclear weapon states, nuclear status continues to confer prestige on the international stage.

Some states seeking international respect have seen nuclear weapons as an effective means to

that end. The fact that the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council all have nuclear weapons is not lost on other countries. The connection between nuclear development and modernity is also a powerful symbol that leaders want to showcase for their own publics, most recently in Iran, but previously in India and Pakistan as well. As long as nuclear weapons and nuclear power are seen as landmarks of advancement, states will consider them important and worth pursuing. The domestic factor in proliferation is often critical, and often more difficult to address than straight security calculations.

The development of nuclear technology has a powerful domestic political effect in some countries, often after having been stoked by years of populist rhetoric. This is especially true in India and Pakistan, and apparently in Iran. Bureaucratic and institutional pressures within a government should not be discounted as a domestic factor in nuclear weapon programs. Once nascent nuclear development programs are initiated, they can be very difficult to restrain and reverse, and bureaucratic forces can be quite effective at exploiting domestic political or economic considerations for their own purposes.

In contrast, terrorist groups seek to acquire nuclear weapons for one reason: to use them (probably as quickly as possible). Those seeking such capabilities have likely done so with a particular target in mind. The acquisition and use of a nuclear device by a terrorist group would inflict massive damage and instill pervasive popular anxiety in the targeted country. This makes them the ultimate terror weapon. In the wake of a terrorist attack, there would be no way of knowing if the perpetrators had additional weapons in reserve. An attacker might therefore seek to blackmail countries with the threat of further nuclear attacks. With little hope of deterring future attacks, it is impossible to predict how a country's population or leadership would respond to such an ultimatum.

Key to any discussion of nuclear terrorism is the question of whether nuclear armed terrorist groups can be deterred. With all due respect to the academic debate on the issue, the risk that a subnational group would use a device in its possession is high, and the consequences are so great that no country or leader could take any comfort in the possibility that a terrorist organization might show restraint after having gone to the lengths required to build or acquire a nuclear device.

Aside from detonating a weapon to terrorize the target population and leadership, are there other motives for terror groups to go nuclear? One could imagine a competitive drive to inflict more damage than the 9/11 attack or mount a challenge to Al Qaeda as the top global terror group. But these are merely secondary motives when compared to the desire to inflict ultimate terror with the ultimate weapon.

While states and substate groups might have distinct motives for acquiring nuclear weapons, the link between state and substate proliferation is a direct one. Terrorists cannot produce their own nuclear materials, and thus must seek to acquire them from the peaceful or military stocks of state programs. Therefore, the distinction often drawn between a nuclear terror threat from a state versus nonstate terrorism is false, and the two types of threats should always be considered in connection with one another. This is clearly the case in Iran, where concerns are high that Tehran might pass nuclear capabilities to terrorist groups, but this link has been often overlooked in other cases of potential proliferation.

Where Do We Go From Here?

For the past 15 years, the debate over how best to address the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other WMD has been viewed as a choice between response and prevention. For the pro-"regime" camp, which emphasized the arms control norms and laws as a bulwark against proliferation dating back to the 1960s, any policy options treating proliferators as a new or emerging reality detracts from the "primary" effort. At the same time, the counterproliferation and preemption camps pushed for aggressive action to counter the inevitable spread of such weapons, even at the expense of diplomacy and support of the traditional

nonproliferation regime, with its tools of inspection and collective response. These different points of emphasis obscure the fact that many nonproliferation professionals believed in the importance of both efforts, but the public and political debates have tended to sharpen the image that the two approaches are mutually exclusive. Those who thought proliferation could be stopped were portrayed as naïve, and those who thought it inevitable were cast as warmongers.

