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Friday, November 26, 2004

Sandia Boss Suggests Nuke Alliances; Deterrence Plays Smaller Role

By **John Fleck**
Journal Staff Writer

With the old U.S.-Soviet nuclear balance gone, a new international framework is needed to deal with the threat of nuclear weapons, according to Sandia National Laboratories President C. Paul Robinson.

In a commentary published Thursday in the British science journal *Nature*, Robinson argues that the advantage of nuclear deterrence as a tool to prevent war is shrinking since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

Regional security arrangements similar to Europe's NATO alliance, in which one or a few nuclear-armed nations band together with non-nuclear allies to look out for one another's collective security, could work, according to Robinson.

That would eliminate the temptation for non-nuclear nations to try to get the bomb to protect themselves, according to Robinson.

Such an alliance could, for example, help deal with problems in Korea, where North Korea is believed to be developing a nuclear arsenal. Robinson wrote that he is even optimistic that North Korea could eventually be brought into such an alliance.

Critics of Robinson's argument point out that NATO itself did not succeed in halting the spread of nuclear weapons. When it was formed in 1949, only the United States had the bomb, noted Zia Mian, an arms control scholar at Princeton

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University.

"Two of NATO's original members, the United Kingdom and France, went on to develop nuclear weapons," Mian said in an e-mail interview. "Nor does he care to bring up the fact that the U.S. has long promised to guarantee Israel's security, and yet Israel insists on having its own nuclear weapons."

Robinson was on vacation this week and could not be reached for comment.

As president of Albuquerque-based Sandia, one of the nation's three nuclear weapons laboratories, and a veteran arms control negotiator, Robinson has long been involved in international nuclear weapons policy.

Robinson's role has at times been controversial.

In 1999, his testimony played a critical role in the Senate defeat of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. An influential 2001 talk he gave in Albuquerque helped lay the groundwork for efforts to modernize and expand the role of U.S. nuclear weapons.

In his *Nature* paper, Robinson argues that the traditional role of deterrence is less important than it once was. That role is based on heavily armed U.S. and Soviet adversaries maintaining an uncomfortable peace because of the devastating potential posed by their nuclear weapons if they made war.

"I strongly believe that the advantage of nuclear deterrence reached a peak with the end of the cold war more than a decade ago, and has been fading ever since," Robinson said in *Nature*.

In dealing with future nuclear threats, Robinson expresses little confidence in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, negotiated in the 1960s and viewed by many in the arms-control community as the primary tool for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

The NPT identifies five nuclear weapon states— the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom— and requires all other signatories to forswear nuclear weapons.

The NPT also requires the five nuclear powers to eventually negotiate total nuclear disarmament, something they have been unable or unwilling to do. Robinson does not expect that to change.

"I have never put much faith in the notion that 'complete and total disarmament' is a realizable goal in the near-term," he wrote.

Princeton's Mian was sharply critical of Robinson's apparent repudiation of the United States' obligation under the treaty to work toward nuclear disarmament.

"Can you imagine the reaction if senior nuclear complex officials in non-nuclear weapons countries were to stop saying the NPT was a legal obligation but rather a question of 'faith' in a 'notion,'" Mian noted.



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