

Hitting the Nine: NPT, Crystal Ball and Changing Milestones

Originally, we wanted to title both our project and the report summarizing its results: "The Unthinkable". And indeed: could we really think that a nuclear club, which had already been stabilized to a certain point, would be expanded even further? What's more... Is it conceivable that one day nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of Turkey (told us some)? Or Saudi Arabia (wondered others)? Or Ukraine (wincing the third)?

Indeed, over the past two decades we've got used to an almost Fellini-like formula of "eight and a half", where we have the official nuclear five (appearing at the nuclear scene in the following order): the US, Russia, the UK, France and China; plus, those three in an unofficial nuclear boat who are reluctant to be recognized (Israel, India, Pakistan); to say nothing about the DPRK: a non-nuclear weapon state de jure, as it has not legally completed its withdrawal from the NPT, but de facto possessing nuclear weapons, which it demonstrates willingly with tests. Eight and a half easily merge into a nine, with nuclear stockpiles of some undeclared nuclear actors (e.g. Israel) sometimes reaching the levels of those belonging to the legitimate (according to the NPT) nuclear weapon holders.

So, there you have a nine. But not the 20 or 30, as politicians of the United States or the Soviet Union had feared about 60 years ago. The Cuban Missile Crisis was fueled by Washington and Moscow. But no sooner had they settled it than they realized: the unthinkable could have happened if, besides Kennedy and Khrushchev, a dozen or two other politicians - like Fidel Castro in his fervor, but with their own nuclear bomb and not the one they brought - had entered the great nuclear game.

Had they realized that – and the NPT was born. After the NPT entered into force (bearing in mind that at the time Israel already had its own nuclear weapons and India was a step away from it), only two states - Pakistan and the DPRK - de-facto obtained nuclear weapons.

Is this number large or small? Exceptionally small. Especially if we take into account that three dozen states have the technological capability to build a nuclear explosive device (NED). And let's not forget the state that possessed nuclear weapons but voluntarily renounced it - South Africa. Given this calculation, the historical record clearly favors the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. It favors the NPT. It favors its efficiency, no matter how thorny the road from one milestone to another might be.

So, why are we now talking about a new nuclear nine? After all, unneeded alarmism has never been in PIR Center's style with its nearly thirty years of expertise. For we are not alarmists. We are analysts.

That is why we are presenting this report today. Without intimidating anyone and without unnecessary drama, we feel the need to discuss openly the pending nuclear non-proliferation issues of the 21st century, which though being of acute concern are often downplayed under one plausible pretext or another.

I can't help noting that the main nuclear proliferation challenges of the 20th century were once summed up in an open report of the Foreign Intelligence Service of 1993 prepared by Amb. Vyacheslav I. Trubnikov, Gen. Gennady M. Evstafiev, Dr Alexander V. Feodorov under the direction of the prominent Academician Evgeny M. Primakov. Next year, this report will celebrate its 30th anniversary. Despite the date, it remains a handbook for all nonproliferation experts. This report, let me remind you, was followed by another one - "The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Challenges for Prolongation" (1995), which would be a good read for anyone who wonders about the sustainability of the NPT. I am proud to have received both reports directly from their authors.

Today, as we enter the second quarter of the 21st century, we continue to adhere strictly to the principle that any alarmism over nuclear nonproliferation is unacceptable, as is any political hypocrisy on this issue. To our deep regret, the new century began with the excessive politicization of non-proliferation issues, combined with massive disinformation and manipulation of public opinion, which culminated in the bloody war in Iraq and threatened the very principles and objectives of nuclear non-proliferation.

No, we're not alarmists. But neither are we ostriches who bury their heads in the ground to ignore the threat. Two years of work on this project had been a careful weighing of pros et cons to see who would end up - and who won't- on the list of a new nuclear nine. And of these nine states and territories only Iran seems an obvious candidate, a classic threshold state. The placement of all the other states in PIR Center's list is based on our own understanding of potentials, threats and risks. We recognize that in most cases the risk of these countries (territories) developing their own nuclear weapons is minimal; as it is demonstrated by the calculations accompanying each country chapter in this report.

By contrast, some reviewers and readers of the first, handwritten drafts of this report (especially those affiliated to Russian state structures) rebuked us for not being sufficiently concerned; for they believed our focus on the nine was too small to reflect the reality. They said we would need to multiply nine by two at least to get an adequate list of potential 21st century proliferators. Some of the arguments of our respected and well-informed opponents were difficult to challenge. Especially since, due to its non-governmental nature, PIR Center works only with open-source data (although we also learn to study the interpretations of such data, and in particular of commercially available satellite imagery). After all, we have to be realistic about our resources. Confining ourselves to a new list of just nine actors, in addition to the classic nuclear nine, seems to me although uncomprehensive but a practically feasible solution

If this first report is well received by the expert community, PIR Center will continue to prepare reports assessing new risks of nuclear proliferation on a regular basis.

For now, I will put it this way: as long as the classic nuclear nine has not yet expanded, let us stick to *potential nines* in our forthcoming reports. But what the composition of the next new nine will be, only global and regional security dynamics will show. Answering this question will require close attention and scrutiny. And for now one thing I can tell for sure, without having to look into a crystal ball, is that the next new nuclear nine will not match today's list. And not only because we may - highly likely - have overlooked something in this report... But above all because we are just about to hit a new milestone.

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