

Nuclear Turning Point

North Korea, Iran and Nuclear Disarmament

November 2006

This report summarizes the findings of a symposium on the topic, “Nuclear Turning Point: Does the Quest for U.S. Nuclear Dominance Undermine Non-Proliferation?,” sponsored by the Center for International Policy and the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University (SAIS) on May 8, 2006.

The speakers were Dr. Helen Caldicott, who addressed the topic “The Case for Nuclear Disarmament,” and Selig S. Harrison, who spoke on “Next Steps in Iran and North Korea.” Jack Mendelsohn commented on the two presentations and Thomas L. Hughes was the moderator.

The central theme of the symposium was the failure of the United States and the other four major nuclear powers to abide by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to reduce their nuclear arsenals, as required in Article VI of the Treaty, and the impact of this failure on non-proliferation. Article VI states that the parties to the Treaty will “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date, and to nuclear disarmament.”

Non-Proliferation and U.S. Nuclear Dominance

On July 16, 1945, the United States, the only country that has used nuclear weapons, successfully tested its first nuclear device, and in August of that year dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In August, 1949, the Soviet Union tested its first nuclear weapon, followed by the United Kingdom in 1952, France in 1960, and China in 1964. The Nuclear Club was now established, and the nature of international relations would never be the same again.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which opened for signature on July 1, 1968, was initiated by the five members of the nuclear club to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to other powers. The five nuclear “haves” agreed “not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices” and the “have-nots” agreed not to develop nuclear weapons.

Today there are 188 signatories to the NPT. The most notable non-signatories were India, which called it inherently inequitable, pointing to the absence of a timetable for nuclear disarmament in Article VI, and wanted to keep the option of attaining nuclear weapons in the event that Article VI was not honored; Pakistan, which feared that India would develop nuclear weapons, and Israel. North Korea and Taiwan signed the treaty but later withdrew.

The NPT permits the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes such as electricity generation. Article IV states that “nothing in this treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the



The Nagasaki atomic bomb

2 inalienable right...to develop the research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.” This Article, together with Article VI, constituted the “nuclear bargain” between the nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” that made the NPT possible. However, Article IV has led to continuing controversy, as the cases of Iran and North Korea, which were discussed in the symposium, have demonstrated. The acquisition of plutonium production and uranium enrichment technologies can be the first step toward the development of nuclear weapons if countries wish to pursue weaponization. To make certain that technology obtained for ostensibly peaceful purposes is not misused by signatories for military purposes, the International Atomic Energy Agency was established as a key part of the NPT regime.

Moderator Thomas L. Hughes introduced the discussion by pointing out that the United States has a grand total of 10,104 nuclear warheads and Russia some 16,000, counting both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons and both operational weapons and weapons in reserve. In the United States, some 2,500 are on hair trigger alert. The entire thrust of U.S. policy, he said, is “incompatible with Article VI.” Selig S. Harrison underlined this theme in his presentation, declaring that “the United States is in no position to enforce non-proliferation because the United States itself is in violation of the most important provision of the NPT.”

Among the states that have chosen not to be signatories to the NPT, North Korea, Iran and Pakistan have often been called “rogue states.” Dr. Caldicott

U.S. and Russian nuclear warhead totals dwarf those of other countries.

Countries	Nuclear Warheads
U.S.A	10,104
Russia	16,000
Britain	200
France	350
China	200
India	40-50
Pakistan	< 50
Israel	75-200
North Korea	< 15

Source: International Panel on Fissile Materials and Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

“The United States is in no position to enforce non-proliferation because the United States itself is in violation of the most important provision of the NPT” -Selig Harrison

challenged this concept and stated in her discussion, “The fact [is] that the real rogue states in the world are Russia and America. Of the 30,000 nuclear weapons in the world, Russia and America own 97 percent of them. Why is that never discussed?” she asked.

In his commentary, Jack Mendelsohn underlined this view by asserting that the Bush administration, far from delegitimizing nuclear weapons, was attempting to broaden the range of scenarios under which such weapons could be used. He characterized the possibility of a nuclear attack by state or non-state actors as the most urgent national security issue facing the United States. To reduce this threat, he said, it is necessary to delegitimize nuclear weapons as acceptable instruments of warfare and relegate them to the status of weapons of absolute last resort.

