

OPINION

The Nuclear Disarmament Fantasy

By Harold Brown and John Deutch

The end of the Cold War changed “the balance of nuclear terror,” and with it the centrality of nuclear forces in U.S. security strategy. In consequence, some politicians and analysts, including several former senior foreign policy officials who wrote on this page, want to make the complete elimination of nuclear weapons a principal U.S. foreign policy goal—as a practical means of mobilizing more resolute international action to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to discourage their possession and use.

We agree that the strongest possible measures must be taken to inhibit the acquisition of and roll back the possession of nuclear weapons. However, the goal, even the aspirational goal, of eliminating all nuclear weapons is counterproductive. It will not advance substantive progress on nonproliferation; and it risks compromising the value that nuclear weapons continue to contribute, through deterrence, to U.S. security and international stability.

The U.S. must maintain a nuclear deterrent; there is no wishing these weapons away.

A nation that wishes to acquire nuclear weapons believes these weapons will improve its security. The declaration by the U.S. that it will move to eliminate nuclear weapons in a distant future will have no direct effect on changing this calculus. Indeed, nothing that the U.S. does to its nuclear posture will directly influence such a nation's (let alone a terrorist group's) calculus.

Whatever their other merits (and they are significant), it is difficult to argue that a comprehensive test ban treaty, a “no first use” declaration by the U.S., a dramatic reduction in the number of deployed or total nuclear weapons in our stockpile, an end to the production of fissionable material will convince North Korea, Iran, India, Pakistan or Israel to give up their nuclear weapons programs.

True enough, the U.S. ratified the 1968 Nonproliferation Treaty, whose Article 5 states: “Each of the parties to the treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

No one suggests abandoning the hope embodied in such a well-intentioned statement. However, hope is not a policy, and, at present, there is no realistic path to a world free of nuclear weapons.

One cannot, for example, make the scientific knowledge and technological know-how that make nuclear weapons possible disappear. Proliferating states, even if they abandoned these devices under resolute international pressure, would still be able to clandestinely retain a few of their existing weapons—or maintain a standby, break-out capability to acquire a few weapons quickly, if needed.

So long as serious political differences exist between nations and peoples, and given that the possibility of nuclear weapons exists, the U.S. should have nuclear weapons to deter potential opponents and to avoid intimidation by other states seeking a capability of weapons of mass destruction. In any case, even in the absence of overwhelming superiority in nuclear weapons, the great predominance of U.S. conventional forces would remain a strong motive for aspiring states to seek nuclear weapons.

So what is to be done? It is possible to slow the spread of nuclear weapons. In the 1970s, South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil and Argentina were convinced to abandon their weapons programs. In the 1990s, South Africa voluntarily dismantled its nuclear weapons after apartheid.

During the first Clinton administration, the U.S. successfully persuaded governments of the former Soviet Union to transfer their nuclear weapons to the new Russian state. During the present Bush administration, Libya renounced its nuclear program. In each case, these suc-

cesses came about by the combined application of the carrots and sticks of proliferation policy, and a change in the way a proliferating state perceived its security circumstances.

Given its predominant conventional weapons capability, the U.S. can safely reduce the total inventory of nuclear weapons to the lowest number needed for the purpose of deterrence. This number is likely to be considerably below the present stockpile of over 8,000 weapons. This reduction will harmonize nuclear weapons policy with our attempt to encourage nonproliferation elsewhere. Meanwhile, the U.S. should not propose or fund large-scale programs or initiatives that suggest new roles for nuclear weapons.

In sum, a significant reduction in the size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile could be justified on the ground of cost, compared to the level needed for credible deterrence; however, the vision of zero nuclear weapons is neither necessary nor politically useful for making decisions on those reductions today.

Adopting an aspirational goal—to eliminate nuclear weapons—similarly risks obscuring the reasons pro and con for deciding other issues. For decades, there's been a debate about the desirability of a universal and permanent comprehensive nuclear test ban (CTB). Those favoring the complete elimination of nuclear weapons are unlikely to consider a compromise measure, such as a five-year renewable CTB.

Yet a compromise would likely attract political support in the U.S. Congress. It would also likely attract the support of many of the 44 nations listed in Article XIV of the NPT—such as India, Israel and Pakistan—that must become signatories before a test-ban treaty enters into force.

