

## Revitalizing the Prague Agenda

Since President Obama delivered his Prague speech four years ago, the prospects for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation have actually not become more straightforward. This is partly due to the current state of international relations. Financial and fiscal frustration has beleaguered both the United States and the European Union (EU), and global economic growth has widely slowed. With China becoming more confident and the second-biggest economic entity in 2010, the distrust between Washington and Beijing continues to rise. Tensions over the past years concerning the change of regimes in West Asia and North Africa, the so called “Arabic Spring,” as well as the U.S. “rebalancing” in East Asia further strain international relations. U.S.–Russia relations also suffer. Although the two countries brokered the new START Treaty of 2010, momentum has slowed on establishing deeper nuclear cuts. Given their different positions over the recent turbulence in Libya and the ongoing conflict in Syria, it is improbable that the United States and Russia could strategically “reset” relations to move down the road of nuclear disarmament.

Even worse, some state actors are actively clouding the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world. The DPRK has launched a number of satellites or missile tests, and conducted its third nuclear test in February 2013 despite sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council (UNSC). Iran’s clandestine nuclear program was first exposed a decade ago, yet it still has not implemented various International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or UNSC calls to suspend its uranium enrichment. Even given the present U.S.–EU financial and energy sanctions, the Iranian government has not come to the negotiation table to hold its nuclear program wholly accountable.

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Shen is a Professor and Associate Dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai, China. This research is a part of the research grant “Contemporary International Nuclear Politics and China’s National Security Studies” of China’s National Social Science Foundation (11&ZD181).

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Major international nuclear arms control talks have also seen little progress lately. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is still waiting for ratification by a number of major standouts, including the United States and China. As the CTBT has made rather strict terms for its entry into force, such as the inclusion of all nuclear capable states into the treaty, its true effectiveness could still be quite distant if not impossible. The Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) is in no better shape—in Geneva, the code of unanimity of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), which hosts the talks on the FMCT, means that any determined member can easily stall its entire negotiation. With such gloomy nuclear developments, one would naturally ask—is the Prague Agenda alive at all?

Nevertheless, while mindful of the above setbacks, we are far from failure in the vision for a nuclear weapons-free world, given the ability of major powers still to cooperate and compromise. With lessons learned and policy adjusted, it is hopeful that the second term of the Obama administration, along with new governments in Beijing and Moscow, could reorient partnerships more resiliently. This could hopefully help manage regional nonproliferation challenges, and possibly repair or strengthen key nonproliferation institutions to curtail nuclear proliferation.

China is one area of essential cooperation. Though Beijing is modernizing its conventional defenses to hedge against uncertain security issues on its periphery,

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its nuclear arsenal is locked by its continuing moratorium on fissile material production for weapons. Therefore, China is committed to nuclear restraint and global nuclear balance through its small fissile stockpile.<sup>1</sup> Beijing has supported the UNSC to both create punitive sanctions against the DPRK as well as Iran and tried to manage the term of punishment acceptable by all parties. But the West as well as the DPRK and Iran may all find China's balancing inadequate: the West would want a

more assertive Beijing on its side, and Pyongyang or Tehran might think Beijing (and Moscow) were not tough enough to resist Western pressure.<sup>2</sup> But eventually, they could all benefit from China's moderated principle.

In addition to nuclear disarmament, nuclear nonproliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy stimulated by the NPT, the Prague Agenda envisioned a fourth pillar: the international community should assure that nuclear energy be used securely. This initiative has reached a near universally positive response over the past four years, seen especially at the two Nuclear Security Summits in Washington in 2010 and Seoul in 2012. With a nuclear

renaissance expected to emerge among developing countries, it is of utmost importance to assure that civilian nuclear energy does not become vulnerable to illegal entities. As a result, China and the United States are collaborating to set up a Center of Excellence in Beijing for the best practice of nuclear security, which will help emerging nuclear states to employ civilian atomic energy securely.<sup>3</sup> Initiatives like this will help secure nuclear order in a wide Asia-Pacific region on the long march toward a nuclear weapons-free world.