Mendelsohn deplored what he called the widespread “nuclear amnesia” with respect to the devastating effects of a nuclear bomb. This “nuclear amnesia” is dangerous because, with the exception of China and India, which have pledged that they will not use nuclear weapons first, the other nuclear weapon states reserve the right to use nuclear weapons for retaliatory purposes or for a preventive or preemptive attack.

He further suggested that it was a mistake to lump chemical and biological weapons along with nuclear weapons as ‘weapons of mass destruction,’ for, unlike the former, the latter are “the only ones that could devastate the United States, irreparably altering the lives of its citizens.” Other important distinctions between chemical and biological weapons and nuclear bombs are that the first two are banned by international treaty, while nuclear weapons are not, and unlike chemical and biological weapons, there is not an effective defense against a long-range nuclear missile attack. There is also “no explicit ban,” he said,

“on the further development or modernization of nuclear weapons by the nuclear weapon states.”

Mendelsohn’s recommendations for the effective delegitimization of nuclear weapons were fourfold. First, the United States should declare that it “does not consider nuclear weapons to be a legitimate weapon of war and will not use them unless they are used by an adversary.” Second, America should “urge the international community to ban the use of nuclear weapons except in retaliation for nuclear use by others or...if the survival of [a] nation is at risk.” Third, the United States ought to make clear that it “does not intend to resume nuclear testing in order to develop new nuclear weapons.” Finally, America should “encourage the creation of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, the goal of which would be to make increasing areas of the globe off limits to nuclear weapons.”

Next Steps in Iran

In his comments on Iran, Mr. Harrison said that “the conventional wisdom is that countries want nuclear weapons because they feel threatened, because they face real or perceived threats to their security from regional or global adversaries. And that is indeed part of the reality. Iran wants nuclear weapons primarily because Israel has them. Iran and North Korea both want them because the Bush administration talks about regime change and about preemptive war. But let’s suppose that the United States stops threatening preemption. Let’s suppose that the United States negotiates security assurances with Iran and North Korea. Will that be enough to end their nuclear weapons programs? In my view, we can buy time with negotiations. We can negotiate a verifiable freeze of uranium enrichment with Iran and we can reinstate the plutonium freeze we had with North Korea from 1994 until 2002. But we can’t expect either of them to abandon their nuclear weapons option, for good, unless and until the existing nuclear powers begin a credible process of global

nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article 3 VI or, at the very least, join in nuclear disarmament at the regional level through nuclear-free zones.”

Although the advocates of sanctions argue that diplomacy with Iran has been tried and failed, Harrison said, “it really hasn’t been tried.” The United States stayed out of the negotiations conducted by the European Union from November, 2004, until their collapse in January of this year. The negotiations were based on a bargain that the EU failed to honor because it was held back by the Bush administration. The media made it look like Iran had somehow violated the

agreement by resuming uranium enrichment. Actually, Iran had only agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment efforts temporarily, pending the outcome of discussions on a permanent enrichment ban. The EU promised security guarantees as well as economic incentives in return for a permanent ban but subsequently refused to



A nuclear power plant in Bushehr, Iran

discuss the security issues seriously.

Harrison emphasized that the language of the joint declaration that launched the negotiations on November 14, 2004, was unambiguous. “A mutually acceptable agreement,” it said, would not only provide “objective guarantees” that Iran’s nuclear program is “exclusively for peaceful purposes” but would “equally provide firm commitments on security issues.”

Iran’s principal concern, Harrison said, “is the possibility that the U.S., egged on by Israel, will make more serious efforts to bring about ‘regime change’ in Tehran, going beyond the covert support already underway for disaffected ethnic and religious minorities.” To get a verifiable ban on weapons-grade enrichment, the United States would have to pledge respect for Iran’s territorial integrity and rule out interference in internal affairs and pre-emptive military action.

“Not surprisingly,” he declared, “Iran fears growing U.S. military encirclement, focusing on

4 reported U.S. plans for permanent military bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia in addition to existing military installations in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf...”

“Summing up, he concluded, “a resolution of the nuclear crisis with Iran would have to begin with regional security tradeoffs. A freeze of Israel’s Dimona reactor and eventual movement toward a regional nuclear-free zone would have to be one element of a phased settlement that also includes changes in U.S. military deployments perceived as threatening by Iran. Iran, for its part, would have to make verifiable commitments ruling out weapons-grade uranium enrichment and would have to terminate support for terrorist groups that threaten Israel.”

