

Nuclear Non-Proliferation After India and Pakistan

Thus far the world's response to the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan has not ventured from the anti-proliferation efforts that failed to dissuade those countries from becoming declared nuclear powers: treaties, sanctions, conferences and arm twisting. The most we can reasonably hope for from this is a return to the *status quo ante* but with seven rather than five declared nuclear powers. It will all too likely be only a matter of time before new Indias and Pakistans are knocking at the door. We need to be more ambitious.

One possibility is to set out to undermine the position India and Pakistan have taken that nuclear weapons have utility, at the least the utility of enhancing a nation's status on the world stage. We are in no position to refute that argument today because by both rhetoric and actions, the U.S., NATO and Russia confirm an even more extensive utility for these weapons. Despite being the most powerful of nations, the U.S. plans call for having 10,000 nuclear warheads almost ten years from now, even if the current arms control treaty is fulfilled; NATO insists on retaining the option of using nuclear weapons first if necessary to defend Western Europe against even a conventional military assault; and Russia recently retracted its pledge of no first-use of nuclear weapons.

If we do not want the example of India and Pakistan to be contagious, we must de-emphasize the utility of nuclear weapons by reducing numbers the drastically and immediately and by renouncing the doctrine of first-use. The first can be achieved by a process termed strategic escrow; the other by presidential declarations. Under strategic escrow the U.S. would reduce the readiness of its nuclear weapons by removing, say, 1,000 warheads from missiles and re-locating them several hundred miles away, inviting the Russians to place observers at the storage sites to count what went in and if anything were taken out. This process of verification would be straightforward and no

treaty would be required. The warheads would not be destroyed and, so, formal approval by the Duma and Senate would not be necessary. It is the complex routine of negotiating, ratifying and executing treaties that results in such a glacially slow arms control process that the START II Treaty can take another ten years to reduce the U.S. nuclear arsenal to 10,000 warheads.

Strategic escrow will accelerate this process only if the Russians reciprocate that initiative. There will be strong resistance in Russia to doing that. If it prevails the U.S. will have lost nothing, as the warheads could be returned to the missiles. In time, though, the Russians almost must come around. Russians today readily acknowledge that their country cannot sustain an arsenal of even 1,000 intercontinental nuclear-armed missiles for more than another ten years. They can neither afford to refurbish their existing, but deteriorating weapons, nor build enough new ones to make much difference. President Yeltsin has already told the Duma that 1,000 warheads is all Russia requires.

Once a process of strategic escrow is going, the U.S. and Russia could each reduce to less than 1,000 ready nuclear warheads in a matter of a few years. At about 1,000 however, it would be necessary to bring all other nuclear powers into the escrow process. That is, the two nuclear superpowers would not go so far into escrow as to have fewer ready weapons than any of the other six nuclear powers. At this point, a program of unilateral initiatives by one nuclear superpower and reciprocal steps by the other would have to be turned into a treaty incorporating Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan and Israel. The treaty would establish, just as does the START process, a goal for the total number of nuclear weapons to be held by each country. It would also provide that in stages these eight nuclear powers would place the warheads for all of those weapons

in escrow under joint observation. Hopefully, this would lead to a world in which there was only a modest number of nuclear warheads, but with all of them in escrow. There would, then, be no nuclear weapons immediately ready to fire; and, there would be international observers to warn of any moves to reconstitute ready weapons. Some of the other six nuclear powers might balk at this arrangement. If they were to hold out, though, they could come under great pressure to join a regime in which the nuclear superpowers had moved so dramatically downward in number of ready warheads. Coincidentally this would be a fine way to lessen one of the dangers into which India and Pakistan are presently heading, that of each sitting at hair-trigger nuclear readiness just across a fragile border. There would be much less risk of some foolish unpremeditated use of nuclear weapon during a crisis. In addition, it should greatly ease Indian concerns to know that China's nuclear capabilities were constrained. The number of China's weapons would have been limited by treaty and all of her nuclear warheads would be in escrow and under international observation.

Still another consideration in placing all nuclear warheads in escrow would be to make storage facilities increasingly secure against surprise attack, keeping sufficient retaliatory forces in submarines at sea or in mobile land-based missiles. Zero nuclear warheads ready to fire and only modest numbers in escrow for each nuclear power would be a stable position. There would be no chance of accidents and there would be warning if any nuclear power prepared for war. At the same time, the ability to reconstitute ready weapons with only modest delay would be insurance against cheating either by one of the nuclear powers or by some rogue state. From this position, then, the world could decide when and if to go on to total nuclear disarmament. In the meantime there would still be a small number of nuclear powers and many non-nuclear ones, much as today. That is a condition against which the Indians have registered complaint. It would, however, be a much more benign condominium than today. It would also be a necessary waypoint on the path to disarmament and, thus, consistent with the position that nuclear weapons do not have utility.

