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A "How To" of Nuclear Proliferation

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Abstract. This article describes several political psychological approaches to best engage in nuclear proliferation.

A nation-state may intentionally contribute to nuclear proliferation in order to (1) obtain funds for its treasury; (2) help fund its own nuclear weapons technology, acquisition and development, deployment, testing, and maintenance--all irrespective of treaties and agreements to the contrary; (3) help fund its scientific and technological base that can contribute to national security, educational, and economic infrastructures; (4) barter for desired products across the economic and military spectrums; (5) "sweeten" the relationship with another nation-state or other political entity; (6) increase its own credibility and salience on the international stage; (7) increase leverage in negotiating other political issues; (8) increase the probability of some local, regional, or global military conflict and its threat consonant with the proliferator's political objectives; and (9) advance ever closer to some Armageddon compatible with internal psychological conflict, political ideology, or religious prophecy. However, since preventing nuclear proliferation is a public goal of virtually all nation-states--including most of those who engage in such proliferation--a proliferator is faced with diplomacy and intelligence challenges. Both challenges bear on how to best continue proliferation without experiencing significant negative consequences that overshadow proliferation's positive consequences described above.

The intelligence challenge is to engage in proliferation without detection. With ever-improving technical intelligence means employed by supporters of nonproliferation, this challenge is very difficult--even though the (1) human intelligence means necessary to discern intent is often largely inadequate; (2) cover, camouflage, and deception operations can at times be quite effective; and (3) the exploitation of the human element in nuclear safety and security systems is at least possible--as is exploitation of aspects of physical, operations, and communications security.

Luckily--for the proliferator--the diplomacy challenge is much easier to meet. This challenge is to engage other nation-state and political entities with words and acts as a cover for the proliferator's intelligence and counterintelligence shortfalls. What best constitutes this engagement? (1) The outright denying of proliferation activities may be quite credible among the largely unsophisticated on the international stage and within nation-states. This is especially the case if the world's premier purveyor of nonproliferation policy can be at least superficially tarred as a proliferation risk as (a) being the only entity to employ nuclear weapons, (b) continuing to admit the possession of large quantities of nuclear weapons and weapons infrastructure, (c) for many years advocating against underground nuclear test bans, and (d) recently advocating for the collocation of civilian and military nuclear applications within its own borders. (2) The proliferator can admit activities that have proliferation consequences. However, these activities are then claimed to be the responsibility of domestic renegades violating the public nonproliferation policy of the proliferator. (3) The proliferator can admit activities as in (2) above but ascribe responsibility to the recipient of materiel, technology, or knowledge. The usual story is that the recipient promised that all activities would only have peaceful consequences such as the production of industrial energy or basic research. Or the recipient is making the domestic renegades--or even the proliferator--an offer that can't be refused. (4) The proliferator admits to activities with proliferation

consequences and claims that it would sincerely like to curtail such activities. However, the international purveyors of nonproliferation are being so heavy-handed that compliance cannot occur without the proliferator looking like its sovereignty is being violated. Compliance, thus, would lead to exacerbation of nationalistic fervor and political destabilization. (5) The proliferator may be adept at pointing out examples wherein the purveyors of nonproliferation have "bent the rules" or even broken them. (See [1] above in this paragraph.) (6) The proliferator states it does not have the requisite ability to develop, implement, and monitor appropriate safety and security measures. (7) To increase the credibility of (1) to (6), the proliferator might occasionally expel a diplomat or representative or two from the recipient nation-state or political entity. Sporadically, a contract may be discovered, cancelled, or held up. Or a seizure of nuclear materiel or nuclear trafficking network is very well-publicized. Much of the above relates to outright deception, some to a sad state of affairs. At times it is difficult to tell the difference. Often, leading nation-states in the nonproliferation arenas take actions or nonactions that ignore or exacerbate the problem.

What can significantly stop the proliferator? Probably nothing--not even intelligence that the recipient may plan on employing nuclear weapons against the proliferator. This intelligence may merely be viewed as disinformation, as easily deterred by the proliferator's own nuclear assets, merely the "price of doing business" in an era of globalization, not salient enough in the pressing everyday life of bureaucratic politics and the domestic "power game," or otherwise discounted by magical thinking.

A strong case can be made that the probability of nuclear weapons employment or its threat--terrorism or other variants of nuclear politics--is increasing, not decreasing, in the post-Cold War era. The psychological model of several discrete sources of threat and rules of engagement has been superseded by a field theory of ever-shifting suspects, assets, and modi operandi. (See Arkin, W.M. (November/December 1997). What's "new"? The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 53(6); Erlanger, S. (January 16, 1998). Russia promises to stop companies from aiding Iran's missile program. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Matlock, J. (February 5, 1998). Russia's leaking nukes. The New York Review of Books, 15-18; Mello, G. (May/June 1997). New bomb, no mission. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 53(3); Philosophical Issues in verification of weapons limitation, reduction, and nonproliferation treaties. (October 3, 1997). IBPP, 3(10); (Supercomputer sales and nuclear proliferation: The surrealist top ten. (July 4, 1997). IBPP, 2(10); Weisman, J. (July/August 1997). Who's minding the store? The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 53(4); When the "soft" sciences become hard: The safety of Canadian nuclear reactors. (December 5, 1997). IBPP, 3(18).)(Keywords: Intelligence, Nuclear Proliferation.)