



Nuclear Proliferation: Some Context and Consequences

Christopher A. Ford, United States Special Representative for Nuclear Nonproliferation

Remarks to NATO Seminar on Proliferation Issues

Vilnius, Lithuania

April 18, 2007

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to say a few words about WMD proliferation, particularly nuclear proliferation in violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). I thank our Lithuanian hosts of this NATO seminar for their gracious hospitality, and indeed all of the organizers for their hard work and success in making this event possible. I'd like to talk about the importance of making sure that the review process for the NPT -- a new cycle of which we are about to begin with the 2007 Preparatory Committee meeting in Vienna -- helps the Treaty regime meet the challenges it faces today. The United States has been quite clear that we believe the most important challenge facing the NPT is from noncompliance with its core of nonproliferation obligations.

As we begin this review cycle, there will be much talk about other key issue areas of the Treaty -- in particular, about peaceful uses, treaty universality, and disarmament. As we discuss such matters, I suggest, we should be careful to avoid underestimating the importance of nonproliferation, both in its own right and as a vital enabler of broader shared goals. Because some countries apparently feel a temptation to use compliance with nonproliferation obligations as a bargaining chip with which to try to procure other benefits -- thereby accepting or rejecting their nonproliferation commitments based upon whether they feel they are getting enough concessions from their diplomatic counterparts -- a full appreciation for the context and consequences of proliferation is needed. Even as we keep other important issue areas in view, therefore, we should remind ourselves of the many reasons that it matters whether or not countries show fidelity to these nonproliferation obligations.

I. Why Nonproliferation Matters

The most important benefit of the NPT has been in its contribution to the security of individual States Party, as well as to regional and international security, through the obligations which help to prevent any further proliferation of nuclear weapons. The NPT therefore powerfully augments the national security of every State Party, and not merely -- as is sometimes speciously alleged -- just the NPT nuclear weapons states (NWS). Indeed, it is the countries of the developing world, as well as many other non-nuclear weapon states, that could suffer the most in security terms if a non-nuclear weapons state in the developing world suddenly acquired "The Bomb" and became emboldened to engage in threats and adventurism against its neighbors.

As the Preamble to the NPT makes clear, the primary motivation for the Treaty was to reduce the risk of nuclear war. Explicit obligations designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to additional states -- and compliance with those obligations -- are critical to achieving that goal. Some diplomats liken the structure of the NPT to one with several "pillars," or compare its main issue areas to the "legs of a stool." I believe the best architectural metaphor, however, is much simpler: nonproliferation compliance is the bedrock upon which all the Treaty's other benefits necessarily rest.

What would happen if the international community were to fail to ensure compliance with the nonproliferation obligations at the core of the NPT?

First and most obviously, such failure directly undermines the most important benefit the NPT brings: assurance against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and thus also against the emergence or resurgence of nuclear arms races which raise the specter of nuclear warfare. By undercutting these core nonproliferation assurances, nonproliferation noncompliance imperils the peace and security of all nations. Perhaps quickly, perhaps more slowly, failure to deal with noncompliance could lead to a loss of faith in the Treaty as a means of constraining proliferation. Would-be violators would feel more free to embark upon nuclear weapons programs, and even peaceful and law-abiding states might come to feel it necessary -- in light of this -- to hedge their bets, perhaps themselves ultimately going down such a path. The world faced enormous danger and uncertainty during the nuclear arms race of the Cold War. A radically-proliferated world would be much more dangerous still, with each new participant and each new regional arms competition introducing vastly greater risks of miscalculation, mistake, or reckless over-reaching.

Second, noncompliance undermines the foundation of trust and safety upon which the benefits of peaceful international nuclear cooperation are necessarily built. Without assurances that transfers of nuclear technology will occur within the framework of appropriate safeguards and as part of a system that helps ensure the employment of such technology for exclusively peaceful purposes, such transfers would become more difficult, or even impossible - and mankind would increasingly lose the benefits that such technology can bring. Nonproliferation compliance is the foundation upon which benefit-sharing necessarily rests, for technology possessors cannot and should not share their knowledge and experience if doing so would not be safe, or would not be consistent with their nonproliferation obligations.

Third, noncompliance with the Treaty's core of nonproliferation obligations undermines efforts to bring about universal adherence to the NPT. If the parties to the NPT did not respond to remedy noncompliance with the Treaty's obligations, there would be both little purpose in seeking to bring non-parties into the Treaty and little benefit in having them subject to its obligations if they did join. An inability to respond to noncompliance with nonproliferation obligations undercuts the chances of achieving universality. Those who care about achieving NPT universality, therefore, should also care about ensuring that the Treaty's rules actually constrain the behavior of States Party. Nonproliferation compliance is therefore critical to any meaningful effort to achieve universal adherence.