Likewise, the inaccurate picture of an either/or between a focus on state or substate proliferation has severely hampered efforts over the past decade and a half. The link between the two, critically in the realm of nuclear proliferation, was often overlooked as those more focused on states questioned the ability of terror groups to acquire or utilize nuclear weapons, and those focused on subnational threats often downplayed the dangers posed by the spread of nuclear weapons to states. In fact, both present a threat to US security interests and should be the focus of the highest priority in US policies. Moreover, many policies needed to address state proliferation would have the added benefit of reducing the risks of substate proliferation as well.

The debates over prevent vs. respond and state vs. substate that have consumed so much attention in the recent past have missed the point—unnecessarily pitting against one another parties and officials who actually share the common goal of protecting the nation by preventing additional states and terrorists from acquiring, possessing, or using (politically and militarily) nuclear weapons and other WMD. If one could introduce a fresh and constructive discussion of nonproliferation policy in the United States, the tools preferred by political figures, policy experts, and military planners across the spectrum are complementary and can be combined into a comprehensive strategy to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Moreover, many of the elements are either in place, are being pursued, or have been supported by both political parties and could generate broad support if pursued in a bipartisan manner. While the issues of terrorism, homeland defense, and the stewardship of US security tend to be highly politicized, the effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons should be kept above the partisan or ideological divide.

Experts and political leaders of all stripes should seek to strengthen all the tools at our disposal to prevent states from acquiring nuclear weapons, to prevent states that have nuclear capabilities from using them against US interests, and to ensure that states with nuclear assets—friend or otherwise—protect them so that no subnational group can gain access (intentional or otherwise) to nuclear weapons. Success in these efforts will require a new national and international consensus both within and outside of the narrow traditional province of nonproliferation policy specialists—including areas such as nuclear weapons policy, broader political alliances, military spending and planning, intelligence, and law enforcement.

What Is to Be Done?

The world now stands at a nuclear precipice. There is broad and growing concern that if current trends continue, the United States will be forced to live in a more nuclear world, where multiple nuclear states and even nuclear-armed terrorist groups exist to the detriment of stability, security, and overarching US interests. The increased salience of nuclear weapons as instruments of power, prestige, and security, unless checked, threaten to undermine the basis for global stability and American power.

There is a growing sense that the United States should do all it can to avoid a more proliferated world. Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear production capabilities to new states and especially to terrorist groups is a common goal of all political stripes. Skepticism about whether such a world can be avoided also exists on all sides, but this skepticism should not be allowed to prevent the aggressive pursuit of policies that have the potential to reduce the nuclear threat—*provided these do not undermine the ability of the United States to deal*

with such a world should it come to pass. While the value and relative importance of some of the tactics used to pursue nonproliferation goals have been in dispute, the underlying goal is the same: prevent, and when prevention is not possible, deter and prepare to defeat as needed.

Just as it has in the past, the United States must be at the forefront of international efforts to reduce the supply and demand for nuclear weapons through a comprehensive effort. If the United States fails to provide such leadership, then the world is sure to be a more proliferated one. And even if the best US-led international efforts do falter or fail, then we must be in a position to protect our vital national interests in a more nuclear world.

A Turning Point?

A remarkable political and policy convergence occurred in January 2007 when a bipartisan group of senior statesmen issued a collective warning: "Unless urgent new actions are taken, the United States soon will be compelled to enter a new nuclear era that will be more precarious, psychologically disorienting, and economically even more costly than was Cold War deterrence."[1] The combined heft of a group that included George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and San Nunn could help open up the political space for a new president to seek a new consensus in American politics regarding how to address the growing nuclear dangers. Indeed, it was just such a collective realization in the 1960s that led the major powers to cooperate in reducing the demand for nuclear weapons and largely kept their spread in check. A new commitment to ambitious, international action is absolutely critical in order to avert the impending threat of widespread proliferation.

