

Panel: Nonproliferation

Date/Time: Tuesday, April 28, 2015 / 15:30-16:45

Moderator: James Acton, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Speakers: Sven Jurschewsky, Foreign Services Officer, Canada (ret.)

Shin Chang-Hoon, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Richard Weitz, Hudson Institute

Yang Xiyu, China Institute of International Studies

Session 2, titled “Nonproliferation”, examined the past and current state of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime. Focusing on the main points of international nonproliferation efforts, it explored the possibility of further nuclear arms reduction dialogue between U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China.

The moderator of the session, James Acton, senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, began by highlighting positive developments such as the 2015 NPT Review Conference, which kicked-off on April 27, the U.S.-ROK 1-2-3 agreement, and the painfully negotiated Iran nuclear deal. He also made a reference to the North Korean nuclear program due to the proximity of the issue to the conference’s location in South Korea.

Sven Jurschewsky, a retired Foreign Service Officer from Canada, began by stating that “the history of nonproliferation was the history of U.S.-USSR competition up until the collapse of USSR,” and pointed to the Middle East region, the Korean peninsula and India-Pakistan as “critical flashpoints to international nuclear nonproliferation”. He went on to argue that “suffocation policy and the status quo policy mainly applied during the 1980s in the Cold War era are doomed to fail”. He insisted that “the interest between a nuclear state and a non-nuclear state within the NPT framework is very different”, and that “non-nuclear states, raising moral issues of possessing nuclear weapons, were very much interested in how their national security could be guaranteed; but nuclear powers were indifferent to their demands”.

Next, Shin Chang-Hoon, a research fellow at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, introduced recent analysis by a Chinese expert that argued that the DPRK may already have 20 nuclear warheads and also enough weapons-grade uranium to double the number within a year. Dr. Shin pointed out that “North Korea enjoys risk-taking and stirring instability”, and “the change in Kim Jong-un’s perception of nuclear weapons and its utility in particular could cause great danger”. Furthermore, he stressed that “from the human security perspective, North Korea’s nuclear weapons can have humanitarian impacts in China, South Korea and Japan; thus, close trilateral cooperation on the North Korea nuclear problem is essential”. Dr. Shin also noted that North Korea is a major supplier, broker and end-user of nuclear materials,

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know-how and technology, and that there is danger of them doing illegal business with terrorists in the black market. Especially having taken advantage of loose security measures after the collapse of the Soviet Union, fissile materials could have been smuggled into North Korea, creating a huge gap between perceived and actual number of nuclear warheads.

Richard Weitz, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Political-Military Analysis at the Hudson Institute, stated that “the return of geopolitics and emerging military technologies have made nonproliferation more complicated”. As such, he argued that “trilateral cooperation between the U.S., Russia and China is important”. However, pointing out that the difference between Americans and Russians had always been very clear, he said that negotiations are stuck in a deadlock. Russia is especially concerned about their strategic balance with other nuclear powers such as China and the complexity such development entails. Russia and China also share concerns regarding strategic defense systems such as missile defense and precision strike. Despite these differences, Dr. Weitz argued “all three countries have done well in the Iran talks, and their cooperation on a Korean deal could be another positive example”.

Finally, Yang Xiyu of the China Institute of International Studies stated that he disagrees with the analysis that DPRK has 20 nuclear warheads, insisting that they would not have enough fissile materials to produce that many after three nuclear tests. He doubted that North Korea could have succeeded in producing sufficient quantities of weapons-grade uranium with good quality. Nevertheless, he believed that a fourth nuclear test is a question of when for North Korea. In addition, Dr. Yang claimed that the collapse of the ongoing Iran deal and failure to address the North Korean nuclear threat would mean the end of the global nonproliferation regime. He concluded by voicing China’s fears of being the only nuclear power to be geographically surrounded by other nuclear powers. Accordingly, Dr. Yang insisted that China’s ultimate goal is to maintain the NPT regime and, in the long-term, to pursue a complete test-ban and comprehensive disarmament, similar to President Obama’s famous and Nobel prize-winning “World Without Nuclear Weapons” initiative.

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