Next Steps in North Korea

“It is generally believed that North Korea is a more dangerous problem than Iran,” Harrison said, “but actually Iran may prove to be a more difficult case. It would be much easier to negotiate denuclearization with North Korea than with Iran if we actually wanted to do so and if we stopped pursuing regime change. Iran has a strong sense of historically-based national destiny as a great power. Iran has petroleum, so it doesn’t need a deal for economic reasons. By contrast, North Korea is deeply insecure and has been actively seeking a deal with the United States primarily for economic reasons. It’s not a confident country like Iran with a sense of national destiny as a great power. It’s part of a divided country moving slowly but inexorably towards some form of reunification. Kim Jong Il and his regime are struggling for short-term survival. He is seeking to develop nuclear weapons to deter a U.S. preemptive strike that would threaten his power and perquisites, and he is ready to trade his nuclear arsenal for normalization and coexistence with the United States. Economic incentives will buy much more significant concessions in Pyongyang than they will in Teheran...”

Harrison contended that the only realistic immediate goal in both North Korea and Iran is a freeze. Getting North Korea and Iran to give up their nuclear weapons option completely would have to be linked to progress in the normalization of relations, he said, and to phased nuclear disarmament by all concerned at the global and regional level. In the

case of North Korea, the United States would have to replace the U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea with some form of regional Korean peninsula nuclear free zone agreement. That would mean giving up the existing U.S. first strike policy. The United States continues to insist on the right to use nuclear weapons first in the event of an attack by North Korea with conventional forces, he pointed out, and “that was the most difficult issue in the 1994 freeze negotiations. North Korea would not agree to the freeze until the United States promised to provide formal assurances against the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the United States. We don’t have to carry out that pledge because the freeze agreement has been abrogated.”

What should be done now?

“First, the United States should negotiate a new plutonium freeze agreement. The other countries involved in the six-party Beijing talks with Korea support this. In return, North Korea would get security assurances and significant steps toward normalization, such as the removal of economic sanctions, energy aid and the removal of North Korea from the State Department List of Terrorist States. It hasn’t been guilty of terrorism since 1987, but it can’t get into the World Bank until it’s off the list.”

“Second, in place of the nuclear umbrella, the United States, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea should conclude a Korean peninsula nuclear free zone, pledging not to use, deploy or manufacture nuclear weapons in the peninsula.”

Criticizing the Bush administration for heading in the other direction with its regime change policy, Harrison pointed in particular to the financial sanctions initiated by the Treasury Department against North Korea. The State Department had initiated a hopeful denuclearization agreement with Pyongyang in September, 2005, but immediately afterwards, Vice President Cheney’s office undercut the agreement by getting the Treasury Department to blacklist foreign banks accused of laundering funds for alleged North Korean counterfeiting operations and to ask all banks throughout the world not to handle any North Korea-related accounts or transactions. On March 27, the *New York Times* quoted a senior administration official as saying that the current U.S. strategy is “to squeeze them, but to keep the negotiations going.” Of course, Harrison argued, North Korea won’t play

that way, and the negotiations have predictably come to a halt. Undersecretary of State Stuart Levey told *Newsweek* that the use of financial sanctions will have a “snowballing, avalanche effect” by making clear to companies and governments throughout the world that dealing with North Korea will damage their relations with the U.S. *Newsweek* said that “Washington has finally found a strategy that is putting real pressure on the regime.”

Harrison cited a *Financial Times* report that Treasury is using the same tactics toward Iran and did get two big European banks, Credit Suisse and UBS, to stop dealing with Iran in January. But isolating Iran financially would be much harder than North Korea because Iran had \$98 billion in imports and exports last year and is much more integrated into the international financial system.

“Will the Bush Administration be able to bring about regime change in North Korea?” he asked. “It’s very unlikely, but the squeeze policy will undoubtedly add to the economic hardships of the people and make it harder for Kim Jong Il to carry out the economic reforms he initiated three years ago. In Iran, the regime change policy will strengthen President Ahmadinejad by enabling him to rally Iranians around the flag with the cry of Country in Danger.”

“In conclusion, Iran and North Korea are not likely to give up their nuclear ambitions any time soon. But solutions are possible, given realistic U.S. policies, provided we create the necessary moral and political climate for non-proliferation by moving toward phased nuclear disarmament. What is needed is a nuclear arms reduction dialogue embracing not only the *de jure* nuclear weapons states under the NPT, that is, the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China, but also the *de facto* nuclear powers, India, Pakistan, and Israel. Until there is such an all-embracing dialogue, the *de jure* nuclear powers will

not feel that it is safe to wind down their arsenals, and would-be nuclear powers will feel entitled to join the nuclear club. My bottom line, in short, is that nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament are inseparable.”

