

NPT 2010: Strengthening the Regime

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The Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) is about to become the subject of heated debate at a four-week conference opening this May in New York. The treaty has 189 member-states. Its term is indefinite. It is often called a cornerstone of international security. But that is how things stand today. What role will the NPT play in the global security architecture in the decades to come?

The treaty was opened for signature on July 1, 1968. The spring of barricades in Paris had just ended, but the Prague Spring was still in full swing. In less than two months, the city would see the first Soviet tanks rolling in.

The NPT survived the chill in Europe, just as it did the Cold War, the collapse of the world order ruled by two superpowers, and the beginning of a new century, with its new set of challenges and threats. Its eleven articles never shook the world, but they always remained a solid foundation of the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. And when the world was being shaken by various crises, the NPT had always remained quake-proof. Some even find it a bit suspicious that the treaty has survived for so long.

The success of the NPT is unquestionable. Its main achievement is that the expansion of the nuclear club has been minimized. Before the NPT, experts routinely predicted a world with several dozen nuclear powers. Nations from Sweden to Switzerland and from Australia to Canada were busily developing their own military nuclear programs. Egypt, Turkey, South Korea, Taiwan, Argentina and Brazil were looking to follow suit. There were also suspicions about the nature of West Germany's nuclear program. But during the entire period after the treaty was signed, there has been only a handful of nuclear cheats (Romania, Iraq and Libya, plus, in all likelihood, Iran and Syria).

As of today, very few nations stubbornly remain outside the regime. Among them are Israel, India and Pakistan, who refused to sign the NPT and acquired their own nuclear weapons. North Korea is the only nation to have withdrawn from the treaty and taken its nuclear program all the way to nuclear tests. Iran has never left the treaty and technically remains within its fold - but it has pursued a military nuclear program under the cover of NPT membership from the mid-1980s until 2003 (and, it cannot be ruled out, continues to do so even now).

Essentially, for almost two decades now all the debate about nuclear nonproliferation has been confined to this worrying but still very short list of nations. Newspaper articles on nuclear proliferation from twenty years ago are certain to bring on a certain feeling of déjà vu. For all the predictions of a nuclear "domino effect", there has been no new candidates for nuclear status. To the contrary, two recognized nuclear weapon-states, France and China, have joined the NPT over that twenty-year period. Another recent signatory is South Africa, which has voluntarily dismantled its nuclear arsenal. Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, which had hosted Soviet strategic

nuclear weapons on their territory, have all joined the treaty as non-nuclear-weapon states; in the case of Ukraine, that was achieved through a complex and sometimes painful compromise.

Whichever way one tallies the result of this game, the score gives the victory to the NPT. Much to the dismay of those who dramatically predict a "crisis" of the treaty or even its "imminent demise", we see no fundamental problems on the horizon that could actually topple the NPT.

But neither is the sky completely cloudless. The situation here can be compared to that of a generally healthy patient who is, from time to time, tormented by toothache. Sometimes this ache is barely perceptible. But if left ignored and untreated, if the patient decides to stick his head in the sand, his life will soon turn into a living hell. In each individual case, the treatment strategy will be different: from cleaning the root canal or fixing a filling to removing a rotten tooth altogether. In that latter case, there will be some blood.

We see five main problem areas that cause the pain: disarmament, universal membership, withdrawal from the Treaty, peaceful use and nuclear security. For each of these aches, we have a "doctor's recommendation" to offer. Some of them are shared by most of my nonproliferation colleagues, and it is now up to the NPT members to either accept or ignore them. Others might well raise the hackles in some sections of the expert community.

The "nuclear zero" idea is now all the rage in the nonproliferation circles. Sundry conferences and summits have already plotted a variety of roadmaps to a world free of nuclear weapons. As a matter of fact, the "nuclear zero" target is not just a noble wish but an actual commitment undertaken by all 189 members of the NPT, nuclear and non-nuclear alike. This commitment is spelt out in Article VI, which forms one of the three "pillars" of the treaty, along with nuclear nonproliferation and the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy. It is also clearly expressed in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, passed by a unanimous vote and reaffirming "an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States (NWSs) to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament..."

