

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION PROBLEMS AND DANGERS IN NORTHEAST ASIA

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, and colleagues,

My name is Randall Caroline Forsberg, Executive Director of the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies in the United States. I will speak on nuclear proliferation problems and dangers in Northeast Asia.

Introduction

Northeast Asia is a lynchpin in the future of nonproliferation efforts: In this region there is great potential for the proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles — but also great potential for diplomacy, international negotiations, and arms control agreements to stop the proliferation. This presentation reviews briefly both the dangers and the opportunities in the region.

In the near term, there are two main dangers: first, the likelihood of vertical proliferation in China, as China modernizes its nuclear forces and responds to the US deployment of a national missile defense system; and second, the risk of horizontal proliferation in North Korea if the 1994 Framework Agreement fails and North Korea resumes work on the development of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles.

In both cases, proliferation in the countries concerned is likely to spur proliferation in other countries. An expansion of China's nuclear force could trigger growth in the arsenals of India and Pakistan; it could stop movement toward deep cuts in nuclear arms in Russia; and, in the worst case, it could lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in East Asia, including possibly Japan and Taiwan. North Korea already has a long history of missile exports and related technical assistance to Iran and Pakistan that could be extended to other countries.

Let me describe these dangers in more detail.

China's Development of Nuclear Weapons

For some time China has been developing new nuclear weapons that would be less vulnerable to a disarming first strike, specifically, submarine-launched missiles and mobile land-based missiles. The submarine program is proceeding slowly. This is unlikely to change because the excellent antisubmarine warfare capabilities of the United States will make future Chinese submarines vulnerable to a US pre-emptive attack for decades to come. In the case of mobile land-based missiles, however, China could build a large number of new systems; and over the next decade or two, it could equip them with multiple warheads and, eventually, multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs).

Since China's nuclear deterrent is meant to help prevent certain threatening military actions by the United States and since a US national missile defense program could nullify that deterrent in its current state, the US decision to proceed with a national missile defense system including up to 100 interceptor missiles is likely to provoke a significant build-up in China's nuclear force. In place of the 20 or so ICBMs that have been deployed for the last two decades, China is likely to build more than 100 new mobile intercontinental missiles and to develop MIRVed warheads as

soon as possible. These missiles and new mobile medium-range missiles that could reach Okinawa or other areas around China's border will be threatening not only to the United States, but also to Russia, India, and Japan.

We have, thus, the prospect of a classic offense-defense arms race, but with spillover to additional countries, which is precisely what the ABM Treaty was intended to prevent, and has, in fact, helped to prevent as the USA and Russia have moved, slowly but steadily, toward reductions in their immense nuclear arsenals.

Nuclear Dangers on the Korean Peninsula

The provocative nature of the US development of a national missile defense system and of the Bush administration's new nuclear policy is underscored when we consider the destabilizing impact of these US policies on the existing non-proliferation agreement between the United States and DPRK.

In 1994, when its nuclear research reactor had produced enough fissile material to make two nuclear bombs, North Korea concluded the Framework Agreement with the United States. This agreement put a freeze on North Korea's building of new graphite-moderated reactors in exchange for the US promise to normalize its relations with North Korea and provide two light-water nuclear reactors (LWR) through an international consortium (KEDO, Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization) financed largely by South Korea and Japan. The United States is supposed to provide the two new reactors by "a target date of 2003," but construction of the plants has lagged far behind the schedule. Nevertheless, within the next couple of years, work will reach the point where all non-nuclear components of the LWRs are completed. At that point, North Korea will be obligated to undergo full IAEA inspection of its nuclear facilities before the nuclear components are installed.

During the 1990s, North Korea developed missiles with growing ranges, starting with SCUDS with a 200-mile range and working up to multi-stage SCUD variants with a range of 1000 miles. Much of the testing of these missiles was conducted in Iran and Pakistan, which helped fund the North Korean program. No improved version of the existing missiles could reach US territory with a nuclear warhead, however. An entirely new generation of missiles with ranges of 5000 miles or more would have to be developed. Such a program would take North Korea at least a decade; and it would take other countries such as Iran or Iraq even longer, particularly without North Korean aid.

