

Chapter 18. The Post-American World and Nuclear Nonproliferation. 20 Years with No Room for Error



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Throughout the existence of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – and this is no less than 54 years^[2] – and the nuclear nonproliferation regime based on it, the Treaty was predicted to inevitably collapse. And number four looks all the more convincing against this background: only four states namely Israel, India, Pakistan and the DPRK have acquired a nuclear arsenal outside or bypassing NPT. And despite the sharp criticism of the Treaty by a number of non-nuclear states – primarily due to the unsatisfactory, in their opinion, pace of nuclear disarmament – the Treaty remains in force. The balance of benefits and obligations put down in it still meets the interests of the absolute majority of states.

The successful track record of the previous five decades suggests that even the states with high scientific and technological potential are not ready to cross the nuclear *red line* unless there is a real and inevitable threat to national security. An example of such a state is the DPRK, which opted for the creation of nuclear weapons out of the need to deter the United States.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to take the NPT regime as a long-time constant which, despite the loud statements of individual states, will forever remain the reality of modern international life. It is important to remember that the nuclear nonproliferation regime is only one of the supporting structures of the global security architecture, and as its other elements fail, the NPT regime will inevitably bear an increasing burden. It cannot be ruled out that against the backdrop of the ongoing degradation of the military-political situation, individual states will start to implement military nuclear programs. In the worst-case scenario, this could lead to a *domino effect* and the demise of the nuclear nonproliferation regime in its current form.

Scenarios that can lead to the emergence of new nuclear–weapon states

Today, such scenarios look alarmist and almost unthinkable. But in the context of a large-scale and painful reconfiguration of international relations, pacifism, and confidence in the inviolability of the established international norms would be an unaffordable luxury. The main impetus for our research was the fact that much of the existing literature on the prospects of nuclear proliferation is focused on the threats emanating from the developing states. At the same time, the destabilizing role of informal US commitments to ensure the security of its allies, the deployment of nuclear weapons outside its territory and the supply of the most sensitive nuclear technologies to the closest allies (as in the case of AUKUS) have not been treated enough.

So, according to most Western experts, the so-called *extended deterrence* plays the role of an additional supporting structure of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. At the same time, with the role of the United States in international affairs being on decline, the effectiveness of these props will inevitably erode. Moreover, the example of AUKUS suggests the features of a *conditional proliferation* policy, in pursuing which the United States will turn a blind eye to the encroachments of its satellites on a more advanced nuclear missile status. And if so, then it cannot be ruled out that the main threat to the NPT regime will be posed not by the states of the *Axis of Evil* and not *anti-nuclear radicals*, but by the closest allies of the United States that are considered to be quite respectable parties to the NPT.

The fact that such a scenario is not illusory is demonstrated, among other things, by an article published in February 2021 by four prominent representatives of the Western military-political establishment^[3]. Former US and British defense secretaries, the former Australian prime minister and the former US ambassador to NATO are asking the question: when will US allies acquire nuclear weapons? And how can this be prevented?

The troubling future of nuclear nonproliferation has more than once attracted the attention of scholars and politicians. Available in the public domain are declassified reports offering an outlook on nonproliferation regime as viewed by the US intelligence community. The matter is also given ample coverage in regular public reports made by American intelligence agencies. The value of these documents is primarily in the methodology and classification of various factors in terms of assessing the risks of the would-be nuclear powers appearance on the global political map. The recipes offered by the *Westerners* are as a rule consonant with one another: it is necessary to strengthen American leadership in every possible way. And for that it will suffice to patch up the nuclear umbrella by inviting the allies to even closer defense cooperation and strengthening the deterrence of a potential adversary. One of the options is to extend the NATO model of nuclear sharing to the allies in the Asia-Pacific region as well^[4].

Let us leave aside the question whether such proposals are in line with NPT. Restoring and maintaining Washington's ostensible leadership in nonproliferation issues will only perpetuate the risks associated with shaky security guarantees issued to the US allies. The *birth trauma* of the US-centric nonproliferation model is that it is based on a non-inclusive security architecture and does not take into account the interests of those who find themselves on the other side of the nuclear umbrella. In this situation Russia is assigned at best an auxiliary role. In better times of the Russian-American nonproliferation dialogue, the United States sought to enlist the support of Moscow's authority in nuclear matters so that it would not be to the detriment of the US foreign policy goals. Now, after the start of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, the divisive nature of American-style nonproliferation has become especially clear. There are obvious attempts to expose Russia as a *scarecrow* of nuclear nonproliferation, to reduce the whole complex of problems in the nuclear field to the imaginary sins of the Kremlin. This is what had led to the failure of the 10th NPT Review Conference which was held in August 2022.

