

De Facto Nuclear Weapons States and the NPT Regime

Session: Regency Room

Date/Time: February 20, 2013 / 14:00-15:15

Moderator: Aruni Wijewardane, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies

Speakers: Ariel Levite, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Senate of Pakistan
Manpreet Sethi, Center for Air Power Studies, New Delhi

Rapporteur: Gordon Wyn Jones, King's College London

Session Sketch

Aruni Wijewardane opened the session with an outline of the non-proliferation challenges of the so-called “de facto” Nuclear Weapon States (Israel, Pakistan and India), in terms of their respective positions towards the NPT and wider NP regime: their stances in connection with the nuclear paths of Iran and North Korea, and their external viewpoints regarding the issue of NPT “universality”, legitimacy and possible future inclusion.

Ariel Levite Israeli, nonresident senior associate in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, emphasized the characteristics of the three de facto states: that none have ever joined the NPT nor broken any rules, but the more significant differences in their respective security contexts, concerns and relationships. Unlike India and Pakistan, Israel “neither is, nor seeks to be, a Nuclear Weapon State,” but decided and remains of the view that the NPT is incompatible with Israel’s broader concerns. With respect to Iran and North Korea, Mr. Levite does not see either regime as likely to give up their respective nuclear programs. Such will remain an elusive goal and the best that can be expected is to “tolerate a hedge” and try to achieve a “mutually defined, agreed upon firewall,” encompassing a degree of improved transparency, safety and security culture, along with ongoing efforts to “attrite the capability for breakout.” From Israel’s experience, Mr.

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Levite cautioned North Korea that “if you build your security on nuclear means, you are in great jeopardy”.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed of the Senate of the Pakistan commenced with the qualitative distinction between the nuclear status of Iran and North Korea, and emphasized that linkage with the de facto three states is not a helpful frame of reference. Providing a critique of post-9/11 nuclear geopolitics and policy inconsistencies (including the US-India nuclear deal), there is a perception that nuclear weapons have gained greater legitimacy as tools for regime protection. Senator Sayed expressed the view that Pakistan’s nuclear path, and that of the other de facto and aspiring nuclear weapons states, should each be viewed through the respective contexts of perceived state security and survival, and that continuing “double-standards and dichotomies over non-proliferation do not, and will not, work” towards realizing lasting non-proliferation progress in troubled regions such as Middle East and Northeast Asia. Effective non-proliferation should move away from emphases on sanctions, isolation and demonization towards more active political and diplomatic engagement. Instead of country specific waivers, a more equitable, criteria-based approach should be applied, which would recognize both India and Pakistan within the NP framework.

Manpreet Sethi, project leader on nuclear security at the Centre for Air Power Studies, emphasized the distinction between the NPT and the more multi-dimensional NP regime; that the deficiencies of the NPT go well beyond the challenge of the de facto states; that NPT membership is not in itself a sufficient guarantee of compliance and that state behavior is a key criteria for making non-proliferation sustainable over time. In this regard, there is a need to disaggregate the de facto Nuclear Weapon States and see them in their respective lights, seeking to encourage participation in wider NP instruments (beyond the inherent inequities of the NPT and its arbitrary, historical NWS definition) and to effectively expand the “global web of commitments”. In this respect, the US-India nuclear agreement, far from undermining the NP regime, represents a positive recognition and advertisement of responsible non-proliferation behavior, with India having consistently lived up to the principles of NWS and NNWS.

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