The danger is that if one of the three NPT pillars crumbles under the weight of empty declarations that are not backed up by concrete steps, the entire complex and mutually dependent edifice of the nonproliferation regime will begin to subside.

And the past decade has clearly been a time wasted for the cause of nuclear disarmament.

On April 1, 2009, during their first meeting in London, Presidents Medvedev and Obama declared that Russia and the United States would lead the world towards a nuclear-free future. It now turns out that the statement wasn't a Fools' Day joke. Only five days after the meeting with Dmitry Medvedev, President Barack Obama expounded on his nuclear-weapon-free ideas during a speech in Prague. Both presidents then agreed to launch bilateral talks on further reductions and limitations on strategic offensive weapons.

Less than a year on, Obama and Medvedev have agreed that they are happy with the draft of the new treaty, and that it is ready for signing.

The talks themselves were painful, sometimes even excruciating – a clear demonstration that the *reset* of bilateral strategic relations is only progressing in fits and starts. It was the deeply ingrained lack of trust rather than any actual reductions figures that posed the biggest problem. Obama's successful visit to Moscow last July, and the US decision last September to abandon plans to station ABM elements in the Czech Republic and Poland helped to clear the path towards a new deal. But

even those moves could not completely *reformat* bilateral dialogue and overcome the deep mutual suspicions and mistrust that had accumulated over the years and decades. Another problem is that over the two decades since the signing of the START-1 treaty, the skills of the negotiators on both sides had become somewhat rusty.

But luckily, the two negotiating teams were led by top professionals in the field, Anatoly Antonov and Rose Gottemoeller.

There were two largest practical hurdles on the way towards reaching an agreement. The first was the verification mechanisms - those have become much less cumbersome and expensive compared to the provisions of the START-1 treaty, which has now fulfilled its purpose and peacefully expired. The second was the linkage between strategic offensive and defensive weapons. Russia insisted that the two should be linked, arguing – quite reasonably, in my view – that even the United States itself has not yet fully defined the true nature and purpose of the missile defense system it is developing (now in a new format).

Obamas come and go, but Russia will always have to face the United States as the biggest military power in the world. Predictability of US policy on missile defense is a vital necessity for Russia.

The new treaty addresses both of these concerns, though only very modestly and thus insufficiently in the case of missile defense.

This agreement really is a product of a compromise. The alternative was to walk away from a deal in a huff, which wasn't part of the plan for either the Kremlin or the White House.

The treaty signed on April 8 has marked the beginning of a *new Prague Disarmament Spring*. The new ceiling of 1,550 deployed warheads represents a reduction of about a third compared to the previous Russian-US agreement, the SORT treaty (which actually looked more like a protocol of intentions than a proper treaty). The new limit on deployed missiles and bombers – 700 – is less than half of the previous figure. There is also a new ceiling for the combined number of deployed and non-deployed missiles (800 for each side).

This approach was quite predictable – in essence, all the bargaining about the fine details never had any real chance of derailing the deal. Neither is the new treaty too radical - the cuts could have been much deeper, and the ceiling for the number of deployed warheads could have been lowered all the way to 1,000 without any damage done to security. But the terms actually agreed can best be described as quite measured and acceptable to both sides (as well as their respective legislatures).

The two countries sent an important signal to the rest of the world: Russia and the United States really are making progress towards nuclear disarmament, not just paying lip service to it. The deal also came just in time for the NPT Review Conference which, as far as the US and Russia are concerned, simply cannot be allowed to fail. That is why the negotiators were in quite a bit of a hurry. And the haste was well worth it – both sides can now arrive at the NPT conference with the heads held high, with no need to prevaricate about their nuclear intentions.

So from the experts' point of view, Prague-2010 was not an unexpected breakthrough but a long-awaited, well-polished and rather modest compromise. The most interesting bit is yet to come.