The continuation of this policy can at best further exacerbate the situation around NPT. At worst, it can lead to the dismantling of the nonproliferation regime as such. The authors sought to analyze the most radical scenarios for the development of the situation in the field of nuclear nonproliferation, which could lead to the appearance of new nuclear-weapon states on the political map of the world. In addition to the obvious case of Iran, less obvious Japan, South Korea, Taiwan^[5], Türkiye, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Brazil were also considered as states and territories ready to *stake a claim for a nuclear status*. It is them, in our opinion, who may be interested in further uncertainty about their nuclear ambitions – either as the *last argument of kings* or as a bargaining chip^[6].

New Nuclear Nine? Countries and Territories With Largest Potential to Acquire Nuclear Weapons

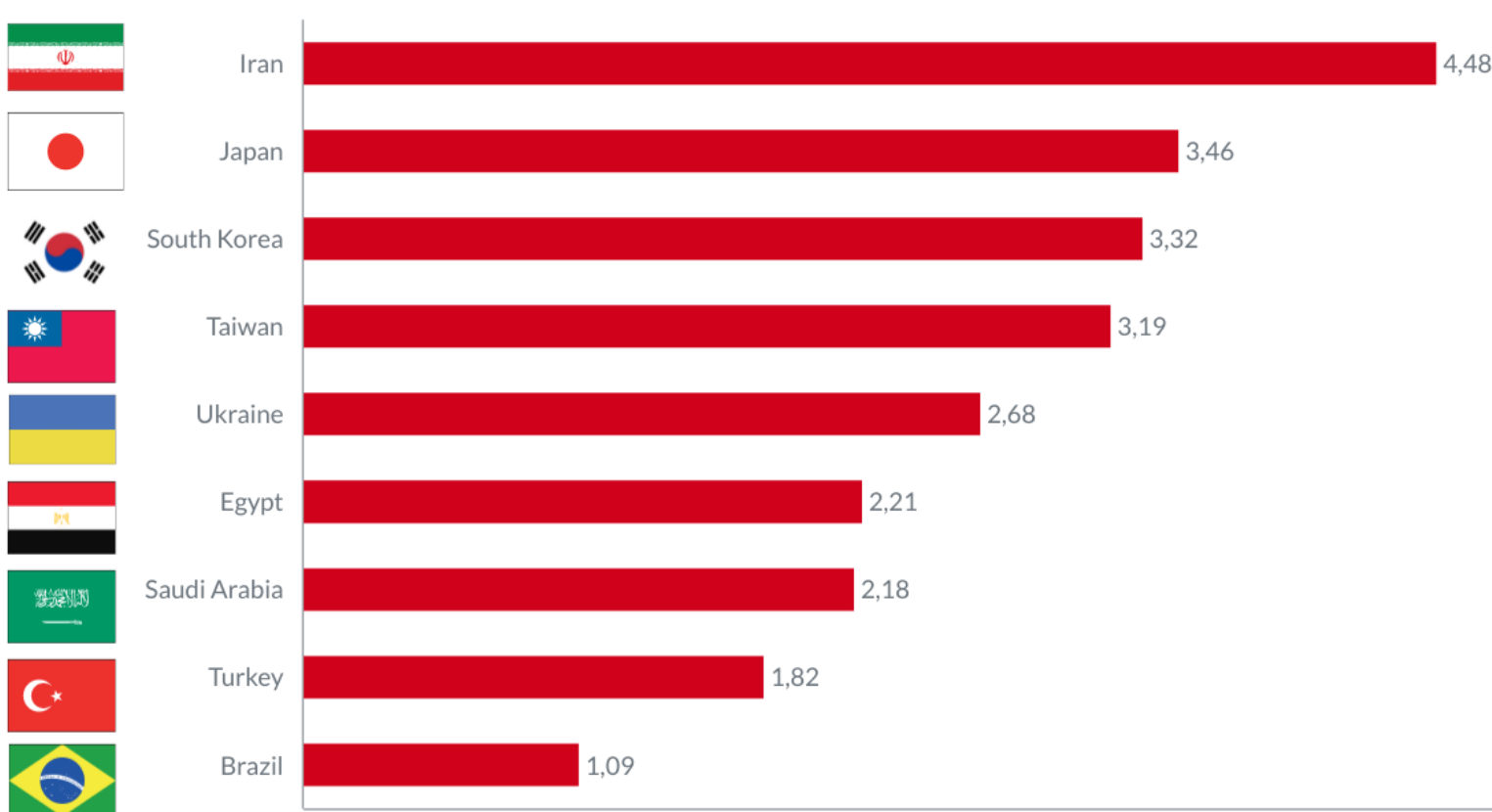


Figure 20. A New Nuclear Nine? Countries and Territories with Largest Potential to Acquire Nuclear Weapons.
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Source: <https://pircenter.org/editions/new-nuclear-nine-report/>

The decision to build a nuclear arsenal is primarily dictated by political factors, not just by the level of sophistication achieved in science and technology. The assumptions that match technological potential with launching a nuclear weapons program lean heavily towards alarmism. The end of the bloc-vs-bloc standoff has dramatically changed the balance between the benefits and the costs of possessing nuclear weapons. The NPT has become an established norm in international affairs, and a nuclear stockpile is no longer regarded as the main attribute of international prestige. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, security challenges that urge a country to develop a deterrence capability shall be considered the principal driver of proliferation. The spectrum of views on the sources of proliferation, however, is much broader.

