School of Politics and International Studies
FACULTY OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND LAW

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

POLIS Working Papers

Working Paper No 4: July 2011

The Myth of Nuclear Proliferation

By Christoph Bluth

The Myth of Nuclear Proliferation

By Christoph Bluth

Since the end of the Cold War and the strategic nuclear confrontation between the then Soviet Union and the United States, nuclear proliferation has been identified by academics and policymakers alike as one of the principal sources of insecurity in the world. In the United States, the drive towards national missile defense gained traction as a result of the perception of threats from newly emerging nuclear powers with ballistic missile development programs that would soon give them the capacity to attack the continental United States with nuclear warheads. The defense policy of the Bush administration with its emphasis on being able to deter any emerging threat and a capability-based threat analysis was deeply committed to ballistic missile defense. Turning away deliberately from the strategic relationship with Russia as the defining role for US strategic nuclear forces, a new nuclear triad was conceived which included ballistic missile defense directed at small nuclear and ballistic missile powers as one of its three legs. In the absence of any new powers being able to directly threaten the United States, the justification for substantially increasing the defense budget (in contrast to the European states whose defense budgets collapsed as the external threat disappeared) was based on nebulous emerging threats until 9/11, after which any effort to limit Rumsfeld's vision of transforming the United States into a unique military power, two generations ahead of any rivals and capable of fighting two major wars at once was dead in the water. Since then the US government has made counterproliferation a major plank of its policy, introduction the Proliferation Security Initiative to prevent the transfer of nuclear technology from North Korea to other states, imposing sanctions on Iran and engaging in the first major war of counterproliferation against Iraq in 2003.

In the face of the centrality of the risk of nuclear proliferation to US national security policy, shared by other many other states, it is remarkable that at least on the face of it, the risk of nuclear proliferation is relatively low. 189 states are members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), including five nuclear states. There are only four states that are not members of the NPT and that have nuclear weapons. Of the four states that acquired nuclear weapons outside the NPT regime, the last one to make the decision to go nuclear and that received civilian nuclear assistance started its nuclear programme 39 years ago (Pakistan – assuming that North Korea embarked on its nuclear program in 1962). Over the years, the NPT has become increasingly robust. In 1992, China and France finally signed up to the treaty which in 1995 was extended with indefinite duration. A significant number of countries, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Italy, Libya, Romania, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan and (the former) Yugoslavia all gave up their nuclear weapons programmes despite having started down the road of developing nuclear weapons and possessing the capability of realizing their plans. Moreover, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus decided not to keep nuclear weapons on their territory, but rather agreed to give them up, and South Africa also dismantled its nuclear weapons program. If we define nuclear proliferation as the acquisition of fully functioning nuclear weapons capabilities (i.e. the possession of usable nuclear warheads) by countries that previously did not possess them, the empirical evidence raises the question as to whether there exists in fact such a phenomenon as nuclear proliferation at all.

Although the facts regarding the modest scale of nuclear proliferation since 1945 speak for themselves, many analysts have a more pessimistic outlook on the future of proliferation. They note that Iran, a member of the NPT, appears to be developing a nuclear weapons capability under the guise of a civilian nuclear program and that this could spark a wave of proliferation in the Middle East. Moreover, there has been a significant diffusion of

nuclear technology by way of civil nuclear co-operation, so that the number of states that have the capabilities to embark on a weapons program, if they so chose, is now greater than ever before. Finally, there is concern that the failure of the nuclear weapons states (NWS) to move towards genuine nuclear disarmament is creating cynicism about the NPT among the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS). For these reasons Graham Allison describes the global nuclear order as "very fragile", although his paper in *Foreign Affairs* (2010) paradoxically also summarises powerful counterarguments to his own thesis.

The argument presented in this paper is that the non-proliferation regime is actually very robust, due to the nature of the contemporary international system and the changed role of armed conflict between states since the end of the Cold War. It posits that a "myth of nuclear proliferation" has arisen as part of a national security narrative that paints of landscape of a multitude of emerging threats to global security in which the proliferation of nuclear capabilities and ballistic missiles and international terrorism are central and linked elements. This narrative fundamentally mischaracterises the international system as unstable, replete with new and unexpected dangers, resulting in defense policies that are not only monumentally wasteful, but are so seriously misguided that they have deeply damaged national security. Finally, this paper argues that the assumption that nuclear proliferation in itself represents the "sum of all fears", a vital threat to international security is misguided. Without endorsing the enthusiasm for proliferation expressed by noted scholar Kenneth Waltz, it must be acknowledged that the acquisition of nuclear weapons can have a stabilising effect on conflict regions by mitigating the security concerns of the weaker parties. In other words, a more sober assessment of the likely consequences of nuclear proliferation, should it occur, is needed.

The dynamics of nuclear proliferation

The academic literature has engaged in serious efforts to understand the dynamics of proliferation and develop some kind of theoretical framework, without much success. The most obvious reason for states to acquire nuclear weapons is to address the threats to their security. In terms of classical realist theory, the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a form of self-help whereby states maximize their power. According to neo-realists such as Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer and many others, nuclear weapons enable weaker states to balance stronger states. They deter and prevent armed conflict and guarantee the security of the state that possesses them. Indeed Mearsheimer and Stephen van Evera confidently predicted that after the decline in Russia's military power and the rise of multipolarity in Europe various countries such as Germany, Japan and Ukraine would become nuclear powers. In the words of William C. Potter of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, California: "Taken to its logical conclusion, unadulterated neorealism predicts a lengthy nuclear proliferation chain that extends to as many states as have access to technical know-how and material to build nuclear weapons."

