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GCSP Policy Brief Series

The GCSP policy brief series publishes papers in order to assess the policy challenges, dilemmas, and policy recommendations in *all aspects* of transnational security and globalization. The series was created and is edited by Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan, Senior Scholar in Geostrategy and Director of the Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security.

Editorial of GCSP Policy Brief No. 19 Proliferation, Non-state Actors, and the Impact on Global Security

Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan
Senior Scholar in Geostrategy and
Director of the Program on the
Geopolitical Implications of Globalization
and Transnational Security
Geneva Centre for Security Policy

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To comment, please email Bethany Webster at b.webster@gcsp.ch.

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Review and Critique

Following the end of the Cold War, there was a considerable degree of optimism with regard to the diminishing relevance of nuclear weapons. Yet, rather than being marginalized, nuclear weapons continue to be perceived by some as essential to responding to today's challenges to security and stability. At the heart of the nuclear-arms-control (and, thus, non-proliferation) crisis is what Joachim Krause has dubbed "nuclear orthodoxy."¹ Major nuclear powers have sought to preserve as far as possible their old nuclear postures, establishments, and weaponry. Large numbers of strategic, as well as tactical, nuclear weapons are still held by the former superpowers, and China has modernized its nuclear arsenal.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is plagued by the inconsistency which provides a fundamental core of its power. The possession and control of nuclear weapons was banned for some, but not the accepted nuclear powers (the United States, Russia/Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China) under the auspicious that these states would work towards disarming their nuclear arsenals. Due to the fact that this has failed to materialize, the NPT has lost much of its credibility.² Additionally, since the establishment of the NPT, a number of other de facto nuclear states have emerged (India, Israel, and Pakistan) and there are other states which are working towards this status as well (Iran and North Korea). Subsequently, regional stability faces a prominent threat through the proliferation and possession of nuclear weapons.

As Brad Roberts notes, there are also states that are determined to gain the strategic leverage that possession of weapons of mass destruction is presumed to bring. The motivation for proliferation has also changed. What drove proliferation in the 1950s and 1960s is not what propels proliferation today: in many cases, regional competition.³

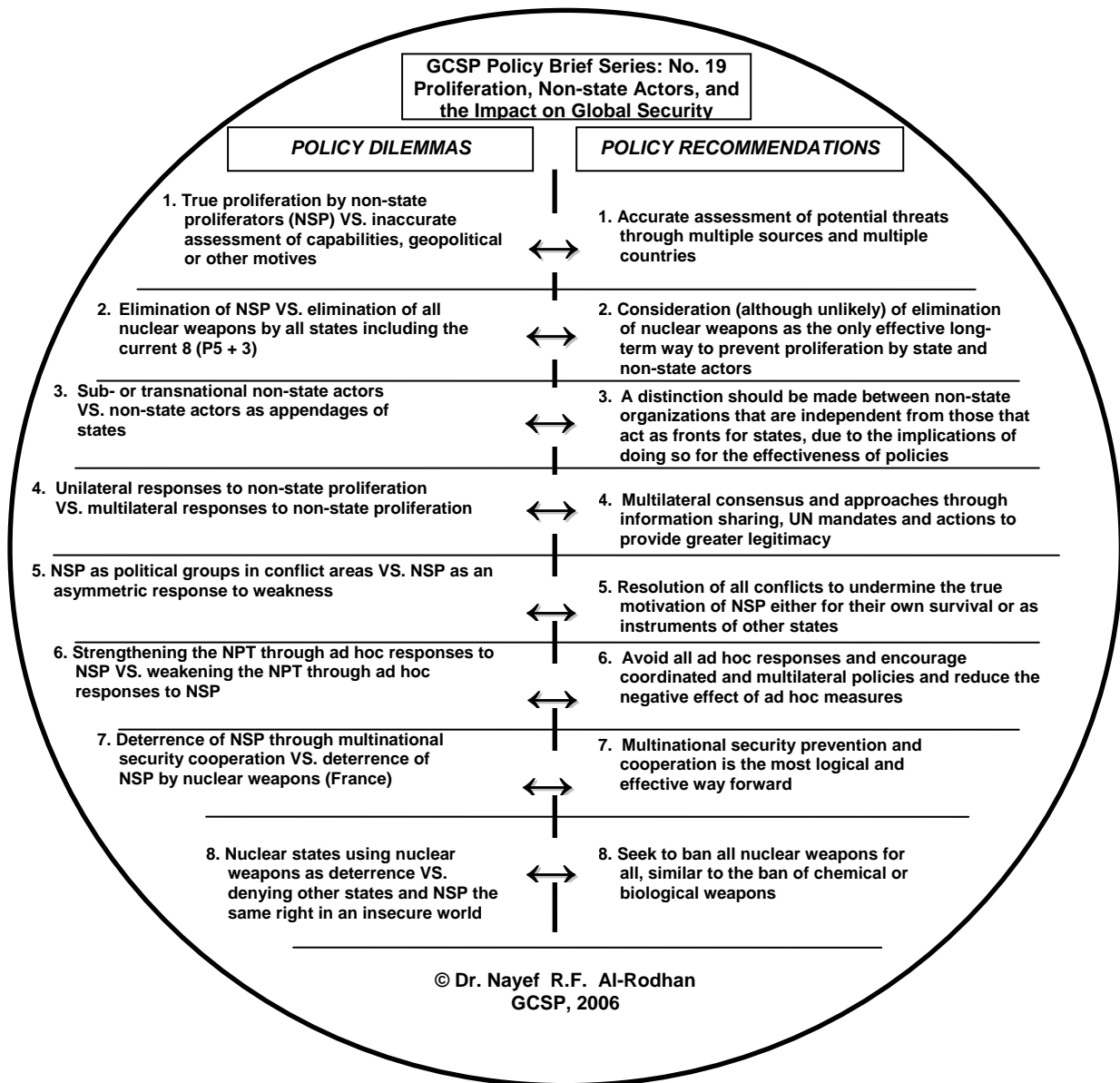
As Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu notes in his policy brief, preventing non-state actors from acquiring nuclear arms and materials poses an additional challenge.⁴ The nuclear non-proliferation regime faces the problem of preventing terrorist groups from acquiring nuclear materials. This task is made especially difficult given the existence of secondary suppliers and dual-use technology. Indeed, dealing with non-state actors represents a new problem for the state-based NPT as non-state actors continually increase their influence. Yet, this also means that there will be a greater impetus to develop ad hoc, short-term, unilateral responses to address proliferation by non-state actors. Such actions risk further weakening the existing treaty-based non-proliferation regime.

