

Nuclear Hypocrisy

The argument that nuclear weapons can only be handled responsibly by certain states needs a closer examination. By Nazneen Ahmed

Soon after the re-election of George Bush II as US President in November 2004, the EU and US put considerable pressure on Iran to force it to abandon its ambitions of building a nuclear weapon. Although the approach and objectives of the EU and US could not be more different, both approaches are based on a fundamentally hypocritical premiss.

The EU realistically recognizes and respects Iran's argument of self-defence in the light of current US foreign policy, and tries to assuage Iran's fears. It sees the dangers yet another nuclear-armed state presents, and tries to dissuade Iran from taking the decisive step towards nuclear weapons capability. The US, on the other hand, following John Bolton's "I don't do carrots" motto, claims righteously that Iran has no right to nuclear weapons, is in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and is a growing threat to regional stability—and, by the outrageous logic employed by US officials, to the US as well. Together the two approaches nicely complement each other. It's the good cop, bad cop ploy: out of fear of bad cop, the suspect looks to good cop for help. That approach is another issue. In this article, let's look at Iran's right to develop its nuclear programme, whether for power generation or weapons development, without interference from other states.

The hypocrisy of the US argument should be immediately apparent to anyone who can think. The legal and moral claims the argument is based on are nonsense. And yet, the reporting and debate of the Iran story we see in the international media displays the same assumptions. Let's see the situation honestly. We owe it to ourselves as moral beings.

The legal claim

The legal claim is based on the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which countries voluntarily signed with the goal of eventually ridding the world of nuclear weapons. While the first part of the treaty focuses on controlling the spread of nuclear weapons technology and limiting its ownership to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the second part of the treaty expressly requires the Security Council Five to cut back their nuclear stockpiles and eventually eliminate them altogether. So countries that signed up did so in the understanding that they were doing so as part of a process to eliminate nuclear weapons from the world. The Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) agreements (of 1991 and 1993) between the US and Russia supposedly reduced the number of nuclear weapons to 3,000 to 3,500 on each side. Then, along came the Bush administration with its doctrines of full-spectrum dominance and preventive war. In 2003, the administration announced it would start testing a new generation of small, "high-yield" nuclear bombs. That's a clear violation of the NPT, in both letter and spirit. What's remarkable is (i) that despite its own more serious undermining of the NPT, the US unashamedly and cynically makes an issue of Iran's alleged attempt to gain weapons capability (a reaction, it needs to be said, to the US policy of 'regime-change'); and (ii) that so many commentators fail to see the grossness of the American accusation. The hypocrisy, from officials to media, could not be more stunning if it were religious belief.

More amazing still is the silence surrounding Israel's nuclear arsenal. Quite clearly, Israel is a member of the in-group, Iran is not. And that, apparently, determines on which side of the law the two states stand.

There isn't much of a legal argument left, is there?

The moral claim

There are two aspects to the moral posturing. First, that the spread of nuclear weapons is bad for the world and must be stopped. Second, that some states can handle nuclear weapon ownership responsibly while others cannot.

The straight answer to the first is that the same

reasons that prompt concern about the spread of nuclear weapons should also prompt concern about existing arsenals that can destroy the Earth many times over. Yet, there is no move or plan at present to cut back existing stockpiles of nuclear weapons. The concern-for-the-Earth argument is an attempt to discredit Iran morally in the public perception.

To argue that some states behave more responsibly than others assumes (i) that states can be differentiated in their moral characteristics and that those differences can be known; and (ii) that the moral characteristics of states will always prevail over other tendencies, such as the drive to power or economic security. The reply to that is that the moral characteristics of states are as illusory as the mythic nature of nationality. No state is more good or more responsible than another. Just look at what the US is doing in Iraq and what Israel is doing in Palestine! For these states to claim they're responsible is absurd.

Conclusion

The use of the NPT to pressurize Iran is an attempt to keep alive the threat of regime change. Iran is not any less responsible or reasonable than any other state. If the elimination of nuclear weapons from Earth, or even the containment of its spread, is a serious objective, the US should stop its policy of invasion and regime change, and seek peace and negotiation instead of war, and the nuclear weaponized states must agree to a timetable of cutbacks leading to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

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Nuclear Disarmament or Club Membership?

1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) opened for signature.

1970 NPT enters into force with 43 states signed up.

1975 96 signatories.

1985 North Korea signs NPT. 132 signatories.

1990 Collapse of the Soviet Union.

1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) between US and Russia pledges to halve nuclear weapons on each side to about 6,000 by 1998.

1992 Lisbon Agreement, in which three successor states of USSR, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine, agree to eliminate nuclear weapons.

1993 Strategic Arms Reduction Talks 2 (START2) between US and Russia aims to cut nuclear weapons to about 3,000–3,500.

1995 US, Russia, UK commit to moratorium on testing.

1995 Number of NPT signatories at 177.

1998 India and Pakistan conduct series of well-publicized nuclear tests.

2000 George Bush elected US president.

2002 US announces its new Doctrine of Pre-Emption.

2003 US invasion of Iraq. US announces it is prepared to use nuclear

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weapons.

2003 US announces it will test and deploy new type of small, “high-yield” nuclear weapon.

2003 North Korea expels inspectors, withdraws from NPT. Is thought to have two to five nuclear weapons.

2004 NPT signatories number 190, but do not include Israel, India, and Pakistan.

2004 North Korea announces it possesses nuclear bomb.

The spirit of the NPT

The [Nuclear NPT](#), was conceived in the spirit of averting nuclear war and eliminating nuclear weapons. In Article VI, it clearly states an “intention to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament.”

Unfortunately, the NPT is being used cynically by the US to achieve its own goals. For example, at the [US State Department website](#), you'll find this brazen lie: “Iraq was found to be in violation of the NPT in 1991. Its nuclear program was neutralized through action by coalition military forces in the spring of 2003 following 12 years of Iraqi noncompliance.”