

[SE2-OR-1] Nuclear Weapons States v. Non-Nuclear Weapons States

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Full Summary

The panel titled Nuclear Weapons States v. Non-Nuclear Weapons States took place in the Orchid room on Monday, June 13th. Part of Session 2 of the Asan Plenum, it was moderated by Dr. Lee Jung Hoon, the director of the Institute of Modern Korean Studies at Yonsei University. The panelists consisted of Dr. Etel Solingen (Chancellor's Professor at the University of California, Irvine*), Mr. Henry Sokolski (of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center [NPEC]), and Dr. James Walsh (from MIT's Security Studies Program). With respect to the format of the panel, Dr. Lee began by making some brief remarks. Following that, he went down the line, allotting each of the panelists roughly 15 minutes to make a statement. Dr. Lee then opened up the floor for a question-and-answer session from the audience. The panel reached its conclusion at the assigned time, running from 5:15 pm to 6:30 pm.

*In the interests of full disclosure, Dr. Solingen serves as my dissertation chair and advisor.

Dr. Lee began by referring to the title of the panel. He noted that the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) had called attention to a host of issues that in fact pitted the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) against the Non-Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS). He noted the overriding perception that the NWS – the United States and Russia in particular – needed to reduce their existing stockpiles. While he acknowledged the presence of the new START as a welcome step in the direction, the issue was far from concluded. After all, the US modernization of their nuclear arsenal seemed to be a contradictory action. Next, he claimed that the issue of nuclear energy had driven a wedge between the two sides. The NNWS clamored for more concrete measures that would increase their access to their “inalienable right.” A final issue mentioned was the implementation of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone in the Middle East. This was a resolution that dated back to the 1995 Conference, and the NNWS wanted the NWS to show their commitment towards disarmament in the region. Dr. Lee concluded by suggesting that there was more nuance to the NWS v. NNWS debate than the title suggested. After all, the very definition of a NWS in

the NPT hardly matched the reality of today's world, with India, Pakistan, Israel, and the DPRK all nuclear, even if they were not 'real NWS.'

With that, Dr. Solingen had the floor. She suggested that it was not simply about the difference between the NWS and the NNWS; after all, there were clearly plenty of fissures within each of those groups. Instead, she posed the nuclear issue as having two separate dimensions: demand-side and supply-side. On the demand-side, she pointed out that most NNWS simply have no interest in nuclear weapons. Those who pursue weapons often view a nuclear program as a tool with which to secure regime survival. Yes, they certainly consider its effect as a potential deterrent against would-be interventionist great powers, but the problem from the academic and policy communities has been the overconcentration on external threats as an impetus to a nuclear program. Dr. Solingen asked us to consider that those who seek nuclear weapons generally fall into the category of having an inward-looking political economy, with the DPRK's notion of *juche* perhaps the most extreme example. An understanding and acknowledgment of the difference between state security and regime security, she suggested, was critical to addressing the demand-side dimension.

On the supply-side, Dr. Solingen examined the differing strategies that the international community has employed in an effort to dissuade the development of nuclear weapons programs – persuasion, coercion, and so forth. The tools have taken the form of sanctions and positive inducements. There have been a number of factors that have undermined the efficiency of those tools, however. To begin with, there appeared significant differences among and within the NWS in employing those tools (again, reiterating her point that the NWS v. NNWS framing was a misnomer). This was a Goldilocks dilemma, with vastly differing perceptions on the appropriate mix of carrots and sticks to use in a given situation. China's history vis-à-vis the DPRK, moreover – in terms of its frequency refusal to enforce existing sanctions measures – reflected the problem of inconsistent and selective implementation of existing measures from the United Nations. Dr. Solingen noted here that this was a problem that went beyond China. With respect to the DPRK, 111 of the 192 UN member-states had failed to submit their reports on sanctions enforcement on time. The problem of efficiency in employing such instruments of statecraft also extended beyond the sender parties. After all, returning to her focus on domestic political economies, the structure of autocratic non-compliers – those who are most likely to seek programs illicitly – also made them the most resistant to those very sanctions. Such regimes were centered on self-reliance, on isolated economies centered on their country's natural resources. The most frequent targets were therefore the least vulnerable to economic instruments from the international community. Still, Dr. Solingen concluded by noting that sanctions remained critical to the credibility of the NPT regime. As such, despite their numerous imperfections, their existence has both symbolic and substantive value in addressing the nuclear supply-side.