The other essential element in demonstrating that these weapons lack utility is to forsake their

first-use. Declarations by the U.S. and Russia to that effect could lead to expanding the 185-nation Treaty of Nuclear Non-Proliferation into a Treaty of No First-Use with automatic political and economic sanctions against nuclear aggressors. As a practical matter, it would be difficult to the U.S. to forsake first-use because it would appear to be lessening its commitment to NATO. The onus, then, lies with the European members of NATO. There is no reason for them not to ask the U.S. to withdraw its nuclear guarantee. There is no conventional threat to Western Europe today or for the foreseeable future. There is also nothing larger to be lost, as no first-use is a fact of life for the U.S. today. For 53 years it has been unwilling to resort to nuclear weapons even in the face of military defeat. President Kennedy when faced with the possibility of using nuclear weapons in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis demurred on the grounds of the great uncertainties involved. General Colin Powell writes in his memoir that he was »unnerved« when he looked at a plan for the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the Gulf War and had the plan destroyed. Beyond history, the collateral costs, risks and uncertainties of using nuclear weapons will always outweigh any incremental effectiveness they offer.

One of the most persistent and logical arguments for retaining the option of first use of nuclear weapons is to deter or respond to an attack with biological weapons. This, though, is stretching a point since there has never been a biological attack to which nuclear weapons could be remotely considered a proportionate response. Reserving the right to use nuclear weapons for such an eventuality has the disadvantage that it leaves open the door to nuclear proliferation. If even a major power requires resort to nuclear weapons for any reason, how can smaller powers not require them also? The argument against proliferation is simply undercut and it makes no sense to do that against a hypothetical threat. Should that threat materialize one day, it could be necessary to rethink this policy. Unless we are utterly persuaded such a threat will develop, it is a sound policy today. As far as using the threat of nuclear response to deter any kind of biological attack, we will always have that threat. It would be extremely rash for any nation to consider a biological attack

against a nation with nuclear weapons without assuming there would be a nuclear response. The consequence of miscalculation would be too high to ignore that possibility. It may seem hypocritical to assume you have a deterrent threat even after denying that you would use nuclear weapons first. It need not be hypocritical if your best judgment, when making a pledge of no first-use, is that you would not use nuclear weapons first. With 53 years of precedent of no first-use, the presumption against such use is high.

It is also argued that while no first-use may be a satisfactory policy for a country like the U.S., which has such other sources of power, it is not for others. Israel's position of vulnerability to a concerted Arab conventional attack is often cited. Yet, Israelis know full well that employing nuclear weapons could only defer the day of their defeat. A single nuclear detonation on any Arab nation would likely unite the Arab world in a way nothing ever has. Nuclear weapons are simply not a rational solution to their or anyone's problem.

The irrationality behind these weapons does not mean they will not be sought or used, no matter how consistently the nuclear powers employ them only for deterrence. Leaders of rogue states and terrorist groups will still seek selfish benefits from them. The counter to their quests is that the greater good of the greater number dictates that these weapons should not be used. The U.N. is, in effect, taking that position in Iraq today. Whether it works over the longer run will depend on how seriously the developed world takes preventing nuclear proliferation. Will Iraq be subjected, as the U.N. mandates prescribe, to long term monitoring? Will similar international pressure be brought to bear on other would-be proliferants? None of this will work, however, unless the existing nuclear powers downgrade the role of nuclear weapons in their arsenals. This is both a practical and a moral matter. Moral leadership can prevail in human relations and even in affairs of the world. Such leadership, though, must be by example, not exhortation.

More immediately, another reason for going to a program of strategic escrow plus no first-use is to solve two special problems. The first is persuading India and Pakistan to back away from the precipice by signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaties; not turning

their nuclear potential into a reality; and generally accepting international controls and standards in this arena. Both countries will be hard pressed domestically not to appear to be caving into sanctions levied by the U.S. and other external pressures. India and Pakistan could contend, however, that the moves of the U.S. and Russia into escrow and no first-use, responded to their legitimate complaint that the U.S. and Russia have not reduced their arsenals substantially, as promised in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Indians and Pakistanis could declare victory and retreat into a more sensible nuclear posture.

The second issue is the Duma's reluctance even to debate the ratification of START II. This is a very poor time for the U.S. to push the Russians on this treaty which they understandably believe is tilted against them. NATO has just thrust expansion onto them. Russia has a new, weak government and an economy in shambles. We risk an outright rejection of START II by insisting on Yeltsin's bringing it before the Duma. Since it will be a decade before START II is consummated anyway, a delay in ratifying it will hardly be critical. We could, instead, engage the Russians in strategic escrow. As they saw this joint program working to the advantage of both, they could put the START II Treaty back on the agenda with much less contentiousness.

Whether it is strategic escrow and not first-use or some other devices, we badly need an imaginative way to supplement and accelerate the traditional nuclear arms control process less proliferation overtake us. ◀