

7. Nuclear arms control and non-proliferation

Overview

In 2013 international efforts to resolve the long-running controversy over the scope and nature of Iran's nuclear programme made encouraging progress (see section I in this chapter). In November the negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 states (the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus Germany) produced a six-month interim deal as a first step towards a longer-term comprehensive agreement aimed at providing assurances that Iran's nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes. Under the deal Iran agreed to a series of practical measures restricting its uranium-enrichment programme and heavy-water nuclear reactor project in exchange for limited relief from US and European Union (EU) financial and trade sanctions.

Earlier in November Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) signed a framework agreement for cooperation to increase the transparency of Iran's nuclear programme. The agreement included a set of initial undertakings by Iran to give the IAEA additional information about, and greater access to, its nuclear sites and facilities. The agreement on the confidence-building and transparency measures was seen as setting the stage for the IAEA to pursue its investigation of allegations that Iran had carried out nuclear activities with possible military dimensions, in contravention of its commitments under the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The tentative breakthroughs achieved in the two separate, but closely related, sets of talks did not resolve fundamental differences over the nature of Iran's nuclear energy rights under the NPT or the future of its sensitive nuclear fuel cycle activities. They did contribute to dampening speculation that some states—in particular, Israel—might prioritize extra-legal measures, or even resort to the preventive use of military force, to deal with a suspected Iranian nuclear weapon programme. The agreements also enhanced the credibility of international legal approaches, including UN Security Council sanctions, for addressing suspected or known cases of states violating important arms control treaty obligations and norms.

In 2013 tensions over the nuclear weapon programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) escalated sharply before gradually abating (see section II). In February North Korea conducted its third nuclear test explosion through which it claimed to have certified a lighter and more compact nuclear warhead design. Its rejection of the UN Security Council's condemnation of the test was followed by a series of

provocative steps that raised the spectre of military conflict with the USA and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). During the year North Korea's leadership reaffirmed its intention to retain nuclear weapons for the indefinite future as a core element of its 'military-first' policy, and it articulated a long-term strategy for expanding and improving the country's nuclear forces. The year ended with little optimism about the prospects for restarting the stalled Six-Party Talks aimed at inducing North Korea to give up its nuclear arsenal in exchange for international assistance.

In other developments, Russia and the USA agreed a bilateral accord to replace the existing legal framework for implementing nuclear security and disarmament assistance activities in Russia under the landmark Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programme (see section III). The US-funded CTR programme, which began in 1992, has continued in Russia with an expanded range of activities for dismantling strategic nuclear forces, destroying Soviet-era chemical weapons, and ensuring the safety and custodial security of nuclear materials. In scaling back or ending key CTR programme activities in Russia, the new agreement reflected the evolution of Russian-US relations in the direction of a more equal partnership.

During the year there were signs of growing international frustration with the lack of progress made in advancing the multilateral nuclear disarmament agenda. Much unfinished business remained on that agenda, in particular the opening of negotiations on the long-stalled fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) and the bringing into force of the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Efforts to promote an alternative international dialogue on nuclear disarmament, one which placed the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons at centre stage, gained momentum during the year (see section IV). In addition, in 2013 the UN General Assembly convened for the first time a new Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to develop proposals to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Finally, the status of a proposed international conference on establishing a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East remained a source of controversy in 2013. The decision to hold the conference had been taken at the NPT Review Conference in 2010, pursuant to the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. The failure to convene the conference by the end of 2012 had disappointed many states in the region and elsewhere. The continued deadlock in 2013 over setting a date for the event led Egypt to stage a symbolic protest by walking out of the Preparatory Committee meeting for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. The Egyptian move called into question the credibility of the NPT action plan for the 2010-15 review cycle.