It is not enough to simply sign the treaty – it will then have to enter into force, says Orlov. Russia's previous experience with the Americans in that respect is not very reassuring. Of course, the best approach would be a simultaneous ratification in both countries. The fact that President Obama has managed to ram the healthcare reform through the Senate is a proper reason for cautious optimism about his lobbying talents. After all, the new START treaty should become his first tangible foreign

policy trophy. But there is a long and sad history of the US senators insisting on linking the ratification of various agreements with Russia to other, sometimes completely unrelated things (one example from just two years ago is the deal on cooperation in nuclear energy and the war in the South Caucasus). So with the nuclear treaty as well we should better be prepared for more surprises.

It would be premature to talk about any further steps towards nuclear disarmament before this agreement enters into force. But politicians in both Moscow and Washington are already plotting the road map for their next steps.

Apart from the two largest nuclear powers - which between them hold more than 95 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons and which are now engaged in bilateral dialogue – there are other nuclear nations, whose opinions about the nuclear zero goal are far from uniform.

The UK has shown seriousness and commitment in its preparations for a world without nuclear weapons. This is of course a question of decades rather than years for London. But of all the other nuclear powers, Britain has shown the greatest inclination to become the second nation on the planet after South Africa – and the first recognized NWS - voluntarily to dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

France, meanwhile, is clearly uncomfortable with the US and Russian disarmament proclamations. "It's nothing but a joke – les us laugh politely and come back to the real world" - that's how many of the French top brass react to the nuclear zero ideas. Neither are Carla Bruni's musings about being attracted to a man who controls the nuclear button completely vacuous. In fact, they accurately reflect the French public attitude to nuclear weapons – they are seen as a status symbol rather than an actual instrument of war. "Yes, I love the bomb", confessed one prominent French pundit. Paris will of course demonstrate steps towards reducing its nuclear arsenal; it will approach the nuclear zero, but not too closely – not in the foreseeable future, anyway.

And then there is China, which officially maintains a rather modest stash of nuclear warheads, but which can at least double their number at a moment's notice, if Chinese expert Dingli Shen and some other pundits are to be believed.

So what could be done multilaterally in the next five years to ensure progress by all the NWSs towards nuclear zero?

First, all these powers could commit themselves (through joint statements or simultaneous unilateral moves) to desist from enlarging their existing arsenals. That is not a problem for some (such as Russia, US or UK), but could be a challenge for others (especially China).

Second, the NWSs could undertake (also through joint statements or simultaneous unilateral steps) not to station their nuclear weapons outside their national territories. The first step in that direction has already been made: the new SORT treaty includes a provision to that effect that covers American and Russian strategic weapons. It should now be expanded to all types of nuclear weapons and all nuclear powers.

Third, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) should be allowed to enter into force as soon as possible. That cannot happen until the treaty is signed by North Korea, India and Pakistan, and ratified by China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel and the US. We fully share the sentiment expressed by Russian diplomat Oleg Rozhkov, who had this to say at an international conference held by PIR Center in February 2010: "The situation with the ratification of the CTBT is nothing short of scandalous – it has now been 14 years since the treaty was signed. All the conditions for ratification are in place, especially given the positive signals from the United States

about its change of stance on that treaty". Meanwhile, all nations should observe a moratorium on nuclear tests pending the entry of the CTBT into force.

Fourth, all NWSs could undertake (jointly or through simultaneous steps) not to develop new types of nuclear weapons.

Fifth, the existing impasse at the negotiations on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), held in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, should finally be resolved. The treaty would be a substantial practical step towards disarmament.

Sixth, all the NWSs should join the Russian-Chinese initiative to begin talks on a new treaty that would ban the deployment of weapons in space.

And seventh, the Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between the United States and Russia should become multilateral, to include all the official and unofficial nuclear powers.

It therefore becomes obvious that nuclear disarmament does not depend on the NWSs alone. All the NPT members (as well as nations outside the treaty, like India) should make their contribution towards nuclear disarmament if they want the entire nuclear proliferation regime to remain effective.