The Case for Nuclear Disarmament

Dr. Helen Caldicott deplored the failure of the nuclear “haves” to make “even a semblance of carrying out Article VI” and of carrying forward nuclear disarmament.

“People may feel reassured,” she said, “that President Bush, meeting in Texas on November, 2001, with President Putin, offered to reduce America’s

stockpile of strategic weapons from some 7,000 down to 2,220 to 1,700 by 2012.” But the so-called Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) that grew out of this meeting did not preclude increased levels after 2012, and did not apply to warheads held in reserve, which could be increased in number.

In fact, she declared, although the cuts look good on paper, they mean nothing. The U.S. will still have plenty of weapons to maintain its first-strike,

winnable nuclear war policy, and none of the weapons will be dismantled, but will be stored, awaiting possible future use. “The reductions do not include the removal of multiple warheads on missiles required by the START II Treaty (The Russians have a monstrous ten-warheaded SS-18 missile, code named “Satan”). And the U.S. Trident submarine fleet, with their invulnerable first-strike arsenal, will be exempt, as will weapons on long-distance bombers being overhauled, and all tactical nuclear weapons.

“In truth, if Russia comes to the party, such bilateral reductions will make it easier for the U.S. to win a nuclear war against Russia, because there will be fewer targets, and the missile-defense system now under construction will mop up any Russian missiles



U.S. President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin

6 that escape the initial surprise attack. U.S. anti-satellite weapons under construction will also be necessary to destroy the 'eyes and ears' of the Russian early-warning system. This is a terrifying but realistic scenario, a logical extension of the Pentagon's current policy to 'fight and win' a nuclear war."

Dr. Caldicott called the SORT agreement "a ploy to divert the world's attention away from Bush's Star Wars project," which she said would provoke an international arms race, entangle third parties such as Britain and Australia, and "lead directly to the militarization of space if it does not cause nuclear war first."

Planning for nuclear war, she warned, could lead to a nuclear event "triggered tonight or tomorrow by human error or computer error, or even by a terrorist attack." If launched from Russia, she said, nuclear weapons could explode over American cities thirty minutes after takeoff. (China's liquid fueled missiles could take many hours to fuel and could not be used in a surprise attack, but they would produce similar damage if launched).

Most cities with a population over 100,000 people are believed to be targeted by Russia, she pointed out. During these thirty minutes, the U.S. early-warning infrared satellite detectors signal the attack to the Strategic Air Command in Colorado. They in turn notify the President, who has approximately three minutes to decide whether or not to launch a counterattack. She said the United States is planning for a "counterforce" scenario in which the President would decide to launch, the missiles pass in mid-space, and the whole operation would be over within one hour.

Landing at 20 times the speed of sound, nuclear weapons would explode over cities, with heat equal to that inside the center of the sun. There would be practically no warning, except the emergency broadcast system on radio or TV, which gives the public only minutes to reach the nearest fallout shelter, assuming there is one. There is no time to collect children or immediate family members.

Most major cities would be hit with more than one bomb, she declared, resulting in craters 200 feet deep and 1,000 feet in diameter if the explosions occur at ground level. Most bombs, however, are programmed to produce an air burst, which increases the diameter of destruction, but creates a shallow

crater. Half a mile from the epicenter all buildings would be destroyed, and at 1.7 miles only reinforced concrete buildings would remain.

Dr. Caldicott, a physician, emphasized that most people would suffer severe burns. In Hiroshima, which was devastated by a very small bomb – 13 kilotons compared to the current 1,000 kilotons – a child actually disappeared, vaporized, leaving his shadow on the concrete pavement behind him. A mother was running, holding her baby, and both she and the baby were converted to a charcoal statue. The heat could be so intense that dry objects – furniture, clothes and dry wood – would spontaneously ignite. "Humans will become walking, flaming torches," she said.

On January 25, 1995, she recalled, military technicians at radar stations in northern Russia detected signals from an American missile that had just been launched off the coast of Norway carrying a U.S. scientific probe. Although the Russians had previously been notified of this launch, the alert had been forgotten or ignored. Aware that U.S. submarines could launch a missile containing eight deadly hydrogen bombs fifteen minutes from Moscow, Russian officials assumed that America had initiated a nuclear war. For the first time in history, Dr. Caldicott said, the Russian computer containing nuclear launch codes was opened. But at the last moment, the U.S. missile veered off course and President Boris Yeltsin realized that Russia was not under attack.