Over the last three decades, quite a few serious studies exploring theoretical aspects of nuclear nonproliferation have been published. Scott Sagan, for example, identifies three pillars of nuclear proliferation: security, domestic politics, and prestige^[7]. They can be engaged due to some peculiarities of the political process in a state. Western expert community has traditionally emphasized the democratic vs authoritarian nature of political systems. According to Jacques Hymans, the decision to go nuclear – all other things being equal – will be made by nationalist-type leaders who perceive their country as a besieged fortress in the international political environment and are keen to prove its prowess^[8]. There is a separate issue of striking the right balance between nuclear and conventional deterrents to counter threats to national security. Some Russian experts observe that the line between nuclear and strategic conventional weapons has been blurred^[9]. However, a strategic bet on conventional armed forces has its downsides. Whereas even a modest nuclear stockpile can have the necessary deterring effect, a non-conventional deterrent must come together with an effective target designation system and an extensive arsenal of high-precision weapons. Building such a system from scratch, as some estimates suggest, may cost even more than a nuclear program.

The triggers that may prompt states to develop nuclear weapons:

1. The need to deter a regional rival that has weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or highly developed military and industrial potential;
2. Inability to deter a potential aggressor by conventional armed forces or through an alliance with a nuclear-weapon state;
3. Political leadership that sees its country as a *besieged fortress* in the current international context and is nurturing neo-imperial ambitions;
4. Lack of confidence in the existing security mechanisms;
5. Factors that help to rein in these nuclear urges include, first of all, international response, dependence on global trade and relationships with allies and partners, as well as the level of economic development.

The tell-tale signs testifying to the ongoing efforts to create nuclear weapons are the following^[10]:

International political and diplomatic activity:

- Resistance to more intrusive international controls, blocking enforcement of guarantees of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- Preparations for withdrawal from NPT and other nonproliferation treaties accompanied by pertinent discussions among political scientists or political forces.

Suspicious industry developments:

- Building of uranium enrichment and spent nuclear fuel reprocessing capacity way beyond the justifiable needs of the national nuclear power program.
- Manufacturing and deployment of delivery vehicles capable of carrying more than 500 kg of payloads over distances exceeding 300 km.
- Expansion or modernization of factories for producing high-precision systems on a massive scale.
- Procurement or fabrication of equipment for making explosive lenses of specified geometries.

Research and development (R&D) and security organizational efforts:

- Increased efforts by security services and private businesses affiliated with them to acquire dual-use technology in circumvention of export controls, and expansion of military, scientific and technical cooperation with high-risk countries.
- Expanding programs to train more specialists for relevant sectors and a spike in academic exchanges in sensitive fields of research.
- Abrupt decrease in publication activity of nuclear R&D centers, relocation of distinguished nuclear scientists to new unknown places of work.
- Steps to classify information regarding the leadership of nuclear R&D organizations and strengthen their personal security, to tighten counterintelligence controls at related facilities/organizations, and establish new sites with excessively high security levels that are at odds with their stated purpose.
- Creation of special administrative bodies vested with broad powers reporting directly to the supreme military and political leadership of the country, and appearance of organizational links between military and research entities^[11].

Political propaganda at home:

- Sharp rise in hysteria and fearmongering in the public media. For Islamic countries, it could be the heightened activity of theologists issuing *fatwas* that hail the development of WMD as something acceptable and even desirable.

Sine ira et studio

When making the list of a *new nuclear nine*, we proceeded from several indicators: the presence of a military-technical potential, the military-political prerequisites for creating our own deterrence potential, and the presence of public statements about the possibility of creating nuclear weapons. That is to say, we analyzed both the *declarations* and the *objectives*. Below we summarize more than two hundred pages of the research completed in November 2022^[12].

Japan

In the short term, there are no realistic scenarios according to which Japan could go nuclear. Public opinion is strongly opposed to a military nuclear program. Thus, according to researchers at Harvard University, more than 75 percent of the Japanese are in favor of a global ban on nuclear weapons and Japan's accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

To ensure the security of country, the political elite is determined to maintain sufficient technical capacity to create nuclear weapons, if necessary. At the same time, a consensus has developed among the elites regarding the undesirability of such a scenario, priority is given to maintaining and strengthening the military alliance with the United States as a guarantee of the country's security. That is why Japan supported Donald Trump's policy of increasing the role of nuclear weapons to support allies.

In the event of a serious cooling of the US-Japanese relations, the loss of Tokyo's rock-solid confidence in the reliability of Washington as an ally and a guarantee of security, we should expect further reformatting of the policy of active pacifism, the emergence of not only defensive but also offensive Japan Self-Defense Forces. Reports of Tokyo's readiness to acquire *Tomahawk* cruise missiles, as well as the development of hypersonic weapons, suggest that such a scenario is quite realistic.