In beginning his presentation, Mr. Sokolsi suggested that the debate between the NWS and the NNWS centered on two basic issues: 1) the disarmament responsibilities of the former, and 2) the benefits for the latter. Currently, he argued, the consensus view was that 1) the NWS – specifically the US and Russia – must take much more concrete disarmament action. With respect to the issue of peaceful development 2), the NNWS have a per-say right to any form of nuclear energy, so long as they claimed it to be peaceful, could show some sort of civilian application purpose, and made it subject to inspection. However, Mr. Sokolsi argued that these current perceptions were simply not optimal, and they have made actually things worse from a proliferation perspective. After all, 1) the focus on the superpowers has delayed any international efforts at disarming non-superpowers, including India and Pakistan. The pace of US-Russian bilateral action served as little more than political cover for other states to take no action. 2) The focus on the “inalienable right” has allowed the exploitation of the clause, and brought about the real possibility of widespread latent proliferation. For instance, North Korea had diverted those technologies and resources it had obtained via the NPT bargain, prior to its withdrawal from the treaty – without recourse – in 2003. He suggested that the interpretations of NWS responsibilities and NNWS rights were strongly at odds with the intent of the NPT.

The second part of Mr. Sokolsi’s presentation focused on the need to revisit and reinterpret the NPT. Citing the negotiating history that began with the Irish Resolution, he suggested that the value placed on preventing nuclear proliferation at the time was far greater than that placed on access to expanding nuclear energy, even for the NNWS. There was an obvious recognition that any nuclear power was only a few steps removed from making bombs. Given this, given the increasingly real possibility of diversion, he suggested that the “inalienable right” is incorrect for this day and age. Here, Mr. Sokolsi made note of the anachronism that was also present in Article V, when the original writers of the NPT thought that they could obtain benefits from peaceful explosions. He suggested that there needs to be a much sounder review of what is actually beneficial. This includes the quantification of civilian energy costs, the evaluation of what to safeguard and what not to. In order to mute the conflict between the NWS and the NNWS, Mr. Sokolsi returned to the two-pronged premise. First, we must better inform our notions of nuclear energy, and dissuade peaceful development if necessary. Second, we must put less of an emphasis on complete disarmament, and instead consider the hedging activity of states that has placed the world in danger.

Dr. Walsh began his presentation with a historical perspective that echoed that of Mr. Sokolsi. The NPT came at a time when expectations for nuclear energy were quite high. Yet, he took care to remind us that the issues were inherently international – not simply bilateral or even multilateral – and that they were inherently political. It would be foolish to consider the NWS versus the NNWS, to examine any of the three pillars of the NPT, without this realization. As

means of illustration, Dr. Walsh noted that the political aspect of the nuclear issue has already permeated a number of forums. This included conflict at every Review Conference to date, the inactivity at the Conference on Disarmament (with stalled negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty), and the overall lack of progress on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

As he continued, Dr. Walsh provided a rather pessimistic vision of the future. He predicted that the NWS / NNWS stalemate would continue, and that the refusal of China and France to further reduce their stockpiles would become an issue at the upcoming 2015 Review Conference. The events at Fukushima were worrisome as well. He suggested that the nuclear renaissance was essentially over (in the eyes of the public and the international community), with the benefits of peaceful nuclear development severely undermined in light of the accident. For the NWS, this meant a loss in leverage, especially for dealing with non-compliant NNWS such as the DPRK and Iran. To fix the stalemate, Dr. Walsh suggested a few solutions. First, in terms of negotiating strategies, he suggested that there must be a shift from the existing bargain that traded nuclear-for-nuclear: in short, the NWS had to offer more than peaceful nuclear energy to prevent proliferation. Second, and interrelated, he suggested that the NPT must be refurbished, or at least reframed. The fact that the three pillars of the treaty were now being played off one another only enhanced the value of nuclear energy. Changes to deemphasize the role of energy, and fundamentally alter the nuclear bargain, would help thaw NWS / NNWS relations. Finally, Dr. Walsh suggested the rise of stronger institutions, including the possibility of IAEA growth. This seemed to echo Dr. Solingen's point on the issue of enforcement. Such an action would help to reduce conflict in general.