A separate issue is the role of nuclear weapons in the military strategy of the NWSs. This has recently become a subject of much debate, especially following the adoption of Russia's new military doctrine last February. In actual fact, the new document did not introduce any substantive changes to Russia's nuclear posture – but that is beside the point. For some nuclear powers, such as Russia or China, reducing their reliance on nuclear arsenals would hardly be feasible. Neither has kept up with the latest developments in new conventional weaponry, especially high-precision weapons, which play a strategic role.

But from a longer-term perspective - say, looking at the next 20 years rather than five – there needs to be a recognition that in the new century, the role of nuclear weapons as a military instrument, political tool and status symbol will decline. For now, it is hard to imagine that the nuclear zero goal will be achieved this century. But preparations for a near-zero situation should be well under way.

Apart from the "legitimate" Nuclear Five, there are four other members of the nuclear club who are not bound by the NPT. These are Israel, India and Pakistan – each, according to SIPRI, holds 60 to 80 deployed warheads - plus North Korea, which is not quite there yet and should probably count only as half a member of the nuclear club. Then there is Iran, which possesses no nuclear weapons - but neither is there any confidence that the country does not have a clandestine military nuclear program aiming to build such weapons. PIR Center's assessment is predicated on the notion that as of this moment, Tehran has not made a political decision to build nuclear weapons.

Nation	NPT State Party	CTBT status	Number of nuclear tests	IAEA membership	Transfer of nuclear technology to other countries	Physical security of military nuclear infrastructure facilities
Israel	No	Signed, not ratified	n/a*	Yes	n/a	n/a

India	No	Not signed	9	Yes	No	Satisfactory
Pakistan	No	Not signed	2***	Yes	Yes	Unsatisfactory
North Korea	Since 1985**	Not signed	2	No	n/a	n/a

* Probably did not conduct any nuclear tests, though Israel's complicity in the mysterious 1979 "flash" in the South Atlantic cannot be ruled out

** North Korea initiated its withdrawal from the NPT in 1993 and announced the resumption of NPT withdrawal procedure on January 10, 2003

*** Pakistan has conducted two underground nuclear tests, detonating a total of six nuclear devices

Source: "NPT-2010: strengthening the regime". Moscow, PIRCenter, 2010.

Resolutions by NPT member-states call for universal membership of the treaty. But universal membership should not be equated with universal approach to each member-state.

India developed nuclear weapons as a response to humiliating defeat in the war with China, which at that time already possessed nuclear weapons and, furthermore, had already been recognized as a nuclear power under the NPT. India just barely missed the chance to jump onboard the leaving NPT train as an official nuclear power - its first nuclear test came only in 1974. But hasn't India demonstrated by its whole conduct over the past decades that it is a responsible nuclear power? Was it India who spread military nuclear technology and materials to third countries? And would it be right to talk about the need for India to go nuclear-weapon-free without linking that process to China?

With all those considerations in mind, many pragmatic members of the international community, including the United States and Russia, made an unprecedented step in 2008 and lifted all the restrictions on nuclear trade with India imposed by the Nuclear Supplies Group on the nations that remain outside the NPT. The decision was controversial, but we are confident that it was the right decision. International community should continue engaging India in the nuclear nonproliferation process as if it were the sixth member of the official nuclear club under the NPT, without its legal participation in the treaty itself.

For its part, India should take such steps by the international community not as an absolution of all its sins, but as an element of dialogue. That dialogue requires reciprocal steps by India on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

We believe that the steps on nuclear disarmament we have listed above in connection with the P5 could and should apply to India as well. If the P5 nations undertake commitments not to increase or improve their nuclear arsenals, India should make a similar unilateral commitment in parallel with the official NWSs. Neither should India have to be coaxed and cajoled into signing the CTBT, or justify its aloofness by the absence of US and Chinese ratifications. To the contrary, India should set an example of nuclear rectitude by signing and ratifying the CTBT without delay. And pending the entry of the treaty into force, New Delhi should observe a moratorium on nuclear tests. If nations such as Russia, Britain and France find such a moratorium compatible with their dignity, why should it not be so for India? Last but not least, the country should strictly comply with its commitment to put all peaceful nuclear activity within the system of IAEA safeguards.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is altogether a different matter, regardless of the fact that its nuclear program was a game of catch-up with India. "We'll eat grass if we have to, but we'll get the bomb", was the thinking in Islamabad. Of all the nuclear-weapons powers, Pakistan is the only one where the political regime is teetering on the brink of collapse. And although Pakistani military have repeatedly tried to reassure the nonproliferation experts that there is no reason to worry about the physical security and accounting of the country's nuclear weapons and materials, we are not prepared to take these guarantees at face value. On top of all the other problems, Pakistan and its immediate vicinity is home to some of the most aggressive non-state actors trying to acquire nuclear weapons or their components.

