Session 1: Nuclear and Missile Commerce:
The Cases of Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, and Syria

Brian Rose

United States Institute of Peace

Summary

Examining an issue straight from the headlines, the panel, moderated by Leonard Spector of the Monterey Institute for International Studies (MIIS), took an in-depth look at trafficking and commerce in nuclear and ballistic missile technologies by and among a number of countries that operate outside the bounds of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), operate in violation of the NPT, or act in ways that are inconsistent with the NPT. Jeffrey Lewis of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and Joshua Pollack of Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) served as discussants.

Spector led off the discussion, offering a number of methods by which Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, and Syria engage in illicit commerce of nuclear and missile technologies. He cited North Korea as a common node in a broad but shrinking network of consumers. He also described an evolving market that increasingly relies on collaboration among the actors involved. He then listed a number of activities taken by the international community and unilateral actors to detect, disrupt, limit the impact of proliferation, including export controls, international control regimes, and direct action, but noted that progress in this area is limited.

Next, Pollack examined North Korean missile supply relationships with Iran and Syria. He argued that North Korea is the single most important supplier of missile technologies worldwide, however one that has changed considerably since the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than exporting complete missiles, Pollack argued that North Korea has gradually moved toward the export of missile components and later the export of components for more sustainable production lines of missile technology in the host country. While the process results in Iran and Syria being more self-sufficient in the production of missiles and missile

technologies—Iran likely surpassing North Korea in solid fuel rocket capabilities, for example—both countries are still heavily reliant on outside assistance for program development. Pollack then examined the effectiveness of a number of policy efforts undertaken by the international community to roll back North Korean missile proliferation. He argued that while there has been some success in reducing the supply of missiles worldwide, trade in missile components and assistance to indigenous production programs persists.

Lewis focused on the case on Myanmar, who's suspected nuclear and ballistic missile aspirations have been the subject of much debate in the wider policy community. Lewis argued that while it is very difficult to know for sure whether Myanmar is pursuing a nuclear weapons program, the country has undertaken several suspicious projects. Speculation derives from three sets of circumstances. First, it is known that Myanmar openly sought cooperation with Russia to develop a nuclear research reactor, which it suggested was for the purpose of producing medical isotopes. The program was disbanded, arguably due to cost issues. Second, Myanmar sent a large number of students to Russia to study a number of fields that suggest broader nuclear aspirations, including the reprocessing of plutonium. Third, a number of photos have been released recently of equipment that many suspect may be related to uranium enrichment or ballistic missile production. Lewis argued that only a more open and transparent Myanmar can dispel such suspicion. A number of meetings with North Korean officials, including a visit by military officials to a North Korean ballistic missile production facility fuel further speculation about Myanmar's intentions.