Here is another important issue. The Bush administration has proposed a Reliable Replacement Warhead program (RRW) to replace existing nuclear warheads with a new design. The RRW, it says, will facilitate reductions in the

stockpile; permit confidence in the reliability, security and safety of weapons for the indefinite future; as well as maintain the design capability of the Department of Energy nuclear weapons laboratories. The RRW could lead to a design that is certified without testing, but that surely would be a subject of debate.

Whether this is a good idea or not, the decision should be made on the basis of the infrastructure needed to support the U.S. nuclear force structure and assure its reliability. It should not be decided on the basis of whether the RRW does or does not contribute to a distant and uncertain goal of a nuclear-free world.

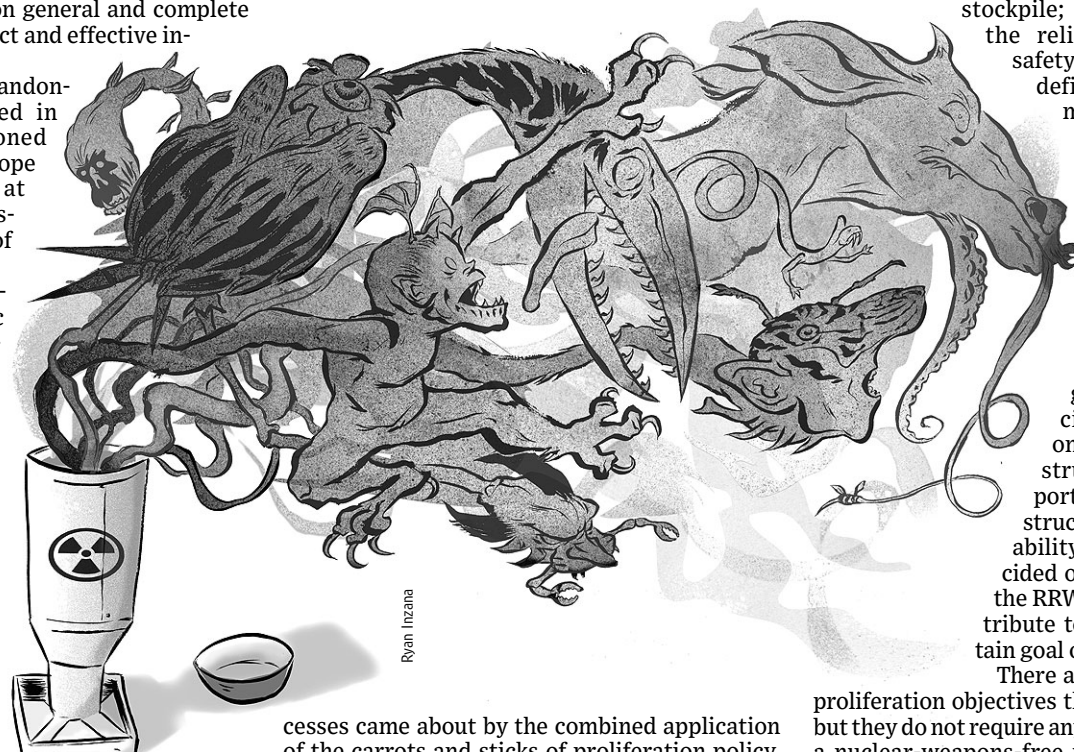
There are several critical nonproliferation objectives that should be pursued, but they do not require any unattainable vision of a nuclear-weapons-free world to justify them.

Supplier states, for one, should seek to control the transfer of fissile material and relevant technology, using the inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Second: Building on the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici program, greater emphasis needs to be given to security of weapons and weapons-usable material, and not just in Russia. Third: Given the potential expansion of nuclear power around the world, it is urgent to put into place new means for controlling the aspects of the fuel cycle—enrichment and fuel reprocessing—that present the greatest proliferation risk.

Finally, the most important and difficult task is to change the underlying security circumstances that lead nations to seek nuclear weapons. To that end, direct negotiations involving positive incentives (economic, political and security arrangements) for states willing to abandon nuclear weapons aspirations, as well as cooperation with others to impose negative sanctions across an escalating spectrum on recalcitrant actors, are essential. These are concrete actions, analogous to the Marshall Plan, to take a historical example, not mere gestures like the Kellogg-Briand Treaty of 1928, which “outlawed war.”