It is high time for Pakistan to stop blocking the beginning of talks on the FMCT at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (though one may suspect Chinese influence behind Pakistan's obstinacy). Just like all the other nations still outside the CTBT, Pakistan should join without delay, and observe a moratorium on nuclear tests pending the treaty's entry into force. Pakistan should also grant IAEA inspectors immediate and full access to all the evidence in the case of the A.Q. Khan ring, which sold nuclear secrets abroad. And as the next step, the Pakistani political and military leadership should think very seriously on this: does the country derive any real benefits from possessing nuclear weapons? Do these weapons make the nation any safer? Or could they end up becoming the last nail in the coffin of Pakistani statehood?

North Korea, just like Pakistan before it, is also willing to "eat grass" if that is what it takes to acquire nuclear weapons. It is not clear how large the North Korean arsenal is. Meager, in all likelihood - but, technical reservations aside, the country does have two nuclear tests under its belt. Its competent missile program is another cause for serious concern. For its part, the leadership in Pyongyang is dismayed by the US gyrations between either including North Korea in the "axis of evil" (then crushing the first member of that axis and hanging its ruler), or ignoring the country completely. Pyongyang craves attention, security assurances and some room for bargaining. That bargaining will probably serve as the basis for the resumption of the six-party talks (North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia, Japan and the United States). The talks will be long and arduous, but there is a chance to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Over time, the implementation of any agreements reached at the six-party talks will enable the North to resume its full membership of the NPT as a non-nuclear state. Pyongyang could also support the moratorium on nuclear tests and eventually join the CTBT. Further steps include resurrecting, jointly with Seoul, the old idea of making the Korean peninsula a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ).

Israel deserves special attention. The situation in the Middle East and the underlying problem – Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and its nonparticipation in the NPT – could become a ticking time bomb for the entire treaty already at the coming RevCon

In our opinion, neither the nuclear disarmament issues, nor the situation with Iran or any other outstanding problems can potentially do so much damage to the reputation and relevance of the NPT as the lack of progress in implementing the Middle East resolution passed at the 1995 review conference. The resolution "calls upon all States of the Middle East that have not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to place their nuclear facilities under full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards", as well as "to extend their cooperation and to exert their utmost efforts with a view to ensuring the early establishment by regional parties of a Middle East zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems".

Fifteen years on, progress made in this area has been precisely zero. Israel is now the only nation in the region not party to the NPT. The United States, Israel's main sponsor, is blatantly ignoring the 1995 resolution's provisions. A year ago, the head of the US delegation at the Preparatory

Committee, Rose Gottemoeller, made a surprising – and most welcome - statement specifically mentioning Israel and demanding that the country sign the NPT; no less surprisingly, she made no mention of Iran. What was it? A U-turn on previous US policy? Or part of Washington's tactical efforts to woo Iran (which soon fizzled out)? Whatever it was, things did not go much beyond good intentions. Israel not only continues to ignore all calls to open up its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspectors and begin negotiations on creating a NWFZ in the Middle East – it even talks openly about how best to destroy the nuclear facilities in Iran (a country that does not actually have any nuclear weapons).

The reality of the current situation in the region is such that any optimism about the very possibility of the Israeli nuclear problem being resolved would sound naive. Nevertheless, if and when the situation begins to change for the better, and if and when more responsible and clear-sighted politicians come to power in Israel, there will be no need to invent the wheel. Recipes for making progress towards a nuclear-free Middle East already exist. Some of them date back to the early 1990s, when the situation there was much different and there was hope for further improvement.