Republic of Korea (ROK)

There is an obvious demand for power politics in South Korean society. At the same time, an attempt to openly launch a military nuclear program will result in a strong opposition from all nuclear powers, and especially China, which is not interested in the emergence of a new pole of power in the immediate vicinity of its borders.

An attempt to create nuclear weapons would also jeopardize the international prestige of the country and, probably, lead to the collapse of the military alliance with the United States, which is not a desirable outcome for the South Korean elites. This policy may be reconsidered if the policy course of the next American administration is again reversed towards international disengagement.

The ROK leadership is aware of this risk and is striving to acquire an independent non-nuclear deterrence capability. Thanks to its skillful diplomacy Seoul managed to extricate itself from the restrictions imposed by the US on the range and launch weight of South Korean missiles, securing a free hand in the development of the missile program.

The next step could be the revision of the *unfair provisions* of Agreement 123 and the construction of uranium enrichment and spent nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities. South Korea has the necessary technological know-how for that. At the same time, it is not entirely clear if the creation of these capabilities will be consistent with the declared course towards gradual refusal from nuclear energy.

Access to the most sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle can also be obtained through the creation of nuclear submarines. South Korean politicians have spoken in favor of obtaining a nuclear submarine before, but the creation of the tripartite alliance AUKUS, within which it is planned to transfer up to eight nuclear submarines to Australia, has given this discussion a strong impetus.

Taiwan

Despite having some scientific and technological potential, Taipei is aware that a military nuclear program will provoke fierce reaction from Beijing and will likely be the end of the Republic of China as an independent territorial entity.

Ukraine

Phantom pains on the issue of renunciation of nuclear weapons persist among the nationalist-minded part of the Ukrainian elite today. Ukraine has some opportunities to create nuclear weapons. Since the times of the USSR Ukraine has had a developed industrial base, technologies for the production of launch vehicles, skilled personnel and a resource base. Nevertheless, there are significant gaps in the *resource availability*: the absence of enterprises for uranium enrichment, plutonium processing, tritium production, as well as experience in the production of special warheads.

By making manipulative statements, Ukraine, on the one hand, has been trying to snatch financial and military assistance from Western partners. As a result of the Special Military Operation of the Russian Armed Forces, all the threats of Ukraine to build a nuclear weapon, as it seems, should be neutralized. At the same time, there remains the risk of *nuclear blackmail* by Ukraine in two formats: firstly, through the acts of nuclear terrorism against critical (nuclear) infrastructure facilities located in new territories under Russian sovereignty (primarily the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant, ZNPP), including both shelling and impact on its personnel; secondly, through provocative actions to create a *dirty bomb*, the use of which in the war zone or in civilian areas is unlikely to lead to mass casualties, but will inevitably result in mass panic, catastrophic psychological impact, given that Kiev will be tempted to lay the blame for these actions on Russia, since attributing acts of nuclear and radiological terrorism in the context of an acute conflict can be a formidable task.

Türkiye

There are no prospects of launching a military-applied nuclear program in Türkiye. First of all, due to the fact that Türkiye does not face threats of a *nuclear size*. Military and political priorities of the current leadership dictate rather the need for further development of general-purpose forces and equip them with the most modern conventional means of warfare.

The transfer of nuclear ambitions to a military footing will further deepen contradictions with the neighbors, alienate the United States and other NATO allies, and will lead to diplomatic isolation of the country and even to economic sanctions. Given the dependence on foreign trade and the country's deteriorating socio-economic situation, the Turkish leadership is hardly ready to take on such risks.

The existing technological potential is not enough for the development of Türkiye's nuclear program. The country lacks the most sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle – uranium enrichment and spent nuclear fuel reprocessing. Given the current Additional Protocol, it is highly unlikely that Ankara will be able to secretly create such an infrastructure. In addition, as mentioned above, the lack of effective means of delivery will not make it possible to quickly capitalize on the success achieved and, in fact, will lead to a manifold increase in pressure on the country.

Egypt

In the medium term, there are no prospects of launching a military nuclear program by Egypt. The existing nuclear infrastructure is insufficient for these purposes.

Currently, Egypt is not facing existential threats that would dictate the need for nuclear weapons. The relationships with Israel, the only state in the region, which is believed to possess nuclear weapons, are relatively even and pose no military threat. A military atom would not in any way contribute to the strengthening of Cairo as the leader of the Arab world – on the contrary, such a step would probably lead to further fragmentation of the Middle East and would push to a new round of the arms race.

Cost-benefit ratio of creating one's own deterrence potential can change only as a result of the emergence of a nuclear potential in another power in the Middle East: Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia. In this case, the Egyptian leadership will be forced to revise its nuclear policy under external pressure.

Saudi Arabia

In the coming years, the emergence of nuclear weapons in Saudi Arabia is unlikely. The country lacks or is at a low stage of development of the infrastructure, technologies, and skilled personnel necessary to start a nuclear program for military application. The information that such a program took place in the past is speculative and does not correspond to the available data on the current state of development of nuclear infrastructure in Saudi Arabia.