## Reviving Nuclear Trust

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To invigorate the belief of, and action toward, a world free of nuclear weapons, it is indispensable for the stakeholders to trust each other and join their efforts collaboratively. Unfortunately, trust is difficult to achieve in a nuclear world—nuclear weapons states do not want to willingly hand over their strongest protection, nuclear deterrence. This is especially true for those nuclear countries with major security concerns, or those whose rivals also possess nuclear weapons. For example, China's new leader Xi Jinping stated on December 5, 2012, that "the second artillery force [Chinese term for nuclear force] is the core strength of China's strategic deterrence, the strategic support for the country's status as a major power, and an important cornerstone safeguarding national security."<sup>4</sup> These countries may not expand their nuclear arsenals or participate in a nuclear arms race, but their lack of action in reducing the role of nuclear weapons in their national security doctrine doesn't help promote global nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation.

But such reliance on nuclear force has its rationale. Among all five acknowledged nuclear weapons states, the United States, UK, and France are within NATO, and theoretically could count on its collective security, though Paris has occasionally acted more independently. Russia and China, however, are not part of NATO and are no longer bound by their earlier military alliance. Therefore, in a rough sense, three main relatively independent political and security centers exist in the world: Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Over the years, they have formed different combinations of trilateral relations: the Soviet Union partnered with China to counter the United States at the beginning of the Cold War, to be succeeded by the United States associating with China in the 1970s to counter the Soviets. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia and China, with lingering mutual suspicion, have partnered again to balance the United States.

For a while, Russia has not felt comfortable with U.S. missile defense policy. Though the Obama administration has softened its stance—compared to the preceding Bush administration's building a missile defense system in Russia's periphery—Moscow remains opposed to any buildup. In the Kremlin's eye, U.S.

missile defense next to Russia, nominally hedging against Iran's potential strategic missile program, is a flawed excuse. Though a limited U.S. missile defense program could physically do little harm to Russia, Washington has no interest in totally accommodating Moscow's opposition; conversely, Russia could hardly allow the United States to strategically undermine it. Such fundamental distrust drastically weakens the chance that President Obama could see a near-term success for his Prague aspirations.

The Arab Spring since 2010 has inserted another wedge between the United States and Russia, as well as China. Both Libya and Syria are long-time Russian partners, and Moscow is unwilling to accept regime change brought by external armed intervention. China could also become nervous by such neo-imperialism, given its own sensitivities regarding the U.S. stance on the Taiwan issue and Beijing's economic stake in Tripoli. (Right before the Libyan civil war in 2011, Chinese companies were reportedly working in the country for projects worth over \$12 billion, though the government doesn't admit there was Chinese investment there.<sup>5</sup>) In fact, in debating the text of a Security Council resolution forming a no-fly zone over Libya,<sup>6</sup> China had already taken the regional Arabic and African views into consideration. Despite this effort, China still believed the West hijacked UNSCR 1973, disrupting the proper balance among all political forces in the country. This has pressed China to work with Russia to prevent a recurrence in the case of Syria (since October 2011, Beijing has joined Moscow to cast three vetoes at the Security Council).

From the U.S. perspective, the rise of China could have come with Beijing's overconfidence or "assertiveness." China's performance at the UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen in 2009 was not perceived positively. Furthermore, Beijing's investment in its conventional armory, especially its navy, plus its intention to police a large part (if not all) of the South China Sea might have prompted a U.S. domestic debate about China's true strategic intentions. Then again, the U.S. "pivot" to Asia and "rebalancing" policy has fueled China's own counterbalancing, prompting closer partnership with Russia, Pakistan, and Cambodia. With the recent U.S. open support to defend Japan in its dispute with China over the Diaoyu Islands,<sup>7</sup> such spats have rekindled China's long-time suspicion that the United States wants to contain the People's Republic.