The United States' ability to build global consensus on a new nonproliferation agenda will no doubt be complicated by the war in Iraq and concern over the United States' more active use of the military in the post-9/11 period. For the United States to lead a new international effort on the nuclear front successfully, a concerted effort to restore its international image and influence will be essential. This will require action on multiple fronts beyond the nuclear agenda itself, including the more effective use of multilateral diplomacy and bolstering the United States' conventional forces—both to give it better military options to deal with proliferation and to reduce Washington's reliance on nuclear weapons as a nonproliferation tool.[2] Despite these challenges, a US policy of active diplomacy, support for international norms and institutions, and leading by example will attract international support and significantly boost the chances of success.

In implementing such an agenda, the highest levels of government must pursue all elements with equal vigor. The cooperative measures are just as important as the more aggressive counterproliferation steps: potential deep reductions in nuclear weapons, support for a broad set of negotiated agreements, engagement with states friendly and otherwise to achieve stated goals, and an effort to undercut the basic assumptions of why states acquire nuclear weapons and the lengths to which the United States should go to prevent their proliferation. In practical terms, this will involve exploring anew the means through which agreements are verified; helping to rebuild and reinforce the nonproliferation norms as codified in international legal agreements; supporting deep, verifiable, and irreversible nuclear reductions in the United States, Russia, and other nuclear arsenals; and enlisting broad support to enforce international norms and legal obligations. It will be necessary to reexamine traditionally sacrosanct issues such as the contours of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime, cooperation and engagement with non-NPT members, and a healing of the ideological breach that has characterized traditional nonproliferation debates. Neither more of the same nor more of the past has any chance of succeeding.

At the same time, all sides must recognize the possibility that trends and developments may

[1] January 7, 2007, *The Wall Street Journal*.
[2] The actions needed in a number of other policy areas are covered in other papers of the Stanley Foundation's Bridging the Foreign Policy Divide project.

have already gone too far to prevent the wider spread of nuclear weapons. Such an ambitious new agenda will take time, and the timeline of nuclear programs in Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere may have lent nuclear proliferation an irreversible momentum. Given the difficulty of nuclear rollback, the United States must also prepare itself to operate in a world of greater proliferation. This includes maintaining a large and robust conventional military force with improved mobility; global strike and intelligence capabilities; as well as a safe, reliable, and robust nuclear deterrent.

Moreover, in a world where many more countries have nuclear weapons, there is a greatly increased risk of both nuclear terrorism through theft and diversion of nuclear materials and of accidental or unintended nuclear use through miscalculation. The United States must ensure that it can protect itself, its friends, and its allies as well as its global interest in such a world; this includes pursing the most effective defense against potential attack, and preparing itself to rewrite longstanding legal and political norms to adjust to a more nuclearized world. At some point, such a reassessment will have to consider a revision of US nonproliferation laws and restrictions as well as deeper engagement and cooperation with friendly states that possess nuclear capabilities outside of the NPT.

In their statement, Shultz et al. list key points that should be included in a new initiative with broad international support. It is worth reviewing this agenda to take stock of the issues and what action will be needed.

- *Reduce the alert status and deployment of Cold War-era nuclear arsenals (de-alerting).*
  Whatever the threats facing the United States, they do not require the maintenance of thousands of nuclear weapons on alert, ready to launch in minutes. The United States should, in conjunction with other nuclear states, reduce the risk of a nuclear accident by removing a large proportion of its weapons from their delivery platforms to secure storage sites, thereby lengthening the nuclear fuse and reducing the number of targets for terrorist theft or attack. A major diplomatic push should be made to convince Russia, China, and other nuclear powers to do the same.

- *Make substantial reductions in the nuclear arsenals of all states.*
  The number of nuclear weapons in the world remains too high and undercuts the credibility of commitments by the nuclear powers to a nuclear-free world. Seeking continued, real, and verifiable reductions in global nuclear arsenals should be a central pillar of international efforts to prevent proliferation, and the United States should remove any doubts about its compliance with its international obligations, including the NPT.

- *Eliminate tactical nuclear weapons designed for forward deployment.*
  The United States has done this with many, but not all of its weapons. Russia has reversed previous moves to reduce its reliance on battlefield nuclear weapons. Efforts to secure and eliminate tactical nuclear weapons dating back to the early 1990s should be revived, accompanied by a new multilateral push to verifiably rid the world of these weapons, which are especially prone to theft and terrorist use.