There is also no credible evidence that a political decision has been made on the need for such a program. The statements that we periodically hear from the top political leadership about the need to create a nuclear arsenal in the event of the appearance of nuclear weapons in Iran should be seen as an attempt to draw the US attention to the concerns of the Kingdom about the Iranian nuclear program and its possible military dimension. Saudi nuclear policy appears to be rational, based on a sober analysis of the benefits and costs of acquiring a nuclear arsenal. Today there are no incentives to acquire a nuclear arsenal at any cost: the Kingdom's security is currently ensured by military and technical cooperation with the United States. In the event of further reduction of the US presence in the Middle East, the diversification of military and technical cooperation with other *security providers* is likely to take place.

Costs currently outweigh possible incentives. The Kingdom is dependent on energy exports and technology imports: an attempt to launch a military nuclear program will elicit a negative response worldwide and lead to an increased pressure from the international community. The possibility of imposing economic sanctions will ruin the plans of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to implement economic reforms and ensure the development of the Kingdom on a new technological platform. This, in turn, will weaken his position in the internal political struggle.

As soon as the nuclear energy program develops, the Kingdom will be forced to move on to more *binding* forms of interaction with IAEA and withdraw from the Small Quantities Protocol. However, it cannot be ruled out that Saudi Arabia will be interested to further hold to uncertainty about its real capabilities and intentions. Therefore, the conclusion and ratification of the Additional Protocol seems unlikely in the medium term.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran has the necessary technical capability to build a nuclear weapon. The assessments of the Iranian *threshold time* vary from three to eighteen months. Such calculations are, as a rule, based on mathematical modeling of the efficiency of centrifuges, and do not take into account the subsequent package of work on weaponization.

Even if one takes the data from the so-called *nuclear archive* provided by Prime Minister of Israel Netanyahu for granted, Iran though it boasts some developments in the field of creating nuclear explosive devices (NEDs) will not be able to quickly create a NED suitable for combat use. The alarmists also do not take into account possible countermeasures of Iran's opponents, including sabotage and targeted elimination of key scientists. The possibility of using some highly sensitive infrastructure raises doubts, given close attention of foreign intelligence services to what is happening in the field of the Iranian atom.

The available data does not allow us to conclude with a high degree of certainty that the Iranian leadership has made a political decision to go beyond its exclusively peaceful nuclear program. The ups and downs of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran's move to limit its obligations under the deal, however, blur the line between peace *enforcement* and the start of a military nuclear program. It is obvious that Iran's opposition to IAEA inspection activities fits into the logic of its response to the US actions, and the strengthening of measures to protect nuclear physicists has been brought about by the risks of sabotage.

There are no signs of turning public opinion in favor of the nuclear option to justify the growing economic difficulties in the eyes of the population. There is no reliable data on the creation of some superstructures empowered to coordinate the implementation of a military-purposed nuclear program.

Brazil

Although Brazil has the necessary technological know-how for the possible launch of a military nuclear program, there are no military-political prerequisites for this. The country does not face an existential threat that could require the creation of a nuclear weapon. Brazil is already a leading regional power, and its army is among the ten strongest armies in the world.

The development of a nuclear program requires significant economic costs that the country cannot afford at the moment and in the near future. A nuclear program will also cause damage to the country's international prestige.

Finally, the idea of creating a nuclear weapon does not find unanimous support among the Brazilian elites, including the military, who are determined to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with the widest possible range of international actors.

Neither alarmists nor ostriches

The emergence of new nuclear-weapon states on the political map of the world at the moment is not unthinkable, but unlikely. The present-day deterrent factors are: the relevance of NPT as an international norm, the vulnerability of potential *troublemakers* to economic sanctions, the high cost of full-fledged nuclear programs and the creation of appropriate delivery vehicles. It is enough to keep the above-mentioned states off the edge of an abyss.

As it can be seen from the summary of our assessments, we do not belong to alarmists because no solid reason been found for that during our study. Nor do we want to play ostrich. Pretending that *everything is OK* with the nuclear nonproliferation regime would be short-sighted. This would be fraught with an increase in threats to Russian national interests. The growing interest of some states to a military atom is a symptom of the crisis in modern security architecture. The main source of tension is the United States, the attempts of the Western bloc of to sustain the rapidly crumbling Western-centric model of the world order by military force.

There is a risk that against the backdrop of a degrading environment instead of looking for inclusive security solutions, the United States and its allies may switch to a *conditional proliferation* strategy, supplying sensitive nuclear technologies to allies in exchange for unconditional loyalty. An example of this approach is the tripartite military and technical alliance with Australia within the framework of which Canberra will receive nuclear submarines. And although Washington insists that this level of cooperation is only possible because Australia has demonstrated strong commitment to the nuclear nonproliferation regime, other US allies can say the same about themselves. AUKUS is setting the wrong precedent for Tokyo, Seoul, Brasilia that would love to take advantage of it.