Nuclear weapons are not empty symbols; they play an important deterrent role, and cannot be eliminated. Foreign policy must be based on this reality; and the U.S. should work with other nations on those achievable objectives that lower the risks of the spread of nuclear weapons capability and the possibility of nuclear weapons use.

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Silence Is Complicity

By Kay Seok

Seoul, South Korea

The second ever inter-Korea summit, between South Korea's President Roh Moo-hyun and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il in early October, produced a media frenzy. Journalists reported on every move and statement by the two leaders, including Kim's casual proposal to extend Mr. Roh's stay by one day, and Mr. Roh's polite but awkward refusal to do so.

Atmospherics aside, one thing was conspicuously missing: any discussion of human rights. Given North Korea's systematic denial of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, this is remarkable. Worse, it seems that both sides are using coded language to agree that it is now unacceptable to raise the issue of human rights.

Why aren't human rights even mentioned during summits between North and South Korea?

At the summit, Mr. Roh signed an agreement with North Korea that pledged, among other things, not to “interfere with each other's internal affairs.” When asked by a journalist if addressing North Korea's human rights violations constitutes interference in its internal affairs, South Korea's Unification Minister Lee Jae-joung reportedly responded by saying that, “human rights in North Korea is directly linked to the question of its political system . . . a moral and ethical stance is not the only way.” He did not say what other ways he had in mind.

Regardless of what Mr. Roh signed with Kim Jong Il, or how Mr. Lee interpreted it, both North and South Korea have made commitments, in international human rights conventions, to the protection of basic human rights as a universal value. Under international law, human rights violations are not simply “internal affairs”—they are of concern to everyone, everywhere. Indeed, calling human rights abuses an internal affair is an approach frequently used by China and other dictatorships to avoid international criticism of how they treat their own citizens.

In South Korea, an opposition lawmaker called this behavior by the South Korean government a form of “Stockholm Syndrome,” the phenomenon where hostages start sympathizing with their kidnapers as they struggle to cope with fear and anxiety. Other observers might simply call it appeasing a bully. North Koreans who are not members of the elite may wonder whether the government in Seoul now sees them as little more than collateral damage in the big picture of peace on the Korean peninsula.

Of course, South Korean officials will not pub-

licly say they don't care about human rights in North Korea. Instead they say that raising human rights issues with North Korea is counterproductive, that it makes North Korean officials storm out of meetings, cut off dialogue and cancel agreements. Discussing rights, they say, does not motivate Pyongyang to improve how it treats its citizens.

It is true that North Korea often reacts with irritation and anger when it faces criticism of its human rights record. But there is reason to think that the regime is susceptible to pressure from outside.

In an interview in August 2007, a 49-year-old man from Onsong, North Korea, described to Human Rights Watch what he experienced during multiple arrests and repatriations to North Korea. The first time he was arrested for the crime of crossing the border with China without state permission in 1999, he was cursed and beaten during interrogation. The last time he was caught, in 2006, the interrogator—in fact the same police officer—offered him a cigarette and pleaded for cooperation.

While in jail awaiting a sentence last year, this man also received a visit by a public defense attorney, for the first time ever. The attorney asked if his human rights had been violated during interrogation. “Well, this time around, there weren't any abuses, so I said no,” he said.

After the man was sent to prison, he said he realized there was a lot less cursing and beating than before. When asked why such changes took place, he said, “I am not sure, but I heard it was the international pressure.”

Of course, this man should never have been arrested in the first place: His right to freedom of movement is guaranteed by international law. He did not get a fair trial. The attorney he met did not represent him in court. In fact, that jail-cell visit was his only visit. And although the level and frequency of abuse may have decreased at his detention facility, the man also said that abuses did not disappear.

Hundreds of thousands of people like this man still toil in prison for trying to exercise basic freedoms. The authorities still execute North Koreans in public, often in the presence of children. Citizens who want to practice religion must do so secretly. In general, repression in North Korea continues to be so severe that there are no known dissident politicians or activists.

Nevertheless, the world must not rule out the possibility that concerted international pressure could produce results. And without any visible political debate inside North Korea, external pressure is essential: Things certainly will not improve by maintaining silence. South Korean officials should be leading the effort on human rights—not signing agreements to sit on the sidelines as their fellow Koreans continue to suffer.

Ms. Seok is Human Rights Watch's researcher covering North and South Korea.

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