

7. Nuclear arms control and non-proliferation

Overview

In 2012 the nuclear programme of Iran remained at the centre of international concerns about the spread of nuclear weapons (see section I in this chapter). Little progress was made towards resolving the long-running controversy over the scope and nature of the programme. The resumption of talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany (the 'P5+1' states) failed to break the deadlock over Iran's non-compliance with the Security Council's demands that Iran suspend all uranium enrichment and other sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities. Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were also unable to agree on a framework plan for addressing the IAEA's concerns that Iran had pursued nuclear activities with possible military dimensions, in contravention of its commitments under the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The impasse led to renewed calls to expand the IAEA's legal powers to investigate NPT parties suspected of violating their treaty-mandated safeguards agreements, even beyond those set out in the Model Additional Protocol.

The lack of progress in these two separate but closely related sets of talks fuelled speculation that some states—specifically, Israel or the United States—might prioritize extra-legal measures, or even resort to the preventive use of military force, to deal with Iran's suspected nuclear weapon programme. The renewed attention to military options raised further doubts about the efficacy of international legal approaches, in particular the use of punitive economic sanctions, in dealing with suspected or known cases of states violating important arms control treaty obligations and norms.

The Six-Party Talks on the denuclearization of North Korea remained suspended in 2012, while North Korea reaffirmed its status as a nuclear weapon-possessing state (see section II). In an apparent breakthrough, North Korea agreed to suspend its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in exchange for humanitarian assistance from the USA. However, the deal soon broke down when North Korea launched a satellite-carrying rocket that the USA and its allies in the region described as a disguised ballistic missile test.

There was a bright spot for the nuclear non-proliferation regime when, in November 2012, Myanmar announced that it would sign an additional protocol to its safeguards agreement with the IAEA giving the agency expanded rights of access to nuclear-related sites and information in the country. Myanmar also pledged full transparency and cooperation with the agency in answering questions about alleged undeclared nuclear activities in

the past, including the procurement of sensitive equipment from North Korea. This unexpected decision boosted international efforts to increase nuclear transparency and universalize the Model Additional Protocol.

The issue of the future of non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons in Europe came to the fore with the completion by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of its Defence and Deterrence Posture Review (DDPR) in 2012 (see section III). The DDPR reaffirmed that nuclear weapons remained a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence, as outlined in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, and did not recommend any force posture changes regarding US nuclear weapons stationed in Europe. At the same time, by saying that NATO would consider options to further reduce non-strategic nuclear weapons if Russia undertook reciprocal measures, the DDPR left open the possibility for extending nuclear arms control measures beyond the 2010 Russian–US New START treaty.

In 2012 the risks of nuclear terrorism and the illicit diversion of nuclear and radioactive materials continued to be discussed at the highest political level. In March, 53 heads of state and government gathered at the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea, for a meeting aimed at strengthening legal and regulatory arrangements for securing nuclear materials and facilities worldwide (see section IV). The leaders reviewed implementation of the voluntary commitments made at the 2010 Washington Nuclear Security Summit and issued a communiqué identifying priority areas for increasing the security of nuclear and radiological materials. They also considered the relationship between nuclear safety and security in the light of the accident in 2011 at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan. The leaders agreed to convene a third summit meeting, in the Netherlands in 2014, amid discussions about how to sustain nuclear security cooperation.

The nearly 40-year-old proposal for establishing a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East raised new controversy in 2012. Finland, acting in the role of a special facilitator, was scheduled to host an international conference on the issue in December, in line with a decision taken at the 2010 NPT Review Conference and pursuant to a resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. However, in November the conference co-sponsors—Russia, the United Kingdom and the USA—announced that the meeting would not be held in 2012 because some states in the region had not yet agreed to participate. A key question dividing the states was whether the zone should be seen as a means towards a more stable and secure Middle East, or whether it would come as a result of an improved security environment in the region. The decision to postpone the conference was met with little surprise but considerable disappointment. One effect of the postponement was to call into question the credibility of the NPT action plan for the 2010–15 review cycle.