First and foremost, Israel must agree to put its nuclear infrastructure in Dimona under the IAEA safeguards system. The creation of a nuclear-free zone would also require an unambiguous commitment by all sides not to attack each other's nuclear facilities. The 1993 Joint Declaration between Israel and Jordan on normalizing bilateral relations could be used as a starting point for a treaty on a NWFZ, or on a zone free from all WMD. It would be crucially important to develop a verification and monitoring system – any confidence has long been lost in this region. Here the experience of regional organizations such as Euratom or the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) could come in handy.

But although Israel is the key – and, for now, the main obstacle - to resolving the nuclear problem in the Middle East, other nations in the region should not disguise their own ambitions by anti-Israeli rhetoric.

We are talking primarily about Iran, which should end its policy of prevarications and give the IAEA full information about its applied military nuclear program – the fact that there has been such a program is in no doubt. Only an unprecedented level of cooperation with the IAEA can help Iran avoid isolation.

Another case in point is Egypt, which, just like Iran, has not yet ratified the CTBT. Egypt, Israel and Iran should all ratify the treaty as soon as possible.

Last but not least, all the nations in the region should take heed of the Russian initiative and desist from creating and developing the more sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle (NFC).

"Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other Parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance." That is it, then. You can cheat all you like, and when you feel that you're about to be caught red-handed, just invent some "extraordinary event" - and you're free of any obligations under the treaty...

The wording of Paragraph 1 Article X leaves quite a lot of wiggle room. That weakness has already been exploited by North Korea. So far, that has been the only precedent - but what if others decide to follow suit? Take, for example, Ali Larijani, a prominent Iranian politician, who in the

same breath first sings the praises of the NPT, then makes an important qualification: "...if we become the target of unfair policies, if there are threats, the situation could change".

Last year's UN Security Council Resolution 1887 outlines a solution to this problem: "a State remains responsible under international law for violations of the NPT committed prior to its withdrawal".

Russia too has offered some useful initiatives in this area. It has suggested that if a nation wishes to withdraw from the NPT, the IAEA should conduct an inspection of the nation's adherence to its commitments under the safeguards agreement. Intentional activity and preparations for a withdrawal from the NPT with the aim of developing a military nuclear program should be regarded as a violation of the treaty. Once the nation has withdrawn, all its nuclear materials, equipment, technology and facilities created for peaceful purposes should remain within the IAEA safeguards system. Unless the nuclear technology imported into the nation is returned to the supplier upon withdrawal from the treaty, it should remain within the IAEA safeguards system indefinitely.

The nuclear nonproliferation commission chaired by Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kavaguchi proposes an even tougher approach: "The UN Security Council should severely discourage withdrawal from the NPT by making it clear that this will be regarded as a prima facie threat to international peace and security, with all the punitive consequences that may follow from that under Chapter VII of the UN Charter."

It would be useful to have all these proposals discussed and reflected in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

The nascent nuclear energy renaissance, albeit peaceful, is nevertheless highly unpredictable. According to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, global demand for nuclear energy will rise by 40 per cent in the next 20 years. And whereas most of Europe still shows little eagerness for such a renaissance, bruised as it has been by the Chernobyl experience, Asia and Latin America are determined to pick up the slack. There is little doubt that China and India will take part in the upcoming nuclear energy boom. The situation is less certain with the nations that had previously shown little taste for peaceful use, but are now reconsidering their stance. These include a host of countries from Vietnam to Myanmar and from Jordan to the UAE in Asia; from Nigeria to Morocco and from Cape Verde to Libya in Africa; Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba and Chile in Latin America. Of course, some of them are already raring to build their first reactor, while others are unlikely ever to convert their interest into practical steps.

But whatever the case may be, this new trend raises the question of how peaceful use of nuclear energy in the new nations will affect their nonproliferation commitments. I do not see any serious contradictions here. The main principle of Article IV of the NPT should remain unshakeable: the presumption of innocence still applies, and unless the nation has been caught cheating on its NPT obligations, it has the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy without any restrictions.

