

such actions would provide for the ailing non-proliferation treaty.

A second area for urgent attention should centre on the security of the world's nuclear weapons and sources of highly enriched uranium and plutonium. Progress has been made in this area in recent years through initiatives such as the G8 global threat reduction programme, but we need to move more quickly given the threat from nuclear terrorism. Hillary Clinton's recent commitment to remove all nuclear material from the world's most vulnerable nuclear sites and effectively to secure the remainder during her first term in office, in the event of her election to the US presidency, is a welcome sign that the message is beginning to strike home.

Third, we need urgent progress on the creation of an international nuclear fuel bank that guarantees access to uranium for nuclear power reactors at reasonable prices. This could initially be built around the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and eventually be run through the International Atomic Energy Agency. This key innovation would decouple states' use of civil nuclear power from the need to develop their own enrichment programmes. As such, it would contribute significantly to reducing the number of states in danger of becoming proliferation risks, while still allowing those choosing nuclear energy to have access to reliable energy supplies. The key debates will be over governance of such a bank and over the extent of membership in it, but these questions should not prevent serious dialogue on how to move in this direction. The recent Saudi suggestion—a shared uranium enrichment plant in Switzerland, available to all countries in the middle east—is an example of the role nuclear fuel banks could play in the management of regional nuclear tensions in some parts of the world, even if a global regime takes longer to establish.

This trajectory for policy at the international level also has implications for Britain. None of the challenges presented here can most effectively be addressed through unilateral action on nuclear disarmament, and there are still some conceivable inter-state security scenarios in which it makes sense for Britain to possess a nuclear deterrent. That said, there is still significant scope for the government to modify both the tone and substance of its decision to renew Trident. It should now switch to a twin-track strategy of renewal on the one hand, while trying to negotiate it away as part of a wider multilateral process on the other. The cause of a nuclear weapons-free world should be one of the great historic missions of any progressive government, especially in such a dangerous and potentially unstable strategic climate.

Gordon Brown, far from giving Trident up for nothing, should use his status as the leader of a nuclear weapons state to invite the leaders of the other nuclear powers to exploratory talks on how best to kickstart multilateral nuclear disarmament and further build confidence in the existing non-proliferation regime. He should also commit more resources to the attempt to secure stockpiles of nuclear weapons and fissile material around the world. Though the government has committed £750m over ten years to this, this represents a tiny proportion of its security budget in this area, despite its crucial importance in reducing the threat of nuclear terrorism. These measures, building on Brown's recently stated willingness to consider the fuel bank option in relation to Iran, would put Britain at the forefront of attempts to reduce the nuclear threat. The vision is of a world free of nuclear weapons. Gordon Brown should embrace it.

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## New thinking on nukes

by Ian Kearns, Deputy Director, ippr.

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Recent discussion on nuclear weapons policy in Britain has been dominated by two debates. The first, centred on Iran and North Korea, has focused on how best to prevent these states from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. The second, centred on the decision to renew Trident, has been a replay of old and familiar arguments from the 1980s between believers in nuclear deterrence on one hand and advocates of unilateral disarmament on the other. These debates have combined to obscure an important third development: a paradigm shift in thinking about nuclear weapons policy among some of the world's leading nuclear strategists, a shift rich in potential to put multilateral, not unilateral, nuclear disarmament back on the agenda.

Last January, a group of senior American security analysts—Henry Kissinger, George Schultz and Sam Nunn among them—published an article in the Wall Street Journal describing future American reliance on nuclear deterrence as "increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective." Going further, they called for a reversal of the world's reliance on nuclear weapons for security, and for the eventual "ending" of nuclear weapons as a threat to the international community. Other senior figures on this side of the Atlantic, such as Lawrence Freedman, have also indicated a need to marginalise nuclear weapons in international affairs. These are significant developments, not least because the calls for reduced reliance on nuclear weapons come from some of the most ardent, thoughtful and influential former believers in the principle of nuclear deterrence.

Three factors underpin this shift in thinking. The first relates to a lack of stability in a world in which more states have nuclear weapons. In the words of Kissinger et al: "It is far from certain that we can successfully replicate the old Soviet-American 'mutually assured destruction' with an increasing number of potential nuclear states worldwide without dramatically increasing the risk that nuclear weapons will be used." The worries here go beyond Iran and North Korea to the potential regional nuclear arms races that each could provoke and the increased risk of accident, unauthorised launch and lack of safeguards.

The second relates to growing concerns over nuclear terrorism. This is seen as a serious threat, either through terrorists acquiring a "loose nuke" from the still not fully secured Russian nuclear arsenal or some other source, or via a group illegally acquiring the fissile material required to make a bomb. Both threats are real and were recognised as such in the government's December 2006 white paper on Trident. However, while the government concludes that Trident is still able to perform a deterrence function in a world threatened with nuclear terrorism, Kissinger, Shultz and Nunn conclude that nuclear terrorism is "conceptually outside the bounds of a deterrent strategy" or, to put it another way, that deterrence as a response to nuclear terrorism is not credible. They are right to do so, since a future nuclear terrorist group may not always have direct state sponsorship, and moreover, in this world of insecure nuclear facilities and nuclear black markets, one could not be sure that a terrorist bomb built with, say, Russian fissile material, had actually been built and delivered at the behest of the Russian government. The sensible conclusion, therefore, is that nuclear terrorism is best handled by making it much, much harder for terrorists to acquire a nuclear capability in the first place rather than relying on a strategy to deter them once they have got their hands on it.

The third and last reason for the shift in thinking on deterrence relates to the greater reliance on civil nuclear power that may be provoked as a result of climate change and energy security issues. If an expansion of civil nuclear power brings with it an expansion in the number of enrichment and reprocessing facilities around the world, this will mean both a greater likelihood that some states will use civil nuclear programmes as a route to a weapons programme (as in the case of Iran) and a more difficult challenge to secure what will be a larger and more dispersed stockpile of fissile material. In other words, the dangers of both state and non-state proliferation may be increased as a result of coming changes in the international energy order.

Collectively, this mix of developments puts us on the brink of a second nuclear age that will likely be more unstable and dangerous than the first. The prevailing view, even among many of the high priests of cold war deterrence strategy, is that the world has been lucky in avoiding the use of nuclear weapons since 1945 and that it is time to act now, before our luck runs out. It is time, in other words, to migrate from a reliance on deterrence to a strategy aimed at marginalising and eventually eradicating nuclear weapons.

In practice, this means a number of things. First, it requires an investment of political capital by leaders of the existing nuclear powers to build a shared commitment to the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. There will be scepticism about this in some quarters, but remember that it was Reagan and Gorbachev who discussed the issue of the eradication of nuclear weapons at the Reykjavik summit in 1986, at the height of the cold war—to the shock of many nuclear strategists.

If high-level multilateral talks can be instigated, an early issue for discussion would be a roadmap for co-ordinated and verified reductions in the weapons stockpiles of the existing nuclear powers, starting with the US and Russia but bringing in other states at agreed stages. This would not be easy, but trust and momentum can be built up through early changes in force posture and deployment, and through initial small-scale reductions. The rewards would be high, not least in strengthening the legitimacy of ongoing efforts to prevent further proliferation in countries like Iran, but also more widely, through the boost