Today, Russia's early warning and nuclear-command systems are deteriorating, she warned. Russia's early warning system fails to operate up to seven hours a day because only one-third of its radars are functional, and two of the nine global geographical areas covered by its missile-warning satellites are not under surveillance for missile detection. To make matters worse, the equipment controlling nuclear weapons frequently malfunctions, and critical electronic devices and computers sometimes switch to combat mode for no apparent reason. Citing a CIA report, she said that seven times during the fall of 1996, operations at some Russian nuclear weapons facilities were severely disrupted when robbers tried to "mine" critical communications cables for their copper and this vulnerable communication system could easily breakdown during an internal or

international political crisis, when the danger of accidental nuclear war would become very real.

Similarly, she declared, the United States is not invulnerable to error. In August 1999, for example, when the National Imagery and Mapping Agency was installing a new computer system to deal with potential Y2K problems, this operation triggered a computer malfunction which rendered the agency “blind” for days; it took more than eight months for the defect to be fully repaired. As the *New York Times* reported, part of America’s nuclear early-warning system was rendered incompetent for almost a year. At that time, Dr. Caldicott recalled, “I was sitting at a meeting in the west wing of the White House discussing potentially dangerous Y2K nuclear weapons glitches. Several Pentagon officials blithely reassured me that everything would function normally during the roll-over. But in fact, their intelligence had already been disabled.”

In conclusion, she declared, if America cannot observe what the Russians are doing with their nuclear weapons – or vice versa – especially during a serious international crisis, they are likely to err on the side of “caution”, and something as benign as the launch of a weather satellite could trigger the annihilation of the planet.

Participant Biographies

Dr. Helen Caldicott, a long time advocate of citizen action to remedy the nuclear and environmental crises, has devoted the last 35 years to an international campaign to educate the public about the medical hazards of the nuclear age and the necessary changes in human behavior to stop environmental destruction. Dr. Caldicott has received many prizes and awards for her work, most recently the Lannan Foundation 2003 Prize for Cultural Freedom, 19 honorary doctoral degrees, and was personally nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Linus Pauling- himself a Nobel Laureate. The Smithsonian Institute has named Dr. Caldicott as one of the most influential women of the 20th Century. She has written numerous publications and has authored five books, including *Nuclear Madness* (1979, revised edition by W.W. Norton in 1994), *Missile Envy* (1984, Bantam), and *If You Love This Planet: A Plan to Heal the Earth* (1992, W. W. Norton). Her most recent book is *The New Nuclear Danger: George Bush’s Military Industrial Complex*, published in April 2001. She is also the founder and president of the Nuclear Policy Research Institute (NPRI), headquartered in Washington, DC.



Panelists (left to right): Selig Harrison, Helen Caldicott, Thomas Hughes, Jack Mendelsohn

Selig S. Harrison is director of the Asia program at the Center for International Policy and a senior scholar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He has specialized in non-proliferation issues in South Asia and East Asia as Washington Post bureau chief in New Delhi and Tokyo for ten years and as a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for 22 years. Harrison is the author of five books, including *Japan’s Nuclear Future* and *Korean Endgame*. He has visited North Korea ten times, most recently in September 2006. In June 1994, on the fourth of his visits, he met the late Kim Il Sung and won agreement on the concept of a suspension and eventual dismantlement of the North Korean nuclear weapons program that set the stage for the U.S.-North Korean nuclear freeze agreement of October 1994, abrogated by the Bush administration in December 2002.

Jack Mendelsohn, commentator, served in the U.S. government as a diplomat and arms control negotiator for 22 years. He was special assistant to the chief negotiator of the U.S. SALT II delegation, senior representative of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in the U.S. START I Delegation and U.S. representative on the Special Political Committee for Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions at NATO. He later served as deputy director of the Arms Control Association. His article, “Delegitimizing Nuclear Weapons,” appeared in the *National Academy of Science Journal, Issues in Science and Technology*, Spring 2006, p. 67.

Thomas L. Hughes, moderator, served as president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace from 1971 to 1991. He was assistant secretary of state for Intelligence and Research from 1963 to 1969 and served as deputy chief of mission in the U.S. Embassy in the United Kingdom.

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