The so-called *American leadership* in nuclear nonproliferation is also getting eroded because its stated WMD nonproliferation policy is put on the Washington's broader geopolitical agenda. Formally, all nuclear troublemakers are equal, but some enjoy a more privileged status. This complicates America's engagement with partners and, particularly, with rivals on nonproliferation where all the parties, it would appear, must have partially or fully shared interests. The most obvious example of friend-or-foe distinction drawn by the US policymakers is Israel which largely shapes America's policy in terms of building a WMD-free-zone in the Middle East, doing its bit to torpedo any consensus on the issue. The United States, however, is not prepared to intervene when its partner oversteps political *red lines* or at least to condemn Israel's actions that clearly smack of terrorism. As for the *foes*, such as Iran, Washington is mostly unabashed in playing hardball. The sanctions, once imposed, are never lifted even after all the US demands have been met, and this undermines the effect of exerting even maximum pressure.

Therefore, with each passing year the United States is left with fewer options to use *atoms for peace* as an enticing carrot in its nonproliferation policy because its cost is mounting out of reach. To be clear, this holds true only for building nuclear power plants as the most advanced form of nuclear energy cooperation. The US position is still strong in fuel supply engineering, and after-sales services. Some US experts also point to America's weakening economic leverage to promote nonproliferation. Multiple examples in recent years have shown that the states penalized by the US with restrictions are unwilling to make any concessions, not least because American sanctions are gradually morphing into a thing-in-itself with no underlying intention to look for compromise. Further strengthening of non-Western financial and economic centers of power will only put the inefficacy of America's carrot-and-stick toolkit in sharp relief.

Moreover, the role of the US sanctions pressure as the main instrument of restraining the spread of nuclear weapons raises concerns. If we allow the weakening of interest in maintaining the nonproliferation regime in Washington, this could lead to a surge of American clientele's interest in nuclear weapons. In this context, the inspection activities of the IAEA aimed at identifying undeclared nuclear programs are extremely important. The politicization of the system of guarantees and the double standards of their application in relation to Western and non-Western states constitute certain risks.

Figure 21. Countries' Potential to Acquire Nuclear Weapons in a Middle Term.

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Source: <https://pircenter.org/editions/new-nuclear-nine-report/>

Our analysis leads to the conclusion that Iran and South Korea are closest to the nuclear threshold both in terms of technical capabilities and in terms of motivation. Iran has some developmental experience in the field of weaponization, which creates an extremely undesirable precedent for the nuclear nonproliferation regime. And although South Korea has a less developed nuclear fuel cycle, one can see the desire of the South Korean elite to take *small steps* towards *technical containment* – a situation in which the capabilities of the South Korean nuclear fuel cycle will at least not be inferior to those of Japan. In the field of delivery vehicles development Seoul is already ahead of Tokyo.

The above-said does not mean that these countries will acquire nuclear weapons. But such a policy seriously raises the stakes in the struggle for the survivability of the nuclear nonproliferation regime and NPT as its main supporting structure. It must be understood that the policy of *small nuclear steps* is a symptom of the growing conflict in international affairs against the backdrop of the end of five hundred years of domination of the *collective West* in international relations. In such circumstances, the attempts to patch up the crumbling US-centric security architecture are doomed to failure.

The shaping of a new world order will take time. The transition period will inevitably be accompanied by a growing number of conflicts and the diffusion of military and technical capabilities. From the point of view of Russia's interests for the next 5-20 years, it is important to determine the following.

First, a desirable image of the future (as hoary cliché as it may sound to some of us), which would help form a circle of like-minded people around our interests with whom we will jointly lay military and political foundations of the future world order. Commonplace criticism of the *rules-based world order* and constant references to the UN Charter and a fairer world order will not do any more. We need a new concept.

Second, the transition risk reduction. On the one hand, the diffusion of military and technical knowledge is inevitable. You can turn it in your favor by strengthening military and technical cooperation with the states with heightened perception of security threats including those mentioned above. But are we ready to accept the fact another one or two nuclear-weapon states will appear in the world as a result of this process? Does Russia need to cling to nonproliferation at any cost and, if necessary, get involved in the next round of Russian-American cooperation on the Iranian or, say, South Korean dossier? One should think twice before giving an answer to these questions.

Russia's role now is to help build a new security architecture with a minimum number of dividing lines in regions where the risks of WMD proliferation are particularly high. In this context, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which has a good potential to become the core of a more stable and conflict-free world order in Eurasia may turn out to be in demand.

No less important is the establishment of a dialogue with those who undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime from within, the so-called *anti-nuclear radicals* – supporters of the TPNW. The Treaty itself remains a thorn in the flesh of the nonproliferation regime. Its political undercurrent only adds to the split among the states parties to NPT. The practical danger is the illusion of the possibility of withdrawing from NPT.