Fourth, noncompliance undercuts the aspirations of the international community to nuclear and to more general disarmament, as expressed in the Preamble to the NPT and in Article VI. If the emergence of new nuclear weapons possessors cannot be stopped, new regional or global nuclear arms races are likely to develop and/or become entrenched, creation of the environment necessary for the total elimination of nuclear weapons would become ever more difficult and distant, and the risk of nuclear warfare would increase dramatically. Nonproliferation compliance is thus also vital for future progress on disarmament.

For all of these reasons, it is imperative that States Party focus during this review cycle upon how to develop and implement vigorous and sustained efforts to detect violations of the Treaty's nonproliferation obligations, return violators to compliance, and deter other future would-be violators from following such a path. This is not to deny, as Ambassador McKay has argued, the importance of the NPT's broader vision. We welcome and will participate in a full debate on the full spectrum of NPT issues. But if the Treaty's parties will not stand up for NPT compliance, the regime may ultimately collapse. This is the most critical test that all of our countries face today.

II. Supporting and Reinforcing Nonproliferation Commitments

Another important thing to remember is that the nonproliferation regime is more than just the sum of its treaty parts. Success or failure in nonproliferation policy depends upon more than whether or not one establishes a legally-binding treaty, adopts a consensus document, or has a successful Review Conference. Rather, it hinges upon the steps that all countries take on their own and with like-minded allies to further nonproliferation goals - and whether the international community can successfully shape the calculations of present-day and future would-be proliferators in useful ways. The nonproliferation regime, therefore, includes not just the NPT and other legally-binding obligations but complex dynamics of persuasion and deterrence that employ many different tools. The NPT helps establish the core nonproliferation obligations toward which many of the tools in the international community's toolkit are directed, but if we neglect to use these tools we will be much more likely to fail in our efforts, leaving the NPT's critical nonproliferation commitments no more than hollow formalisms.

The nonproliferation regime exists in what is in effect an iterated game relationship with the proliferators. Just as today's proliferators have learned lessons from how the

international community has dealt (or failed to deal) with proliferation in the past, so we can be sure that *tomorrow's* would-be proliferators will learn lessons from how we approach and respond to our challenges today. While the specifics of each situation and each country obviously need to be factored into one's approaches, there is therefore no such thing as an entirely country-specific problem or an entirely country-specific solution. Each policy choice today has implications across issue areas, across regions, and over time.

In support of these goals, the United States has adopted what we have called a "layered" approach employing reciprocally reinforcing elements -- a mix of formal and informal, multilateral, bilateral, and individual measures all of which are intended to act together to complement and reinforce the nonproliferation regime. Much of our effort has gone into retaining and strengthening effective elements of traditional multilateralism. We have turned to the United Nations Security Council, for example, which has acted under Chapter VII to address the proliferation risks posed by the programs in Iran and North Korea. Because of the proliferation risks of Iran's nuclear program, the Council has acted to require Iran to suspend its enrichment activity and cooperate fully with the IAEA. When appropriate circumstances arise -- as is the case with Iran's provocative and destabilizing actions in pursuit of the ability to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons -- NPT States Party can involve the Security Council to require and take measures which can help meet the challenges presented by a Party's NPT and nuclear safeguards noncompliance. The Council has likewise addressed North Korea's nuclear weapons programs, and the United States has been deeply involved in multilateral diplomatic initiatives (e.g., the "P-5 plus one" Iran negotiations and the Six-Party Talks on North Korea) to develop ways to resolve both these crises. Far from engaging in the "unilateralism" decried by some critics, we have made multilateral efforts the centerpiece of our approach to the seminal WMD challenges that face the world today.

The United States has also lent enthusiastic support to the IAEA safeguards system. We have supported the IAEA as Iran and North Korea have at various points impeded the work of Agency inspectors, misled them, denied them access to vital information, and otherwise undermined the effectiveness of nuclear safeguards. We have supported the safeguards system with enormous sums of money through our voluntary contributions to the IAEA. We have also worked tirelessly to strengthen the safeguards system by promoting universal adherence to IAEA Additional Protocols and pressing for the vigorous and effective implementation of inspections aimed at detecting undeclared nuclear activity. We originally proposed and have led the creation of the Committee on Safeguards and Verification (CSV) at the IAEA, a new organ dedicated to finding ways to improve the safeguards system.