- *Initiate a new process within the US Senate to boost confidence in and to achieve the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as push for ratification by other states.*
  The Senate rejection of the CTBT was based in part on concern over the reliability of the United States' nuclear deterrent under a test ban and also regarding the verifiability of the agreement itself. An effective, global legal prohibition against nuclear testing would help impede the progress of nations developing nuclear weapons. There should be strong bipartisan support for an agreement that could be effectively verified. A new, blank-slate assessment of verification and modeling technology will be essential for the reconsideration of an effective CTBT.

- *Ensure the highest level of security for all nuclear weapon-usable materials worldwide.* The vulnerability of nuclear materials around the world remains an acute security threat and must be the focus of renewed efforts by the US government, the G-8, and all governments that seek an end to proliferation and the threat of nuclear terrorism. The political, technical, and economic means to achieve this goal must be marshaled.

- *Achieve international control of the nuclear fuel cycle through multilateral efforts, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), nuclear suppliers group, and other efforts.*
  This complex issue has been the subject of serious proposals by the United States, Russia, and the IAEA. Bureaucratic efforts at the working level to develop new ideas are ongoing. However, the complexity and costs associated with such efforts cannot be solved by technical experts and will require sustained involvement by the top political levels. Control over the production of nuclear fuel is critical to ensure that the spread of technical know-how does not undermine the goals of nonproliferation.

  The authors differ over the future role of the NPT, but agree on the underlying need for international political consensus over nonproliferation norms. The NPT played an important role in stemming the proliferation of nuclear weapons through the Cold War period, although it is difficult to distinguish how much of that effectiveness was due to the influence of two superpowers that both sought to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, rather than the treaty itself. Nonetheless, the Cold War-era experience does point toward the importance of consensus among the established nuclear weapons states as a sine qua non for effective multilateral action against proliferation. Thus the United States should also seek to bring together leaders from key states—including, but not restricted to, the P-5 members of the UN Security Council—to forge a new nonproliferation consensus. The 1991 meeting of the heads of state of the UN Security Council that declared the proliferation of WMD was a "threat to international peace and security" is an important precedent, but new political efforts will require much greater high-level attention as well as a more detailed set of goals. It would be surprising if such a new consensus did not include a reaffirmation of the NPT itself but, in the end, it is the consensus and the effectiveness of its results that are most important and should be the primary focus.

- *End the production of fissile materials for weapons worldwide and end the use of weapons-grade uranium in civil applications.* The United States stopped production of all such materials in 1988, and has endorsed a negotiated ban in the Conference on Disarmament. However, the United States has opposed verification measures for such an agreement, believing it inherently unverifiable. The goal of US policy should be to engage in comprehensive negotiations, including consideration of verification, and ideological preconditions should not stand in the way of pursuing the benefits of an agreement. A fissile fuels agreement with adequate verification terms and sufficient scope receive US support and Senate consent.

- *Redouble efforts to resolve regional tensions that give rise to new nuclear powers.*
  Festering regional disputes and instability feed the proliferation threat in multiple ways. They can spark further demand for nuclear weapons, lay the seeds for regional nuclear wars, and threaten to drag the United States into conflicts and potential confrontation with other nuclear powers. Nightmare scenarios are easy to imagine. The United States thus must lead in resolving such disputes.

- *Continue to develop effective measures to impede or counter nuclear-related conduct that threatens the security of any state or peoples.*
  Any comprehensive nonproliferation effort must include the means to detect and respond to violators, particularly those who illegally traffic in nuclear technologies. Extending global detection and interdiction efforts and

bolstering the United States' own political and military capacity to counter the spread of nuclear weapons and technology is fully consistent with the goals outlined above. American policymakers should build both unilateral capacity and international cooperation as urgently and energetically as possible.