A serious flaw in the prohibition of nuclear weapons remains to be the issue of verification. Assuming that *state N* is only a member of TPNW, it is not entirely clear on what legal basis IAEA will be able to transfer its file to the UN Security Council in the event of a violation of obligations under the safeguards agreements. This requires appropriate legal rationale in the camp of *anti-nuclear radicals*. But it is not advisable to force the issue in IAEA because its resolution will only strengthen the positions of the TPNW supporters.

At the same time, the non-nuclear-weapon states pursuing radical disarmament approaches should be given a credit. They are right – endless pumping of weapons into the conflict regions of the world, the reliance on military and technical capacity for ensuring national security is a dead end. The issue of disarmament must again be put on the top of international agenda. A *new strategic equation* proposed by Russia to ensure a conflict-free environment in international relations is a step in the right direction.

"When the global situation continues to deteriorate, we want Russia and the US, [as countries] bearing special responsibility for maintaining international security, to sit down at the negotiating table to come up with a *newsecurity equation* that will take into account all strategic stability factors and modern military technologies".

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov
in an interview for TASS news agency
December 30, 2020

Source: TASS (<https://tass.com/politics/1241279>)

"On our part, we have presented a vision on how to frame the SSD, and what is desirable to achieve as a result thereof. The underlying idea is to jointly develop a *new security equation* that would cover all factors affecting strategic stability. We want to embrace the entire spectrum of both nuclear and non-nuclear, offensive and defensive arms with strategic capability...there is no way to avoid addressing the issue of missile defense in the framework of the *new security equation*...".

This positive approach towards disarmament by Russia, however, meets resistance from a player who believes it is *the nonproliferation leader* – the United States. This resistance is rarely demonstrated in public. Instead, it is covered with layers of hypocrisy. A typical example of it is the US attitude towards the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Back in the early 1960s, frightened by the Cuban Missile Crisis Americans quickly conceded to an international legally binding agreement banning nuclear tests in the three areas: in the atmosphere, under water and in outer space. The Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), which marked its 60th anniversary in 2023, was in line with the interests of the Soviet Union. And it still is. But coming to terms with each other on underground tests proved to be much more challenging. It took years and even decades to hammer out a mutually acceptable international deal that Russia firmly supported by signing CTBT in 1996. Historical documents of those years show that Americans had been extremely pro-active preparing the ground for CTBT and convincing all and everyone, including Russia, of their commitment to bring this Treaty into effect and to lead this process^[1].

Map 10. Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
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Another example of the *American leadership*... but where did it land us? The United States refused to ratify the Treaty and if we try to look hard for the real reasons instead of finding faults with misused prepositions, this may raise some serious concerns. All this time Washington was stringing Russia and the whole world along. The Obama administration (2009-2017) was particularly good at it. But the Nobel Prize had already been awarded to him... and the rest was just a lot of jaw-jawing about the importance of CTBT, a see-through effort to conceal true America's intention to avoid having their hands tied up by the Treaty.

Without the US ratification CTBT could not become effective. Some other governments that had not ratified or signed it either looked at the United States and could not help thinking: "Why do we need to rush if Washington is quietly sabotaging the Treaty?". And they were right not to. Meanwhile, Americans were trying their best to habituate the whole world to their *leadership in nonproliferation*.

In this hostile environment, Russia which had signed and ratified CTBT demonstrated patience and restraint. However, Russian government did not hesitate to remind Americans whenever possible that its patience was not without a limit.

The decision made by the Russian parliament to revoke CTBT ratification while retaining Russia's membership in this not-yet-in-force Treaty is the gentlest possible step Russia has ever taken. Russia is not going to be the first to conduct nuclear tests. We support this approach. Let military experts and nuclear scientists do some serious thinking – quietly, without political fuss and excessive public attention – to understand whether Russia really needs renewed nuclear testing for our national security, the security of our nuclear arsenal and, if necessary, for its upgrading. Russians are patient people who respect international law and deeply regret that it is slowly but steadily eroding. Insofar as Russia has been caught up in a hybrid war which the *collective West* have actually declared against her, it is not going to feel bound by self-imposed commitments.

Concluding CTBT by 1996 was one of the key demands during the discussion in 1995 on the terms of extending NPT. This demand was fulfilled, although in practice it led to very little, as CTBT is still far from entering into force. The similar situation is observed with regard to the Middle East-related elements of the NPT review process. But in the case of the Middle East it may be even worse, as the *Middle East Resolution* adopted at the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995 as part of a *big package* and together with a legally binding indefinite extension of the Treaty did not produced tangible results at all: Israel is as far from joining the process of establishing a zone free from nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction, as it was in 1995... if not farther away.

In the Middle East the demand for an equitable architecture of regional security is high. Back in the late 1990s, in completely different geopolitical realities Russia began to develop a concept for ensuring collective security in the Persian Gulf zone. Since then, the ideas set out in the document have been updated several times, acquiring a new relevant sounding in the current circumstances. The concept envisages gradual progressing, based on equal interaction of all regional and other interested parties, towards unblocking conflict situations, building confidence, introducing control measures, and ultimately creating an integral mechanism of collective security and cooperation in this subregion, with the creation of appropriate organizational structures. It means that such a system will become a prologue to the construction of a common post-crisis architecture in the Middle East region.