However, nations that wish to develop a nuclear energy industry should be encouraged to use the benefits of international division of labor, and rely on multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle. In essence, I am talking about building a global nuclear fuel infrastructure and a network of international fuel centers. So far, only one such facility is operational – the International Uranium Enrichment Center in Angarsk, set up at the Russian initiative. Kazakhstan, Armenia and Ukraine have already joined the project.

Some developing countries (especially Egypt) are wary that they are being lured into a technological trap, in a cunning ploy to deny them their legitimate right to develop national programs. Therefore, the international centers should offer tangible economic benefits and be politically acceptable to all the interested NPT nations, and possibly to India as well. Those who still have their doubts would do well to listen to the UN secretary-general's High Representative Sergio Duarte, a very experienced Brazilian diplomat: "The creation of the International Uranium Enrichment Center in Angarsk is a constructive step which can alleviate concerns over nuclear proliferation by obviating the need for national enrichment capability".

And for those concerned by the prospect of nuclear fuel supplies becoming hostage to politics, special fuel reserves are being set up under the IAEA safeguards system in places such as Angarsk.

Nations such as Iran, who have ambitious plans in the nuclear industry, should study these initiatives more seriously and join them as soon as practicable. That would enable them to dismantle or minimize their own enrichment programs, which are economically uncertain and politically provocative.

"We know very well about the terrorists' sustained interest and determination to acquire, in whatever shape or form, nuclear weapons or nuclear components" - such is the somber conclusion of the Russian government top law enforcement experts.

Based on PIRCenter's analysis, we can assert that over the past 15 years, there have been dozens of attempts by international terrorist organizations to secure access to nuclear facilities for the purposes of sabotage. They have tried to gain access to weapons-usable nuclear material; they have studied the possibilities of stealing nuclear devices during transit; they have also worked on creating a dirty bomb, which would cause large-scale radioactive contamination.

In our assessment, acts of nuclear terrorism still remain one of the least likely scenarios of a terrorist attack – thanks primarily to reliable systems of physical security, accounting and control of nuclear warheads and materials that are now in place in the majority of the nations that possess nuclear weapons or produce nuclear materials.

Nevertheless, an act of nuclear terrorism would be catastrophic. Its psychological consequences would be no less devastating than the actual physical damage. It should be remembered how pervasive the dormant fear of nuclear terrorism is in Russia. According to a PIRCenter survey, some 83.4 per cent of the Russians are afraid that if weapons of mass destruction fall into the hands of international terrorists, they will be used against our country. Only 11.6 per cent say they have no concerns on that account.

There are several obvious factors that increase the risk of nuclear terrorism. One of them, in an ironic twist, is the release of large amounts of weapons-grade nuclear material as a result of reductions of nuclear arsenals. Another is the growing number of increasingly influential and rich violent non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, transnational organized crime syndicates, ethnic separatist movements, extremist religious sects, etc. One serious concern we have already mentioned is the presence of nuclear weapons in the politically failing Pakistan.

The Washington summit on nuclear security held in April has outlined the joint measures that should be undertaken to counter the growing terrorist threat. The NPT is powerless in this case – the source of the threat is violent non-state actors. That is why the UN Security Council should play the leading role. In 2004 it passed Resolution 1540, which calls upon all nations not to provide support in any shape or form to those non-state entities that seek to develop, acquire,

produce, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons or their delivery systems. Strict adherence by UN member-states to that resolution will help to minimize the risk of nuclear weapons or weapons-usable nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists. Just as importantly, the UN Security Council should not turn a blind eye towards those UN members who ignore the resolution's requirements.

If member-states find effective remedies for the individual afflictions from which the NPT now suffers, and through those remedies manage to strengthen the entire nonproliferation regime, the treaty has every chance of living long and prospering - not perhaps for an eternity, for which its indefinite extension ostensibly aims, but certainly for a long time to come.

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