To be successful, the ambitious agenda outlined here will require a tremendous investment in political and other resources. If pursued diligently, this agenda offers hope that the current trends toward a more nuclear proliferated world can be stopped, and even reversed. Yet while these steps constitute a bold policy agenda, they must be considered merely a part of a wider ongoing effort. Traditional tools designed to reduce the availability and incentive to acquire nuclear weapons have been a critical part of past efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and will remain a valuable set of tools in the years to come. This intricate and interlocking set of activities includes:

- Export controls to block the transfer of sensitive technologies and thereby increase the barriers facing states in their efforts to develop weapons.
- Unilateral and multilateral economic and diplomatic sanctions against states seeking or trading in illicit technologies.
- Homeland security and national defense programs, including detection and interdiction.
- Development of missile defense technology to reduce the odds that a would-be attacker could succeed in striking the United States.

These efforts, taken together, form the backbone of current nonproliferation efforts and must be continued and continually reinvigorated.

Nuclear Weapons and US Policy

In pursuing such a multifaceted agenda, the United States must also engage in a long-needed public discussion about what role nuclear weapons do, should, and will play in US policy. Fundamental questions should be raised and debated, including why we have nuclear weapons; how many we need; what role can they play, if any, outside of the nuclear deterrent calculation; and whether and how the United States can work toward complete nuclear disarmament. The continued direction of US nuclear policy must not be driven by the mere inertia of the Cold War momentum. General James Cartwright, commander of Strategic Command, has endorsed the need for a new national dialogue on the role of nuclear weapons in US policy: "The challenging security and threat environment of the 21st century signals the need for an informed national level discussion to hear the voices of government leaders, military, academia, and the public if we are to effectively establish a long-term nuclear investment plan."[3]

There are serious decisions to be made in this process. Key among them will include the United States' strategy for maintaining its current nuclear arsenal, possible efforts to develop new weapons, how to ensure reliable and robust delivery capabilities as long as the United States retains a nuclear arsenal, and how to balance US nonproliferation and nuclear deterrent requirements.

If the spread of nuclear weapons is indeed the principal threat of our time, then every means at the government's disposal must be focused and integrated to prevent these threats from harming US security. Therefore, US nuclear weapon and conventional military capabilities must be configured and geared toward supporting overarching US efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. For some, this argues for the development of new, smaller, battlefield nuclear weapons to put adversaries' underground targets at risk, while others invoke nonproliferation objectives to advocate a ban on nuclear testing, a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons, and a declaration that US nuclear weapons will only be used for nuclear deterrence.

For a new international nonproliferation consensus to have any chance of success, the United States must throw its full political

[3] April 4, 2005, testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

weight behind such an effort. This will require a delicate balance between political and military aims. For instance, the first priority in any effort to develop a reliable replacement warhead must be to develop technologies to ensure reliability while avoiding the need to test nuclear weapons. The current efforts within the nuclear establishment have been prudent and sound—aiming to design a reliable replacement warhead without testing that could be put into service if weapons in the existing US nuclear stockpile were to prove defective. Ultimately, if pursued within the context of a broader, more robust nonproliferation agenda, this capability would also build the basis for reconsideration of the CTBT.

Also, the United States, together with the other nuclear powers, should provide assurances that nonnuclear states will not be the subject of nuclear threats. The proposed development of new nuclear weapons by the United States for possible use in essentially a conventional capacity—to reach deep underground targets—is based on a premise that does not seem credible. The United States could not develop and deploy, much less use, such weapons without shredding any global consensus that remains regarding the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons. Any US use of a nuclear weapon of any type against a nonnuclear state would cross a line that simply would not be understood or accepted by the rest of the world. There is no meaningful distinction between a large and a small nuclear weapon when used against a nonnuclear state.