Following the three presentations, Dr. Lee thanked the panelists, then opened it up for the question-and-answer session. The first audience member asked the individuals to predict who is most likely to proliferate in the next 20 years. Dr. Solingen referred back to her profile of the inward-looking autocracies, of regimes that had little or no desire to incorporate their economies worldwide. While she deferred on offering specific countries for the next 20 years, she mentioned that she had been previously asked this question a few years ago, and offered Venezuela and Burma then. Given recent developments in Myanmar, it seemed that the possibility was very real. Dr. Walsh, meanwhile, suggested that fewer and fewer countries would be likely to go down the nuclear route in the future. This seemed to build on a theme he had discussed during his presentation: the end of the nuclear renaissance. It seemed natural that there would be a de-emphasis on the value of nuclear energy, and with it, nuclear weapons. He too declined to name examples. In contrast, Mr. Sokolski provided South Korea and Saudi Arabia. While he did not elaborate too much, he obviously expected regional nuclear dominoes to fall: those two cases were surrounded not only by nuclear neighbors, but

existed in areas with perpetual conflict. Both countries, moreover, had strong economies, and thus the resources to consider nuclear pathways.

A second audience member pushed the panelists from the perspective of potential proliferators. What was the disadvantage of nuclear weapons? Here, the panelists took care to unpack that question further. Dr. Walsh warned of the danger inherent in thinking that any country is essentially a unitary actor – even North Korea. It was disingenuous to consider any country as simply, a “potential proliferator.” Instead, the reality was that there constantly existed internal debate, and the disadvantage of acquisition depended on the character of the institutional actors involved. Dr. Solingen agreed. She noted that it was critical to understand the internal dynamics of countries, to consider the divisions that existed between factions. Returning to the question of the audience member, she referred to a previous discussion about why Switzerland had given up its pursuit of nuclear weapons in the 1980s. The answer was simple: the financial sector would not allow it.

During the question-and-answer, the panelists also reiterated the point that the nuclear bargain had to be fundamentally changed: Mr. Sokolsi jumped on Dr. Walsh’s previous point that the deal had to shift from nuclear-to-nuclear to something else, that non-nuclear benefits had to be present in order to dissuade the draw of nuclear weapons, and prevent further conflict between the NWS and the NNWS. He even provided a more drastic solution, that the NWS essentially remove the “inalienable right” as an item of consideration. He suggested that the means to do this was to deemphasize it, to discourage others from claiming energy without some sort of limits: in terms of institutional boundaries, IAEA safeguards, or regulatory components that would render latent proliferation more difficult.

Overall, the panelists painted a rather grim image of the stalemate that persists. They all seemed to agree that expressing the conflict as NWS v. the NNWS was gross oversimplifying the situation, as there were plenty of divisions within each of those groups. Moreover, the definitions of those groups originated from a period that obviously no longer fit today’s reality. Still, all of the panelists also acknowledged the very real problems that marked the NPT regime. This included the danger of the NNWS who did desire nuclear weapons, the perceptions about NWS responsibilities to completely disarm, and the inalienable right to nuclear energy that had opened up a Pandora’s box of technologies and expertise. Such problems existed on both sides of the equation – the supply and demand sides – and encompassed everything from fundamental ideological divides to basic coordination problems. Perhaps more worrisome was the fact that there appeared to be no relief in sight. Even as the US and Russia took action, the other NWS did not. Even if the UN agreed on sanctions against the DPRK, any sense of timely and uniform execution was severely lacking. And concrete steps, such as the FMCT and the CTBT, remain long in limbo. Drastic change

appears to be necessary – if not to the incentive structure, than perhaps to the fundamental bargain itself.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

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