Such a negative cycle of mutual distrust has seriously spoiled major power relations. Given the sustained distrust between the United States and Russia, and the rising mistrust between the United States and China, the Prague Agenda has even smaller chances of short-term success. This ought to be reversed. Major powers have to review their security strategy, international events, and make meaningful readjustments. For instance, NATO did not necessarily need to act on UNSCR 1973 by bringing down the Gaddafi regime so controversially. The United States also doesn't necessarily need to build up

alliances with former Soviet satellite states by deploying limited missile defense forces on their territory. Russia and China could work with various Syrian political elements to advance their broader interests there. To put it simply, major powers have to share common objectives to allow a better chance of advancing the Prague Agenda.

## Defeating Regional Challenges

Though nonproliferation has never been a total success on a regional scale, it has also not been a complete failure on a global level. Ever since the nonproliferation notion was raised six decades ago, less than a handful of states have crossed the nuclear weapons threshold. And since the NPT was made in 1968, only four countries—Israel, India, Pakistan, and the DPRK—have more or less made their nuclear way. A number of other aspiring states have retreated from their nuclear ambition. In the past decade alone, both Iraq and Libya have abandoned, convincingly, their nuclear weapons program via regime change. In the meantime, regional nuclear weapons-free zones are spreading, covering more areas in the world.

Nevertheless, the desire to seek nuclear weapons by some non-nuclear weapons states has never ended. At present, the international community is facing grim challenges of nuclear proliferation especially in South Asia, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East. Rather than being complacent with the success in countering nuclear proliferation thus far, we should be exerting more serious efforts to stem moves toward proliferation in those areas.

### South Asia

The increasing regional rivalry between India and Pakistan has exposed their nuclear arms race on the subcontinent. Though regional tension primarily explains this race, Cold War politics which intentionally downplayed such a threat have also contributed to its development. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has shifted its policy from Clinton's "freezing-capping-reversing"—a phased process to first freeze a nuclear weapons program, then impose a ceiling not to allow more weapons, and finally cut the existing nuclear arms—to the George W.

Bush administration's encouraging the Nuclear Supplies Group (NSG) to enable civilian nuclear commerce with India, a country outside both the NPT and CTBT. In China's eyes, this was unambiguously motivated by U.S. efforts to

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attempt to use India to balance China's rising power. Pakistan in turn has demanded a similar treat. Thus, South Asia has turned into a subtle playground of U.S.–China geostrategic competition, undercutting the effectiveness of global efforts to prevent proliferation.

To reverse this situation, major powers have to change their mindset, which traditionally subjects nuclear nonproliferation to their other national interests. The United States needs to understand that nonproliferation shall not be a mere tool of national security interests. Instead, it has to be taken as a principle, unbendable to other competing security interests, especially unyielding to geopolitical interests for power competition. China also must reorient its thoughts on proliferation. In the past, a Beijing–Islamabad security nexus with a nuclear and missile link served their short-term interests for geostrategic balancing, but not necessarily for the long-term benefit of regional stability. Indeed, from a state perspective, nuclear proliferation tends to cloud regions with the shadow of nuclear terror. The Pakistan-originated nuclear proliferation through the A.Q. Khan network to Libya and Iran has fully testified to this effect. In this context, all major powers need to reconcile their competition so as to give nonproliferation a real priority.

In terms of nuclear security, the spread of nuclear capabilities adds to the concern of unconventional terrorism. As core forces of the Nuclear Security Summit, the United States, China, and other powers should work with India and Pakistan—with or without the IAEA framework—to assist the nuclear security capacity of their civilian nuclear installations, and to help strengthen their domestic nuclear export control system. There is no guarantee that similar loose control would not recur. It is crucial that groups like the A.Q. Khan network be severed for good, in South Asia and elsewhere.

### **Northeast Asia**

It is troublesome that all Northeast Asian states (except Mongolia), and even some non-state actors, have acquired or are attempting to acquire nuclear weapons or its capability. The United States is a player with substantial interest and presence here. For most of the Cold War, the United States stationed nuclear arms in the region. On September 27, 1991, President George H.W. Bush announced a raft of unilateral initiatives to limit and reduce the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons arsenal. Specifically, he pledged to withdraw all the U.S. ground-launched short-range weapons deployed overseas.<sup>8</sup> Today, however, the United States can still deploy nuclear arms on its naval vessels in and out of Northeast Asia.