Brave New World

For more than 50 years, the United States relied upon a robust nuclear arsenal as a deterrent to any party that may attack our nation with a nuclear weapon. As successful as that strategy has been, the world in which it worked is largely gone. The threat of state-to-state nuclear conflict involving the United States now rates among the least likely of contingencies we may face. As the challenge of nuclear proliferation has evolved, so must our strategy.

None of the many types of action suggested in this paper to meet the challenge of nuclear proliferation are new. To some degree, many of them are either current policy or have been in recent administrations. The real evolution needed in the United States' strategy is in the architecture of the solutions. The policy must include both multilateral diplomacy and robust unilateral action. It must balance cooperative initiatives on arms control and the maintenance of a safe and effective US nuclear arsenal. It must involve diplomacy and the willingness to use force. In short, it will contain combinations that appear inherently contradictory. It must be a total effort.

This task will require a genuine commitment at the highest levels of government to build a united international front. Allies must be recruited, including among the new nuclear powers such as India and even Pakistan. With the broadest possible international support, the United States and its partners must launch a layered approach to meet the challenge of nuclear proliferation.

The full set of international regimes and norms, of treaties and laws should be invigorated and further refined to close off any trade in nuclear weapons technologies with states that do not abide by the NPT—whether they are a party or not. A comprehensive, global effort must be launched to catalog, secure and, where possible, recover and destroy nuclear materials. The existing nuclear powers should cooperate in reducing their own nuclear arsenals in concert—down to the minimum level necessary for a deterrent against each other. The remaining warheads should then be stored in the most secure manner possible. Every effort must be made to disrupt and interdict the trade of nuclear materials, especially fissile material. Stopping nations and individuals who participate in this illicit trade should be a priority for intelligence services and the military.

Underneath the ambitious strategy laid out by Schulz et al., the United States will need to maintain safe, reliable, and robust nuclear forces—in the most strategically stabilizing manner possible—to remain capable of deterring the use of nuclear weapons by other states against the United States and its friends and interests abroad.

Finally, in order to lessen the need for nuclear weapons as well as respond more effectively against any incipient nuclear threat, the United States must maintain large and well-equipped conventional military forces to defeat any potential adversary. The United States must also, as aggressively as possible, locate and defeat terror plots, disrupt terrorist networks, deny substate groups' safe havens, and preempt such groups anywhere in the world. Beyond the detailed policy agenda outlined here, protecting the United States from all serious threats will remain the primary constitutional duty for any president.

In the end, we may not succeed. At the current pace of proliferation, it seems likely that new nuclear powers will yet emerge in this decade. With the large number of nuclear weapons in various arsenals around the world—under what may be described as, at best, suspect security—the theft of a device at some point is a distinct possibility. With the growth of terrorist organizations of global reach, the delivery of a nuclear weapon to America's shores is by no means far-fetched. The explosion of such a device on US territory would then be only a matter of time. If we are to succeed in meeting the challenge of proliferation, we must act—now—as if our lives depend upon it. Someday, they actually might.

The Case of Iran

Iran is the single most pressing case confronting US nuclear nonproliferation strategy today. Unlike North Korea, Iran does not currently possess a workable nuclear device and may be several years away from producing one. Thus it is still possible to envision an outcome where Iran remains a nonnuclear power, either as a result of diplomacy or due to a combination of cooperative and coercive means.

Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities is of serious concern in and of itself, but especially because of its ties to and support of extremist terrorist organizations. There is a very plausible threat that Iran might transfer nuclear capabilities to nonstate actors who are far more difficult to deter or contain than Iran itself. Iran's pursuit of a weapon will also have a direct impact on regional neighbors, forcing them to consider developing their own nuclear weapons as a countermeasure or to take preemptive military action to prevent Iran from going nuclear. There is yet another danger that Iran's open hostility toward the United States and Israel could lead them to launch an unprovoked nuclear attack.

