

Priorities to Combat Terrorism and Save the NPT

Lucy Webster

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The May 2002 efforts to create the basis for a peace conference for the Middle East could reverse the escalation of violence that has marked the region. Assertive action to ensure stability for Israel and a new Palestinian state is an essential part of combating terrorism. That is one priority.

A large measure of international cooperation will be required for any success in the Middle East and for defeating terrorism. Beyond a Middle East Peace Conference of the US, the UN, the EU and Russia, the call to step up humanitarian and development assistance is a positive priority too.

Above all, people need opportunities to participate in their own future. It is most urgent to dry up the pools of despair among educated, middle class youths. The despair that springs from gross inequality and the lack of personal and national purpose grips both rich and poor. Especially acute for Palestinians, a lack of identity and hope leads people to become terrorists in many countries now groping for modernization.

A sense of purpose is the top priority for nations as well as for individuals. And to find a common international purpose will require a rational analysis of the roots of terrorism as indicated above. A true international commitment to end terrorism will not be sustained if the United States is simply committed to a military solution based on the idea that terrorism can be eliminated in the way that Nazism was eliminated.

Nor will a common effort to end terrorism be sustained if the United States abandons the nuclear non-proliferation framework that it previously worked to put in place.

The withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty to become effective on June 13, 2002 unless the US Senate acts, is one element in a broad US policy trend to abandon multilateral commitments. Another was the US stance during the April 2002 Preparatory Committee of the 2005 Review Conference of states parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. US ambassador Eric Javits stated, "we no longer support some of the Article VI conclusions in the Final Document from the 2000 NPT Review Conference", citing the ABM Treaty, and referring to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as "another example of a treaty we no longer support."

Likewise the information available on the recent US Nuclear Posture Review shows the terrible path down which the world is heading. The Bush administration's plan to develop and potentially to use new types of tactical nuclear weapons adds three kinds of costs to those already incurred by its existing nuclear policies.

First, the development of new tactical nuclear weapons will pile additional direct costs on top of the hundreds of billions of dollars already being spent on missile defense.

Second, the idea that such weapons could be used in a first-strike nuclear attack by the United States adds to the fear of many countries, including Russia and China, that the purpose of the missile shield is to permit nuclear weapons to be used without unacceptable risk of retaliation. Nuclear powers that have hitherto relied on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty for their nuclear security may now feel compelled to maintain retaliatory weapons sufficient to overcome US defenses, and thus to deter US attack. This could lead to a new arms race in offensive weapons for many countries.

Third, a US plan to use nuclear weapons completes the destruction of the structure of nuclear non-proliferation, particularly when combined with withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban. As Robert S. McNamara and Thomas Graham of Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Security pointed out in a recent Los Angeles Times article, 182 countries signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in exchange for a pledge made in 1978 and reaffirmed in 1995 by the five NPT-recognized nuclear weapon states that they would not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear party to the NPT. By breaking that pledge, the United States would give notice that any country is legally free to develop or purchase nuclear weapons. For many countries that have up until now forgone this option because they are parties to the NPT, that would not be difficult; they could build and sell as their interests dictated with clear costs to international security.

Parallel actions to abandon other international commitments do not bode well for a common approach to terrorism. The US action to "unsign" the International Criminal Court statute, which the closest allies of the United States support is one more case in point. As the US military budget expands to tackle new challenges while maintaining Cold War legacy weapons, the priority given to human security at home and abroad suffers. A legitimate military program can be effective only if it is part of a larger picture. Keeping faith with global network is essential.

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa believes Arab governments will support a conference on the Middle East only if it includes a clear plan for peace with a Palestinian state. That should be a major priority to combat terrorism.

Lucy Webster is ECAAR's Program Director.

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