Japan, the ROK, and to some extent Taiwan still enjoy American military protection, with or without the nuclear umbrella. The ROK and Taiwan used to develop nuclear weapons, only to end at Washington's intervention. Japan has

pursued a contradictory nuclear policy—while declaring “Three Non-Nuclear Principles” that commit Japan not to possess or produce nuclear weapons nor permit their entry to the country,<sup>9</sup> Tokyo intentionally maintained a confidential agreement with Washington that *did* allow the United States to bring nuclear weapons into the country. The United States could, for instance, potentially deploy nuclear weapons from vessels docked in Japanese ports without truly provoking the “three-nos” principles.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the DPRK has been the only state here, until a decade ago, that had neither its own nuclear weapons nor a nuclear umbrella. With the former Soviet Union dissolved, Russia did not retain the Moscow–Pyongyang security treaty of 1961. While the mutual defense treaty between Beijing and Pyongyang nominally still remains intact, its background has experienced a sea change: China may be truly transformed to such an extent that it is no longer interested in committing itself to a burden-sharing security arrangement with North Korea. In other words, China may be uninterested now in a treaty that obligates it to protect an ally. For example, while the United States ended the ROK’s and Taiwan’s nuclear weapons program in the 1970–1980s, it has continued to provide them a credible security umbrella. On the other hand, when Beijing seems fed up with its trouble-making ally, its credibility as a protector may also erode without adequate reassurance extended to Pyongyang. As China is less interested in its treaty-bound obligations, it is less likely to be viewed by the DPRK as an honest broker, and therefore unhelpful to dissuade a surreal North Korea.

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From the Western perspective, it is hard to believe that China cannot tame the hermit kingdom. As long as Beijing is willing, its ability to cut off supplies such as food, cash, energy, weapons, and fertilizer could cause an immediate crisis in Pyongyang, even more serious than any traditional external threat could present to the DPRK. But North Korea’s nuclear tests clearly show that North Korea does not care about Beijing’s leverage, or that Beijing’s attempts to use that leverage have not been backed by credible threats.<sup>11</sup> China does indeed want stability in North Korea, but persuasion without teeth won’t work. As regional stability is a core Chinese interest for its national security and economic development, Beijing has to use more resources at its disposal to protect these core interests.

Therefore, only the right combination of carrot and stick would potentially help here. For the sticks, China has to demand firmly and clearly that further nuclear tests are not tolerable, and warn Pyongyang that it will absorb severe

**North Korea's nuclear tests clearly show that it does not care about Beijing's leverage.**

consequences should it not follow China's ultimatum. For carrots, it would be desirable for Beijing to recommit to its security obligations under its 1961 treaty with Pyongyang. As long as the DPRK does not provoke another country first, China shall protect North Korea. If North Korea does initiate aggressive unilateral action, as it did with Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, China shall condemn the DPRK and sanction it both unilaterally and multilaterally under the UN system.

To implement this ideal and balanced security system, the major powers still have to remove their own hedging against each other. China needs relief from its perennial problem of the United States arming Taiwan, and lately from the new headache of the United States agreeing to protect Japan on the Diaoyu Islands. The U.S. "rebalancing" policy in the rest of East Asia also keeps China at bay. As long as China feels contained, it will realistically tend to take counter-rebalancing measures to thwart U.S. efforts. Assuaging these concerns and breaking this cycle of countermeasures would help enhance China-U.S. nonproliferation cooperation in Northeast Asia.

**Middle East**

The Middle East region is full of ethnic and religious strife. Consequently, countries have sought weapons of mass destruction. Israel, Iraq, Libya, Iran, Egypt, and Syria might have attempted to secure these weapons, but only Israel is widely believed to have succeeded. Lately, Saudi Arabia has expressed similar intent given the nuclear threat from Iran and Israel. (Saudi's former intelligence chief and Ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki al-Faisal, said in Riyadh on December 5, 2011, that "the leadership should consider acquiring nuclear weapons to counter threats from Tehran, and from Israel.")<sup>12</sup> Honestly, Israel's possession of nuclear weapons must be addressed. If nuclear weapons give Israel security and deterrence, and no one demands sanctions or inspections or limitations on it, then there is no reason why others should not contemplate the same for their own survival. Nuclear rules need consistency.

