Beyond Pessimism: Why the NPT Will Not Collapse

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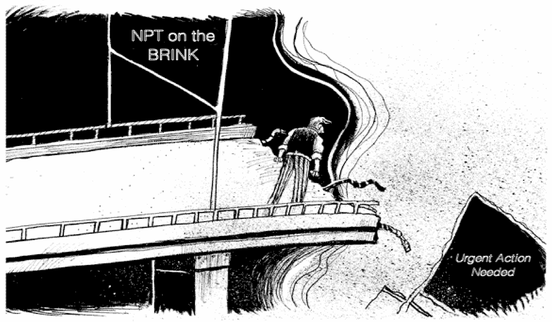
Collapse Fears

Absent urgent action, the NPT will soon collapse, argue many. The perceived origins of such calamity include ■ unfulfilled disarmament pledges ■ incessant proliferation efforts ■ selective favoritism towards countries unwilling to ratify the NPT ■ the diffusion of sensitive nuclear technologies ■ the use of illegitimate force as a counter-proliferation instrument ■ or the right to withdraw from the treaty. At the end of the day, all contend a certain development will initiate a process that will ultimately lead to the treaty's collapse.

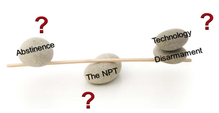


Problems with «Grand Bargain» Theory

The first part of this research evaluates the dominant "grand bargain" theory, which many analysts use as a basis for forecasting NPT developments. This theory claims the treaty's past, present and future depends mainly upon a carefully balanced three-pillar agreement. Have-nots relinquished their right to nuclear acquisition in exchange from pledges from the nuclear haves to work towards disarmament and to ease access to nuclear technology.

This research argues the trilateral “grand bargain” model is an insufficient instrument for assessing a particular state’s future proclivity towards accepting the NPT’s restrictions.

Within the treaty’s negotiations, vague promises of nuclear disarmament and technical assistance played a smaller role in the treaty's negotiations than is often assumed.



Most states gave up little when ratifying the NPT, as a majority never sought to acquire the weapons the treaty prohibits. In addition, the NPT allowed the few who wanted to keep their options open to acquire the necessary technology.

Other constrains and incentives played a significant role in states' decision to accede to the treaty: ■ states valued the system of mutual restraint ■ powerful allies pressured them towards accession ■ the NPT could be used as an instrument in regional politics.

Once in the NPT framework, states pursue a more convoluted set of goals than is often assumed.

Nuclear disarmament is likely to be less central to most: nuclear arsenals pose a significant material threat to only very few and large sacrifices for normative fairness are unusual among states.

Most have a strong interest in the status quo: ■ the system of restraint suits many well ■ while specific states might have a particular interest in weakening certain constraints of the treaty, most are likely to work towards maintaining the system ■ a majority also seems to derive other benefits from membership, like showing their support for the United States or improving their relations with developing countries.

Therefore, the numerous pessimist expectations derived specifically from this theory appear unwarranted.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RETHINKING THE BOMB

Last of Six Articles

Next week, representatives of more than 170 nations will gather in New York to decide whether to renew the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the world's most important statement about the control of nuclear weapons.

Arms control specialist Tom Graham worked hard to change U.S. policy to help win indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mexico's Miguel Marin-Bosch wants to hold the United States and the other five nuclear powers to the letter of their NPT pledges.

A Hard Sell for Treaty Renewal

U.S. Campaign for Indefinite Extension Met With Skepticism

By David B. Ottaway and Steve Coll
Washington Post Staff Writers

Last May 16, President Clinton and P.V. Narasimha Rao, India's prime minister, concluded talks in Washington with a formal statement that attacked little arms control issues. The statement, a top priority for the administration's chief lobbyist for winning extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

One sentence caught Graham's eye. It said the two countries "offered their strong support" for efforts "to achieve a treaty banning nuclear explosions with the goal of elimination of such weapons."

Eliminating nuclear weapons was not something that U.S. presidents talked about publicly, even in this vague way. During the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union had tens of thousands of nuclear missiles aimed at each other, it was hardly a practical objective. But the Cold War was long over, and the NPT was coming up for renewal. Graham intend on Clinton's statement as he sought to line up votes for indefinite extension of the 25-year-old treaty.

Back in Hammer and fall, Graham traveled to more than 40 countries on nearly every continent. In meetings with diplomats, he repeatedly cited Clinton's statement as evidence of U.S. commitment to one of the treaty's central provisions: that the NPT's five nuclear powers would work toward the elimination of all nuclear weapons, including their own.

Back in Washington, diplomats read Graham's cables NUCLEAR, A10, Col. 1

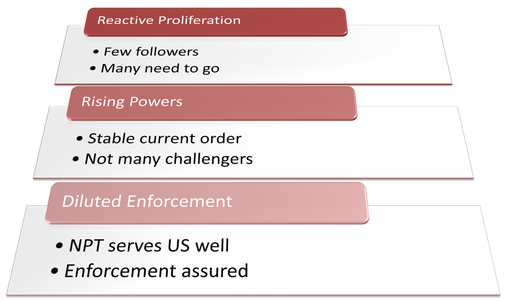
Moderate fears about additional proliferation, the campaign of "friendly persuasion" orchestrated by the United States, and the apathy of most have-nots enables the treaty to be extended indefinitely, remembered the Mexican ambassador Miguel Marin Bosch.

Potential Scenarios for Collapse

The second part of this research combines insights from nuclear scholarship with historical assessments of the dynamics and contexts that led comparable treaties and regimes to collapse. It advances specific testable breakdown scenarios, and evaluates the likelihood of these scenarios playing out in the foreseeable future.

First, what will be the impact of reactive proliferation? Additional nuclearisation is likely to generate only limited emulation ■ recent case-study research suggests widespread contagion is unlikely ■ prestige or bureaucratic inducements of additional proliferation will be narrow ■ and even if some will leave, many will have to renege for the treaty to become obsolete.

Second, will significant actors challenge the existing architecture? This research argues both that ■ the broader international system is relatively stable and that ■ few potentially rising powers seem prone to challenge the nuclear order.



Third, will the treaty's enforcement be soon diluted by the US abandoning its protective role? The answer is no: ■ Washington's global ambitions have been served well by the NPT system ■ the US is unlikely to abandon its position of primacy and commit to retrenchment ■ even assuming a less engaged America, protecting the NPT seems an enduring interest.

In conclusion, there is little evidence substantiating the assertions that the NPT is likely to face fatal threats any time soon.

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