

AVOIDING THE APOCALYPSE

Robert S. McNamara

[Back to Previous Page](#)

As we talk, the US has deployed 6,000 strategic nuclear warheads. Each, on average, has 20 times the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb that killed 100,000 human beings. Of the 610001 2,000 are on hair-trigger alert to be launched on 15 minutes warning by the decision of one man, the President. Russia has similar plans and deployments.

Despite the end of the Cold War fifteen years ago, US nuclear weapon policies are today essentially what they were when I was Secretary of Defense 40 years ago. If I were to characterize US and NATO nuclear policies in one sentence, I would say they are: immoral; illegal; militarily unnecessary; very, very dangerous in terms of the risk of inadvertent or accidental launch; and destructive of the non-proliferation regime that has served us so well over the 40 years.

The objectives of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, currently underway, should be to strengthen the Treaty and, in particular, to ensure that North Korea and Iran do not become nuclear powers. I believe there is a high probability that the Conference will fail to achieve those objectives. North Korea states it has produced a nuclear weapon and that it will continue to proceed on that path. Iran seems to be moving in the same direction. If both countries continue their present programs, other nations will follow. In Asia: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are likely to proceed; and in the Middle East: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria may well follow.

Protecting the non-proliferation regime

As a first step, I urge that nations recognize that this problem should not be seen as a concern solely of the US. If proliferation proceeds, it will adversely affect the security of nations across the globe. Therefore it is an issue that should be dealt with by the United Nations Security Council. The Council should state it will ask the Secretary General to monitor proliferation and to report to the Council when he believes the risk is increasing. At such times, he should recommend the action required to reverse the trend.

As a second step, the Council should state that no nation not now possessing nuclear weapons will be allowed to acquire them. And it should then rule that nations now possessing the weapons will not be allowed to increase their forces.

The five Declared Nuclear Powers should be required to state:

1. They will follow a policy of No-First-Use.
2. They will reinstate and make explicit their Negative Security Assurance pledges, i.e. they will not initiate the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.
3. They will accelerate reductions in the level of their nuclear forces. Demands will be made that they adhere to Article 6 of the Treaty, which requires that they negotiate, in good faith, the elimination of nuclear weapons. Although this is a requirement of the Treaty (and in the US it is a law because the Treaty was ratified by the Senate) it is totally unrealistic to believe the Article will be implemented in the foreseeable future.
4. They will stop development of new nuclear weapons and will not initiate action to prepare for weapons testing. The Bush Administration has asked Congress to appropriate funds for both these activities. The Undeclared Nuclear states (Israel, Pakistan, India, North Korea) will be asked to make similar pledges.

I do not believe there are acceptable military actions by which the US can respond to North Korean and Iranian moves toward proliferation. Therefore the US and its allies in Asia and the Middle East, must address issues

raised by North Korea and Iran through effective diplomacy. In particular, the US should agree to meet bilaterally with both North Korea and Iran. It should do so in the context of the multilateral negotiations involving the European 3 and the Asian 6.

Both North Korea and Iran clearly fear that the US wishes to achieve “Regime Change.” In addition, North Korea has asked for commitments against aggression. The US should address these concerns head-on. It is inconsistent and ineffective to demand disarmament and pursue “Regime Change” simultaneously.

Iran has demanded recognition of its right under the Treaty to enrich uranium to fuel civilian reactors for the production of electric power. The US and the 3 European nations should assure Iran that they will supply the necessary fuel or will permit Iran to produce it under strict and continuous IAEA inspections.

If the Conference fails to achieve its objectives, as I predict it will, the Security Council should debate the issues I have referred to and take whatever action appears necessary to stop proliferation.

Messrs. Chirac, Schroeder and Blair, the political leaders of France, Germany, and Britain have stated publicly that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is the greatest security problem facing the nations of the world in the twenty-first century. I strongly agree with them.

Robert S. McNamara is a Trustee of EPS. This article is the full text of Secretary McNamara’s statement to the NPT Review Conference. On May 24th, Mr. McNamara spoke at a panel session co-sponsored by the Global Security Institute and EPS.

Economists for Peace and Security

<http://www.epsusa.org>