This brings us to Iran. Iran's nuclear case differs from that of India—India as an unacknowledged nuclear weapons state can still access U.S. civil nuclear cooperation, yet Iran cannot. Nuclear "fairness" here, while a worthy ideal, could lead to more global destabilization rather than less if Iran were to gain greater access to civil nuclear cooperation. In this context, Iran's nuclear quest has presented one of the most prominent contemporary proliferation challenges. A decade ago, Tehran clandestinely built an underground enrichment facility without reporting to the IAEA. When Iran's opposition party leaked this

information in the early 2000s, the Iranian authorities didn't allow inspectors to fully assess their program. To this day, Tehran has refused all UNSC demands to suspend its uranium enrichment. Iran still deserves civilian nuclear energy, but not before its nuclear history is fully and rightfully accounted for.

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As the "5+1" talks (led by the P5 countries plus Germany to negotiate with Iran) have led nowhere, the United States and EU have imposed unprecedented financial sanctions on Iran and on any others who continue energy transactions with Iran in large volume. Because of this, a rough "win-win" situation has emerged: Asian importing countries have cut their Iranian trade to qualify for exemptions from these sanctions, and the United States and EU have avoided the headache of needing to sanction these nations without hurting the U.S. and EU economies. For Iran, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. The sanctions have impacted its economy considerably: the Iranian government admitted that in the first nine months of the Iranian year, revenue from its sale of oil and natural gas declined 45 percent.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, though, the sanctions have secured some time for Teheran to reassess its current nuclear policy.

The above cases have shown that to prevent nuclear proliferation, an indispensable component toward a nuclear weapons-free world, it is possible for the United States and China to take some concerted actions. Even such reluctant cooperation on pressuring Iran, under duress because of the threat of U.S.-EU sanctions on third parties, works to some extent to help assure that Iran would not have the opportunity to progress as far as the DPRK has. On North Korea, more can be done if China were to take a more coherent strategy toward the North Korean nuclear issue, commanding a more skilled balance of carrot and stick that includes a credible security guarantee extended to Pyongyang for pure defense.

But in order to encourage Beijing to think along such lines, Washington has to make its own Asian strategy coherent: coercing China on the questions of Taiwan and the Diaoyu Islands won't make Beijing prioritize nonproliferation, and exempting India from NSG restrictions discredits the nonproliferation regime at the outset, prompting China to be more suspicious of true U.S. intentions.<sup>14</sup>

### **Strengthening International Institutions**

As aforementioned, trust among major powers plays a determining role in the success of threat reduction, and subsequently of the chance for nuclear

## Nuclear rules need consistency.

nonproliferation and disarmament. Cooperation can take various forms, either case-based or rule-based. This section discusses the rule-based approach to the Prague Agenda—how to strengthen those valuable nuclear arms control and nonproliferation regimes.

### Promoting the CTBT<sup>15</sup>

The CTBT has been iconic in showing the international attitude toward nuclear arms control. For the United States, its signature of the CTBT is an outcome of bipartisanship, but its inability to ratify the treaty also reveals a partisanship which badly hurts U.S. leadership in nuclear nonproliferation. The United States has nothing to gain by not ratifying the CTBT. After all, the CTBT only commits Washington to not test nuclear weapons; it doesn't require nuclear disarmament directly. The United States is still dominant with its current nuclear arsenal and conventional weaponry. By not ratifying the treaty, the United States only highlights the importance of nuclear weapons in its security strategy, directly opposing the spirit of the Prague Agenda. President Obama should honor his promise in Prague that his administration "will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the CTBT."<sup>16</sup>

China has also not ratified the CTBT. Beijing gains little by this—it is hard to imagine that international relations would deteriorate to such an extent that China would ever have to reopen its nuclear weapons testing. As a lesser nuclear weapons state, Beijing couldn't conceive of relinquishing its nuclear weapons entirely in the near term, but its rising economic competence and conventional forces could increasingly afford it to reduce its reliance upon them. The argument that China shall not ratify before the United States is not convincing either. The United States wouldn't take this as Beijing's leverage at all.

