

Regional Animosities and Nuclear Weapons Proliferation

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Summary Conclusions

- Regional animosities contribute, upon occasion, to nuclear proliferation, but other considerations are usually equally or more important.
- An effective policy to prevent further proliferation will combine efforts to deal with the more general problems (such as “de-legitimizing” nuclear weapons as a source of national power) with specific moves to defuse the most dangerous aspects of regional confrontations.
- Every confrontation has unique aspects; though policy should be broadly consistent, it must be tailored to the specific situation with which it deals. In particular, policy makers must avoid the assumption that others “think like we do.” Their thought processes are often quite different, which makes it important to take into account the culture and history of forces in the specific area.
- Regimes hostile to a nuclear-armed state may perceive that nuclear weapons provide the most reliable deterrence to military action aimed at removing them.
- This suggests that threats of possible military action, whether direct or implied, can be counterproductive. The historical record indicates (1) that nuclear-armed states do not use force against

other states with nuclear arms; and (2) that threats from external powers tend to unite a country in support of the existing regime.

- States that have terminated nuclear weapons programs (Brazil, South Africa, and Libya are examples) have done so—each for different reasons—when they deemed that possession of the weapons would create unacceptable dangers and that forgoing the program would actually make the ruling regime more secure.
- U.S. diplomacy in the 1980s, which led to an end of the Cold War, suggests that direct communication at the most senior levels of government is a useful—probably essential—tool to find peaceful ways to resolve disputes.
- The combination of “six-power” talks with bilateral negotiations seems the most appropriate approach to North Korea, despite the obvious difficulties. Steps should continue to broaden the dialogue that has begun with Iran, both bilaterally and in the context of regional fora. It might be helpful for the United States to outline the features of a modus vivendi with both North Korea and Iran that would permit eventually normalizing relations. Multilateral pressures on both will be an essential supplement to direct talks.
- Given Pakistan’s current political instability, its nuclear arsenal constitutes a more serious immediate threat than the prospect of Iranian weapons. The current political turmoil may continue and intensify, increasing the chances that some of Pakistan’s weapons could find their way into the hands of terrorists. U.S. options are severely limited, but more attention must be given to undermining the popular assumption that the United States is anti-Islam, not only in order to help stabilize conditions in Pakistan, but also to improve relations in other areas of the Islamic world.
- Should Iran resume its nuclear weapons program, it would very likely stimulate further nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Syria is already suspected of planning a weapons program and others might well follow that pattern if the Iranian program is resumed and approaches weapon capability. Similarly, if North

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Korea continues to develop and improve its capability, the pressure on Japan, South Korea, and perhaps even Taiwan to follow suit would grow.

- Until there is a generally accepted settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, Israel's possession of nuclear weapons will be used as an excuse or pretext for development of nuclear weapons in Muslim countries. Even if a settlement is possible, however, it would not, in itself, remove the allure of nukes given the high levels of tension between Islamic states.
- A new set of regional confrontations has arisen of late that have serious implications for nuclear proliferation: those of Russia with some of its neighbors, particularly with Ukraine and Georgia. A continuation and further exacerbation of these tensions could ultimately revive a desire on Ukraine's part to re-acquire a nuclear weapons capability. More immediately, these tensions, if unresolved, are likely to make Russia less willing to join the U.S. in a program to accelerate the reduction of nuclear weapons.
- This suggests that the U.S. should re-assess its attitude toward a near-term NATO membership for Ukraine (where the majority of the population is opposed to NATO membership), and also for Georgia, which is confronted with unresolved disputes with the de facto independent enclaves it claims and is currently in the midst of a political crisis. U.S. policy should continue to support the independence of all the ex-Soviet states, but should encourage those governments to avoid gratuitous actions which would inevitably be viewed as provocative by Russia.
- The U.S. should also re-assess the necessity for some of its other plans, such as for missile-defense installations in Eastern Europe, if they diminish Russian willingness to cooperate on other nuclear issues. A program to develop missile defenses jointly with Russia, and perhaps China and interested NATO countries, would facilitate better overall cooperation in reducing the number of nuclear weapons and restraining further proliferation.
- To deal effectively with regional confrontations that encourage

nuclear proliferation, the U.S. must avoid, whenever possible, total support for a single party to the dispute but rather cultivate a position from which it can act as an honest broker. It also must recognize, both in stated policy and in practice, that these problems cannot be solved or eliminated by unilateral U.S. action, but require multilateral cooperation, which will often require agreeing to arrangements that are less than optimum from the U.S. point of view.