Thus, while the Cold War rivalry has disappeared, the much anticipated "new world order" has failed to appear. Failure to address persistent security concerns has, as Mohamed ElBaradei has lamented, resulted in a "new world instability."⁵ The non-proliferation regime has now to prevent not only states from proliferating but also non-state actors that fall outside of

multilateral measures. Thus, the non-proliferation regime will need to be overhauled in order to deal more effectively not only with states but also with non-state proliferators.

Dilemmas and Our Recommendations

At present, no consensus exists as to how best to respond to the above-mentioned challenges. The understanding of how the non-proliferation regime can be effective and relevant will be the key to resolving many of the threats surrounding proliferation. We identify eight dilemmas related to this issue area and eight corresponding recommendations that may contribute to the debate.



The non-proliferation regime faces serious challenges as a result of non-state proliferators. A large part of the long-term solution to this problem lies with nuclear states. A reduction of the proliferation threat posed by non-state actors requires at least the eventual marginalization of

nuclear weapons by nuclear powers themselves – that means the P5, as well as three new nuclear states currently outside the NPT. This presents a formidable challenge, given the continued “nuclear orthodoxy” shared by the P5, not to mention the fact that additional states are “determined proliferators” and are motivated by a variety of factors.

New supplier nations also render the task of preventing non-state proliferators all the more complex, given the diffusion of materials, technologies, and expertise that have both civilian and military uses, as well as their position outside the NPT.⁶ As ElBaradei has pointed out, the current system of export controls is also inadequate in that it relies on informal arrangements that are non-binding, limited in membership, and, moreover, that fail to include many countries with growing industrial capacities.⁷

The necessary response to non-state actors that are suspected of having gained nuclear capacity is also complex. Should states, for example, engage in ad hoc, unilateral, punitive actions? In our view, all ad hoc responses should be avoided, since they undermine multilateral efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons. Instead, coordinated and multilateral policies should be encouraged. One of the difficulties that must be faced when taking any form of punitive action is that of ascertaining whether proliferation has, in fact, taken place. Inaccurate assessments may only help to nurture the perception that hidden geopolitical motives are at play. Thus, it is imperative that intelligence be developed through the use of multiple sources, as well as through a considerable degree of intelligence sharing between countries. In addition, multilateral approaches, based on information and intelligence cooperation, ought to be backed up by United Nations mandates in order to lend legitimacy to non-proliferation measures.

Responding to non-state proliferators also raises another issue: How should non-state proliferators that are political groups in conflict areas be dealt with? Ultimately, a lasting solution to the problem depends on addressing the root causes of insecurity and instability, which include both regional rivalries and conflicts.⁸ Resolution of all conflicts should be sought in order to undermine the true motivation of non-state proliferators that obtain nuclear materials either for their own survival or as instruments of other states. The effectiveness of responses also depends on being able to make the distinction between non-state proliferators that act as appendages of states and non-state organizations that act independently from states.

Conclusion

Perhaps the lack of consensus on how best to respond to threats to security and stability is one of the biggest obstacles to progress in the area of non-proliferation. Non-state proliferators provide a challenge to states, primarily because they are extremely difficult to deal with through traditional non-proliferation measures. Over the long term, ongoing regional

competition and conflicts, as well as the gap between rich and poor, should be ameliorated. In the short to medium term, multilateral efforts to prevent, as well as to deal with, proliferation should be strengthened.

References

¹ J. Krause, "The Crisis in Nuclear Arms Control," in J. Krause and A. Wenger (eds.), *Nuclear Weapons into the 21st Century: Current Trends and Future Prospects* (Bern, etc.: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 26.

² Krause and Wenger, *ibid.*

³ B. Roberts, "Rethinking N + 1," *National Interest*, No. 51, Spring 1998.

⁴ For the brief in its entirety, please see the policy brief series as a part of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy's Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security at <http://www.gcsp.ch/e/publications/Globalisation/index.htm>.

⁵ M. ElBaradei, "Nuclear Non-proliferation: Global Security in a Rapidly Changing World," Statements of the Director, Washington, DC, June 21, 2004.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*