It will be necessary to build such a security architecture in the context of the growing crisis in the relations between Russia and the countries of the *collective West*, sometimes in the face of open and stubborn opposition from the United States and its allies. Under the circumstances, despite the purity of thoughts, Russia is unlikely to cope with this undertaking on its own. China is an obvious partner.

At the same time, it is necessary to understand that to create a new security architecture is much more difficult than to fight for the good and against the bad. Its construction will also require concessions from Russia and China, voluntary acceptance of restrictions. It is the readiness for self-restraint, confirmed by measures of transparency and trust, that will persuade our neighbors and partners of the seriousness of Moscow and Beijing's intentions. Such self-restraint is especially important for China's neighbors, who are wary of its growing global ambitions.

Not just one-time action, but a comprehensive and systematic set of steps *to get ahead of the curve* is the only path for Russian diplomacy to take so that it stands strong on its feet and does not feel, like Porthos^[4], the exorbitant weight of the burden: because, generally speaking, the international nuclear nonproliferation regime that has been functioning for decades with an active, often leading participation of the USSR (Russia), is not a burden for it. This is the solution. And we will have to pay a high price for flawed assessments leading to incorrectly taken (or not taken) steps. After all, the countries of the potential *nuclear nine* with the exception of Brazil, are all located along the perimeter of our borders.

[1] This chapter is based on the following publications: Орлов В.А., Семенов С.Д. Постамериканский мир и ядерное нераспространение // Россия в глобальной политике, 2023. Т. 21. № 1. С. 72-87. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/postamerikanskij-mir/>; Новая ядерная девятка? Оценка угроз распространения ядерного оружия в мире. Доклад. Издание 2-е (исправленное и дополненное) / Ред. В.А. Орлов, С.Д. Семенов. М.: ПИР-Пресс, 2023. – 230 с. – (ПИР-Библиотека – книжная серия). URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/new-nuclear-nine-report/>.

[2] The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. – Editor's Note.

[3] Hagel Ch., Rifkind M., Rudd K., Daalder I. When Allies Go Nuclear: How to Prevent the Next Proliferation Threat // Foreign Affairs. April 12, 2021. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-02-12/when-allies-go-nuclear>.

[4] Daalder I.H., Hagel Ch., Rifkind M., Rudd K. Preventing Nuclear Proliferation and Reassuring America's Allies // Chicago Council on Global Affairs, April 10, 2021. URL: http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/report_preventing-nuclear-proliferation-reassuring-americas-allies.pdf.

[5] Indicating Taiwan separately in this chapter does not imply recognition of its independent status. We consider Taiwan as a part of the People's Republic of China. – Editor's Note.

[6] In 2019, at a meeting of the International Expert Council of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies Robert Einhorn presented a similar list. Of course, according to our estimates, the list of states with the necessary scientific and technical potential is wider than the nine. Among the next in line can be called the five: Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Algeria, and Argentina.

[7] Sagan S.D. Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb // International Security, 1996-1997 (Winter). Vol. 21. № 3. Pp. 54-86.

[8] The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy. By Jacques E.C. Hymans. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[9] Караганов С.А., Суслов Д.В. Новое понимание и пути укрепления многосторонней стратегической стабильности. Доклад // Высшая школа экономики, 2019. URL: https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/doklad_strategicheskaya-stabilnost.pdf.

[10] See: Новая ядерная девятка? Оценка угроз распространения ядерного оружия в мире. Доклад. Издание 2-е (исправленное и дополненное) / Ред. В.А. Орлов, С.Д. Семенов. М.: ПИР-Пресс, 2023. – 230 с. – (ПИР-Библиотека – книжная серия). URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/new-nuclear-nine-report/>.

[11] Paternoster R.R. Nuclear Weapon Proliferation Indicators and Observables // Los Alamos National Laboratories, December 1992. URL: <https://permalink.lanl.gov/object/?tr?what=info:lanl-repo/lareport/LA-12430-M5>.

[12] Новая ядерная девятка? Оценка угроз распространения ядерного оружия в мире. Доклад. Издание 2-е (исправленное и дополненное) / Ред. В.А. Орлов, С.Д. Семенов. М.: ПИР-Пресс, 2023. – 230 с. – (ПИР-Библиотека – книжная серия). URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/new-nuclear-nine-report/>.

[13] See: Evgeii Kholodnov. Interaction on Nuclear Nonproliferation in 1990s Through a Prism of Archival Documents / Russia-US Nuclear Nonproliferation Dialogue: Lessons Learned and Road Ahead. Edited by Sergey Semenov, Vladimir Orlov // Ves Mir Publishing House, 2021. Pp. 424-452.

[14] One of the musketeers, the fictional character in the novels series "The Three Musketeers" by Alexandre Dumas, père. – Editor's Note.

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