Following the 1998 test of a failed satellite launch using a missile that flew over Japan, North Korea entered into serious negotiations with the United States with the goal of ending all further testing and export of North Korean missiles and related technology in exchange for full diplomatic recognition, financial aid, and access to development funds, such as the IMF and the Asian Development Bank. An agreement along these lines was almost signed under US President Clinton, but was postponed to the next administration in November 2000, when the US presidential election was thrown into doubt.

Instead of seizing the opportunity to end North Korea's missile development and exports, the Bush administration has gone back to the drawing board. In place of the focused goal of ending any further development, testing, or export of long-range missiles by North Korea, a goal which could be verified with 100 percent confidence by national means, President Bush has added sweeping new demands, including the destruction and non-production of shorter-range missiles — scaled up SCUDS with ranges of 400-600 miles, intended to help offset the US and South Korean technological superiority in air forces. Bush has also demanded intrusive "challenge" on-site inspection, which would verify the elimination of the short-range missiles, but at the same time lay open all of North Korea's conventional forces and command structure to detailed US observation.

When the US-North Korean missile talks began in 1998, North Korea undertook a moratorium on missile testing, to show its good faith in these talks. In 2001, North Korea extended the moratorium to 2003, showing commendable restraint and giving the talks the best chance for success.

Now a number of potentially extremely dangerous developments may come to a head in 2003: the original deadline for delivering two LWR plants to North Korea; progress in work on the non-nuclear components and the issue of North Korea's acceptance of IAEA's full inspection requirements; the end of North Korea's self-imposed missile test moratorium; and the start of a new administration in South Korea which may be less committed to reconciliation with the North than the administration of the current President Kim Dae-Jung. It would be a truly terrible danger if during this sensitive period the United States decided to turn the "war on terrorism" to North Korea.

Opportunity for Arms Control and Nonproliferation

Never has there been a more clear-cut case for international arms control agreements to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction than there is in Northeast Asia today. By reinstating the ABM Treaty, or at least indefinitely postponing the planned deployment of interceptor missiles in Alaska, the United States could prevent a near-term build-up of China's nuclear forces. In the meantime, deeper cuts in US and Russian nuclear arms could create an environment in which that build up would never occur and in which all of the current Nuclear Weapons States could make a good faith effort to move toward zero, as they have repeatedly promised to do.

Equally important, by agreeing with North Korea to a nationally-verified ban on the testing and export of missiles with a range over 200 miles — which North Korea has already accepted — the United States could completely eliminate the most imminent threat of a new state with an ICBM, which is at least a decade off; and it could further delay the more distant prospect of acquisition of an ICBM by Iran or Iraq. In other words, a missile agreement with North Korea would completely eliminate the alleged reason for developing a national missile defense for a decade and possibly much longer.

Dangers Posed by US Nuclear Policy

Instead of working for such an agreement, the United States is rushing to abrogate the ABM Treaty and build a national missile defense, even though there is no near-future threat of a hostile state's ICBM; even though the country closest to posing such a threat has offered to end its missile program; and even though missile defense deployment is likely to lead to a new arms race and perhaps a new Cold War, with China replacing Russia as the designated enemy.

Rather than pursue diplomacy, confidence-building, and arms control measures to forestall potential threats and prevent proliferation, the Bush administration has thrown up new obstacles to progress in nonproliferation, first by antagonizing North Korea with the harsh rhetoric of "axis of evil" and then by releasing a "Nuclear Posture Review" which calls for further development of mini-nukes and threatens a preemptive use of such weapons against North Korea in any future outbreak of war. This threat is a truly alarming development and one which betrays the US commitments made under both the NPT and the 1994 Framework Agreement

Recently CIA Director George Tenet testified in a Senate hearing that North Korea is in compliance under the 1994 Agreement. It is incumbent on the United States to do its best to reverse the harm done recently and to comply with the 1994 Agreement by giving "formal assurances to the DPRK, against the threat or use of nuclear weapons" in order to avoid another nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula.

Conclusion

Surely the international community should not and will not sit by while the United States, piece by piece, dismantles all of the work of the global system of arms control and nonproliferation regimes built up with tremendous international effort over the past 30 years. Nowhere is the devastating impact on nonproliferation efforts likely to be greater than in Northeast Asia. We certainly cannot allow another nuclear holocaust in this region. The time has come for the international community to take a stand, to hold the United States accountable, and put its feet to the fire.

Thank you for your attention.

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