

Proliferance

Based on excerpt from David Cortright and Raimo Väyrynen, *Towards Nuclear Zero*
(Routledge, 2010), pp. 42-47.

The nuclear weapons states have continued to deploy thousands of weapons, many of them still on hair trigger alert. They are modernizing and upgrading their weapons systems and developing new security missions. In the 1990s the United States developed a counterproliferation doctrine envisioning the possible use of nuclear weapons against governments and non-state actors seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction.¹ According to this doctrine, nuclear weapons serve not merely to deter and retaliate against possible nuclear attack, but to strike first if necessary against threats posed by the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Similar doctrinal shifts have occurred in Russia, the United Kingdom and France. In the 1990s Russia abandoned the Soviet-era policy of no first use and declared that nuclear weapons could be used in the event of an overwhelming conventional attack against its armed forces. In 2006 French President Jacques Chirac included the safeguarding of strategic supplies as a vital national interest for which nuclear deterrence could serve a role.²

The new missions are major factors in sustaining political and institutional support for nuclear weapons. They contradict the principle of security guarantees, which are pledges not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states. They are obstacles to achieving an unequivocal commitment from political and security officials for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear weapons are considered tools of counterproliferation, but evidence suggests that nuclear weapons themselves cause proliferation. Their very existence is an inducement to acquisition, the possession of nuclear weapons by one state impelling another to seek the same capability. Jonathan Schell has identified what he terms the 'proliferance' effect of nuclear weapons. When a country acquires or seeks nuclear weapons it prompts other states to seek countervailing capability. 'Whereas deterrence stops states in possession of nuclear arsenals from using them, proliferation inspires nations that lack them to get them'.³ US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a similar point in remarks at the US Institute of Peace in Washington in October 2009: 'The nuclear status quo is neither desirable nor sustainable. It gives other countries the motivation or the excuse to pursue their own nuclear options'.⁴

The possession of nuclear weapons by the major powers confers legitimacy on these weapons as the ultimate instruments of national power and prestige. They are the coin of the realm in international politics. Their status as symbols of global influence is reinforced by the fact that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are the world's only recognized nuclear weapons states. It is not an accident that India demands simultaneously both a permanent seat in the Council and its recognition as a nuclear weapons power as a condition for entering the NPT.

This continued linkage between nuclear weapons possession and global power encourages proliferation, according to the report of the independent commission to the IAEA. 'If nuclear weapons continue to be seen as offering security and prestige, and states that maintain them continue to send the message that nuclear weapons are essential to security, more states may seek such weapons'. When the world's most powerful states indicate that they consider nuclear weapons essential for their security, the report argues, 'they strengthen the hand of nuclear advocates everywhere'.⁵

In almost every case where states have developed nuclear weapons, they have done so in response to nuclear weapons development by a rival or neighboring state and to assert international influence. This pattern has been at work throughout the atomic age. The United States launched the Manhattan Project to guard against the possibility that Nazi Germany might develop the bomb.

The Soviet Union quickly learned of the US program and infiltrated spies to purloin nuclear know-how. After the bombing of Hiroshima Stalin ordered his bomb builders to accelerate the incipient Soviet program.⁶ The nuclear programs of the United States and the Soviet Union prompted China's decision to develop the bomb. Britain and France developed their nuclear programs not only as a deterrent against the Soviet threat but as a means of maintaining their great power status.

Prime Minister Harold MacMillan said in 1957 that Britain's independent nuclear capability would solidify its special relationship with the United States and 'our influence in world affairs'. Prime Minister Michel Debré similarly considered nuclear weapons necessary to assert France's 'influence in international life'.⁷ India decided to 'exercise the nuclear option' to counter Chinese power and gain global influence, which prompted Pakistan to follow suit. North Korea and Iran have developed their nuclear capabilities in part to deter US military threats.

As long as states continue to possess nuclear weapons, they will create insecurities in other states that may prompt them to build up their military capacities, including in some cases to develop nuclear weapons.

¹ United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Theater Nuclear Operations*, Joint Pub 3-12.1, 9 February 1996, pps. III-6 and III-7, http://www.nukestrat.com/us/jcs/JCS_JP3-12-1_96.pdf

² Jacques Chirac, Speech to French Strategic Forces, Landivisiau, France, 19 January 2006, <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Speech-by-M-Jacques-Chirac,6771.html>

³ Jonathan Schell, 'The Folly of Arms Control', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 79, no. 5, September/October 2000, p. 32.

⁴ Remarks at the United States Institute of Peace, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, Renaissance Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC, 21 October 2009.

⁵ 'Reinforcing the Global Nuclear Order for Peace and Prosperity: The Role of the IAEA to 2020 and Beyond', report prepared by an independent commission at the request of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), May 2008, <http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/News/PDF/2020report0508.pdf> 'Reinforcing the Global Nuclear Order for Peace and Prosperity'.

⁶ David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 129, 132–33.

⁷ Quotes from Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Now* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), pp. 58–59.