Yet while supporting and helping strengthen these and other multinational efforts, the United States has also worked hard to develop new and innovative, and complementary, tools to advance nonproliferation goals. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), for instance, has been instrumental in increasing the costs and risks to proliferators. It has enhanced nonproliferation, counterproliferation, compliance enforcement, and deterrence -- by improving coordination in the employment of existing national and international authorities. There have been more PSI successes than one can discuss publicly, but we should remember that it was a PSI interdiction, of a shipment of illicit centrifuge equipment bound for Libya in October 2003 that began the unraveling of the dangerous and infamous A.Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network and helped catalyze Libya's decision two months later to renounce the pursuit of WMD and dismantle its WMD programs. Neither a treaty nor yet another international bureaucracy, PSI is a new model of multilateral cooperation based upon shared interests and perspectives, and upon coordinated endeavors frequently drawing upon national authorities.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 -- which requires all states to prevent WMD proliferation, institute effective export controls, and enhance security for nuclear materials in their territory -- also stands as another new model for effective multilateralism. Built upon the Council's authority under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, Resolution 1540 and the work of its Committee can powerfully complement the full range of other approaches. Its requirements highlight the point that it is incumbent upon *every* UN Member State -- not simply upon a group of nuclear suppliers, the nuclear weapon states, or even the most industrialized countries -- to prevent proliferation.

Perhaps most dramatically, the United States worked with our British allies and our new Libyan colleagues in helping Libya come to, and implement, its courageous decision of December 2003 to eliminate its WMD and long-range missile programs. This unprecedented, successful, trilateral, and cooperative project of wholesale WMD elimination is another example of our innovative, coordinated actions in support of nonproliferation and counterproliferation goals. It is hard to exaggerate the potential significance of the Libyan model, because Libya is an historic example of full-scale "rollback" of active WMD-related programs that did not occur in the context of regime change. Coming after years of thoroughgoing isolation growing out of the international community's concern about Libya's support for terrorism, human rights abuses, and interest in weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, Libya's return to the international community illustrates how relations with a proliferator can be turned around by policies that induce it to make a wise strategic decision to abandon the pursuit of WMD. Today, especially as Libya increasingly reaps the benefits that naturally accrue from having a more normalized relationship with the major powers, the Libyan example is one from which states such as Iran and North Korea should learn.

And with our own, individual national efforts, the United States has sought to apply all the elements of our own national power to combating WMD proliferation. This has been a multifaceted effort. It has included, for instance, our imposition of economic sanctions against proliferator entities pursuant to U.S. laws and Executive Orders. It has also included our longstanding efforts -- involving billions of dollars in U.S. taxpayer funds -- eliminate former Soviet nuclear warheads, delivery systems, and proliferation-sensitive materials in an effort to help reduce the former Soviet strategic arsenal, improve security for nuclear materials, and prevent illicit transfers of WMD-related goods, materials, and expertise.

Finally, we are taking steps to shape the incentive structure facing proliferators around the world. We are working closely with our traditional allies to help ensure their security, and will continue to do so. We also are developing missile defenses, both on our own and in cooperation with friends and allies around the world. This is an important nonproliferation step. Working together with our allies, cooperation on missile defenses can not only help defeat missile threats from proliferator states should attacks occur, but also solidify security relationships, reinforce alliance credibility, and lessen incentives for both missile and nuclear weapons proliferation by making it harder to be sure that weapons, once acquired, can be delivered. Missile defenses deter proliferation by making it clear to would-be proliferators that they may not be able to deliver their weapons by means of ballistic missiles -- and that they should therefore reconsider the pursuit of such capabilities. Seen in this light, missile defenses are an important component of the world's nonproliferation tool kit. This common sense contribution, however, is too frequently overlooked.

III. Conclusion

It is imperative that all NPT States Party appreciate the enormous stakes that ride upon the international community's success or failure in fighting proliferation. We must take advantage of the full range of policy instruments that can contribute to such success. The Treaty review process provides a unique global forum for developing common positions on key issues. During this cycle, we must focus upon the many challenges that we must meet in realizing our vision of a safe and secure world for all countries. This will include discussing how to move toward achieving the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. It will include discussing new approaches to realizing the 21st Century promise of expanded nuclear energy cooperation with minimized proliferation dangers. But it must be understood that unless all States Party jointly confront, and overcome, the grave challenges of nonproliferation noncompliance that the NPT now faces, the prospects of the NPT's universality will diminish and it will be much harder for the Treaty to survive. Thank you.

Released on April 18, 2007

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.