Even if the United States were to develop new robust nonproliferation measures, there is not sufficient time for such instruments to make a major contribution toward ending Iran's nuclear ambitions. Thus this challenge must be addressed with the tools already at the disposal of policymakers. The diplomatic partnership of the United States with key European powers is a critical initiative, and the maximum use of multilateral institutions such as the IAEA and the UN Security Council will remain important instruments in seeking to convince Iran to change its nuclear direction. Iran has consistently deflected such efforts and it is conceivable that nations with competing interests can block action—particularly in the UN Security Council. Moreover, Iran's leadership is clearly working to exploit the frustration or suspicion in the Middle East and elsewhere in the developing world toward US policy of the past decade. The United States must therefore pursue a full-court diplomatic press using all available and conceivable tools to reinforce its nonproliferation goals in Iran.

The first level of action is political and economic pressure, including the most restrictive sanctions possible if Iran refuses to halt its nuclear enrichment program in particular, and its pursuit of a nuclear weapon more generally. The position of Iran's leadership is not as strong economically or politically as it might appear at first glance. The internal political and economic impact of sanctions may have a greater impact than many expect. This pressure can then be used to create a greater incentive for Iran's leaders to compromise on key issues. To this end, direct, bilateral diplomacy between the United

States and Iran should be pursued if there is any reasonable prospect of halting Iran's nuclear weapons program. Notwithstanding the other broader and serious concerns regarding the Iranian regime, preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran must remain a top policy goal. Other objectives—including regime change—should be secondary as long as a chance remains to end Tehran's nuclear ambitions through peaceful means. This does not mean that the United States should discontinue its efforts to detect and deter Iranian support for terrorism and to push Iran to permit its people to enjoy the full liberties of a free society—including the right to choose their leaders. It means only that ending Iran's nuclear weapons program should be the highest priority.

Given the existing US military commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Iran and other countries in the Middle East believe the United States is either incapable of or unlikely to consider military actions against Iran. Most regional players oppose the use of military force to stop Iran's nuclear program. Yet stopping the development of an Iranian nuclear weapon remains a US national security imperative of such enormity that the use of military force must remain a real option for American decision makers. The United States should continue planning for such an operation and preparing for the potential consequences of such an action—especially the likely increase in terrorist attacks worldwide and the potential disruption of energy supply lines from the region. Such contingency preparation, pursued within reason, would increase the sense of vulnerability in Iran and could make it more willing to seek a compromise on the nuclear issue.

While the United States does not currently have sufficient military resources to invade and occupy the nation of Iran, it does have the ability to use force to disrupt those nuclear capabilities that it can identify. While even this, in the end, may not prevent Iran from going nuclear, it must remain a possible option if for no other reason than to reassure US allies in the region that Washington is committed to their defense and protection as well as to maintaining pressure on Iranian decision making on nuclear and other issues.

The crisis over Iran's nuclear ambitions is likely to continue for many more months. Developing and implementing a comprehensive new nonproliferation agenda will take much longer. But commencing the work toward such an agenda could have immediate benefits for the effort to slow or end Iran's nuclear efforts. Demonstrating in an international context that the United States and the world's major powers understand and recognize the risk of unchecked nuclear proliferation and the responsibility to include themselves within a new broader system of controls may prove critical in the intensifying diplomacy surrounding Iran's nuclear program. Coming on the heels of renewed efforts to develop diplomatic solutions to the North Korean nuclear crisis, any progress on the Iran front—even a suspension of Iran's enrichment program and the start of a real dialogue between Iran and the outside world on security issues—could go a long way in laying the foundation and building global political momentum for the new nonproliferation agenda laid out in this paper.

The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices, original ideas, and lasting solutions to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation, located in Muscatine, Iowa, that focuses on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants. Online at *www.stanleyfoundation.org*.

Production: Amy Bakke and Margo Schneider
209 Iowa Avenue · Muscatine, IA 52761 USA
563-264-1500 · 563-264-0864 fax · info@stanleyfoundation.org

Printed on recycled paper
4/07 1.8K