Even if the United States and China did ratify the CTBT, the treaty still requires ratification from a number of holdouts that may never join, like Israel, India, Pakistan, and the DPRK. But in order to move down that road, those five states with acknowledged nuclear weapons must first ratify the treaty; otherwise their nonproliferation preaching looks rather weak and hypocritical.

### Revitalizing FMCT Talks

Though the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) does not address the fundamental cause of nuclear proliferation, it does attempt to limit trade on the materials which drive it. The treaty's terms have yet to be defined: the United States wants to define fissile material as highly-enriched uranium and plutonium, while Russia wants to limit fissile material to only *weapons-grade* uranium and plutonium. Countries have also disagreed on whether and how to include a

verification system. Although the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has agreed to establish an FMCT negotiating committee, little progress has been made.

Part of the problem is the CD's requirement of unanimity in making decisions. This allows any single member to block legislation. For example, Pakistan has repeatedly blocked the CD's attempt to form a work plan which would help meet disarmament goals.<sup>17</sup> This makes progress toward meaningful negotiations nearly impossible.

Physical control of fissile material is crucial to nuclear security and for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Given this understanding, the CD needs to revamp its procedures so that a single member (or even a small coalition) cannot veto unwanted legislation, or such multilateral negotiation might move to a different platform that wouldn't require unanimity. A simple majority requirement could work, say a 50 percent or two-thirds majority. If the CD can approve a new system that does not permit a single veto, an FMCT might not be too far off.

### **Universalizing the Additional Protocol**

When Iraq violated its NPT obligations in the early 1990s, the IAEA strengthened its inspection regime by putting forward the Additional Protocol to ensure better accountability by state parties. However, it is still an optional system—an NPT signatory could opt to accept it or not. This is increasingly incompatible with the changing international system. Ever since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was defeated in 1991, the UNSC has termed nuclear weapons a “threat . . . to peace and security.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, compulsory acceptance for the Additional Protocol is increasingly necessary for a true verification and enforcement regime. Granted, nations will want to protect certain state secrets, and this may conflict with the idea of the Additional Protocol, but work needs to be done to ensure that protecting national secrets shall not be used as an excuse to cover illegitimate nuclear activities. All those proliferation cases—Iraq, Libya, and the DPRK—have revealed big loopholes that need to be closed by an improved Additional Protocol.

### **Revitalizing the Prague Agenda**

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In sum, a number of facts have supported the success of the Prague Agenda. But without improving international relations, especially among major powers, it is unrealistic to count on the willingness of nuclear weapons states to cut nuclear arms much further and faster. Due to adverse competition and conflict among major powers, the international efforts to stem regional nuclear proliferation have stalled, or even failed lately. The cases of the DPRK and Iran most clearly show this. Regarding North Korea, if countries cannot forge serious cooperation,

then in the next three to five years Pyongyang could well establish itself as another *de facto* nuclear weapons state. (The only things preventing that status so far are the further tests North Korea needs to miniaturize its atom bomb; time to become more expert in uranium enrichment; and time to convert its rocket technology to shoot at an intercontinental range.)

Hope remains, however, that U.S.–Russia and U.S.–China relations could improve in the second term of the Obama administration. They have already partnered, even reluctantly, to bring financial pain to Iran because of its nuclear activities. If Washington could reconcile its relations with Moscow on the missile defense issue, and accommodate China’s legitimate concerns over the U.S. handling of Taiwan, the Diaoyu Islands, and the South China Sea, perhaps they could freeze and reverse the Pyongyang nuclear clock to some extent. Certainly, China providing security protection to the DPRK would still help.

In the meantime, nations need to strengthen certain nonproliferation agreements. The ratification process of the CTBT needs to accelerate, the FMCT needs agreement, and the CD needs to reform its procedures and make the Additional Protocol compulsory. If these nonproliferation regimes could strengthen, it would help prevent a chain reaction of proliferation in the future.

## Notes

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