But lack of technical know-how is not an insuperable barrier to proliferation. Pakistan and North Korea both developed nuclear devices despite concerted efforts by the international community to deny them access to nuclear technology. The only known example of a case where denial of access to nuclear technology may have contributed to a decision to forego nuclear weapons development is that of Libya. Indeed, access to nuclear technology for civilian purposes is one of the principal elements of the bargain embodied in the NPT. Given that all the non-nuclear weapons states have acceded to the NPT, the technical barriers to proliferation have been reduced significantly. So how can it be that so few states have acquired them? Neo-realism spectacularly fails to account for the proliferation behavior by states.

The most obvious alternative paradigm is neoliberal institutionalism which shares many of the assumptions of neo-realism with respect to the anarchical nature of the international system, but emphasizes the role of international institutions to alleviate the security dilemma and enable states to engage in long-term cooperation. Within this framework the success of the NPT as a quasi-universal institutional framework that regulates relations between the nuclear powers and the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) is used to account for the low level of nuclear proliferation. However, the proposition that the existence of the NPT as an international security regime which is discriminatory in its very design and offers only very weak security assurances to its non-nuclear members has persuaded states to forego such a powerful means to provide for their security seems *prima facie* implausible. In other words, it is unclear whether the NPT is capable of having such a powerful effect as is required to explain the empirical evidence, given the fundamental assumptions of neoliberal institutionalism about the nature of the international system. This accounts for the fact that those who adhere to the neoliberal paradigm are mostly proliferation pessimists, who believe that the NPT regime is in serious danger of collapse, despite all of the evidence to the contrary.

Proliferation pessimism is in part based on the existence of so-called proliferation networks that deal in dual-use goods applicable to various military technologies, including nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Most analysts consider proliferation to be demand driven, but recently Matthew Fuhrmann has used statistical analysis to support the notion that the greater diffusion of civilian nuclear technology is itself a factor that promotes proliferation. However, this thesis does not stand up to close scrutiny. In the first place Fuhrmann does not consider the effect of the NPT on proliferation. None of the states that acquired nuclear weapons beyond the recognized nuclear powers were members of the NPT at the time and only one of these states (North Korea) ever signed the NPT. Secondly, this

analysis involved data on nuclear cooperation agreements (NCA) from 1945-2000. It does not discriminate between NCA that were implemented or not. Moreover, it does not distinguish between different historical phases during which the positive and negative incentives in relation to the acquisition of nuclear weapons changed significantly. The dynamics of proliferation seems to have changed in a way contrary to Fuhrmann's thesis – as nuclear technology has become more widespread, nuclear proliferation has become less common. A closer analysis of proliferation beyond the five recognized nuclear powers shows that causation occurs in the opposite direction from that posited by Fuhrmann, namely states that have decided to acquire nuclear weapons seek nuclear cooperation agreements in order to acquire the fissile materials and technology needed for their military nuclear programs.

Global Security in the Contemporary Era and the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

One of the key gaps in the efforts to develop a conceptual approach to the understanding of the dynamics of nuclear proliferation is the failure to consider the evolution of the international system and how the change in the nature of the sources of insecurity affect the decisions by states about the acquisition of nuclear arsenals. Most of the literature makes no distinction about the causes of proliferation over the entire period of the nuclear age. But the international security environment has changed substantially during in the course of 66 years. During the Cold War, both superpowers sought to prevent their allies from acquiring nuclear weapons (although this failed in the case of China, Britain and France). To some extent, the NPT was an instrument of this policy. In other words, we can see non-proliferation as a form of coercion, whereby non-nuclear states were compelled to forego their own nuclear capabilities in return for "extended deterrence". Particular examples where states considered acquiring a nuclear capability, but were effectively prevented from doing so were the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Korea.

The end of the Cold War was the beginning of a total transformation of the international system. The military contingencies that the nuclear powers are likely to face do not involve nuclear weapons either as a deterrent or as a useful military tool. For example, in the conflicts in the Balkans four nuclear powers were engaged with armed forces, but this had no relevance for their conduct or the course of the conflict. Very few states face an external threat that would compel them to acquire nuclear weapons. Countries that might have previously contemplated the acquisition of nuclear weapons are no longer doing so because there is simply no need for them. Another significant factor is the development and diffusion of norms which changes the way in which countries view nuclear weapons. In particular international norms in relation to the use of force have changed fundamentally. It is no longer considered legitimate to use force to support national interests (including the resolution of territorial disputes). Rather, the use of force is only permissible under very specific conditions, such as self-defence, or the enforcement of international law and security as mandated by the UN Security Council (which may include humanitarian intervention). Moreover, the use of force is subject to very stringent conditions, among which proportionality and the avoidance of civilian casualties are paramount. While the possession of nuclear weapons is not against international law, their use would be illegal in almost all conceivable circumstances. Although one may question how strictly these norms are being adhered to, they demonstrably restrain the use of force by states. Many former practices in the conduct of warfare are no longer acceptable, such as the kind of strategic bombing practiced during World War II, the annexation of foreign territories or the execution of prisoners of war. Even the kind of planning for the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe during the Cold War now looks bizarre and beyond all moral bounds.

Clearly the major risk to international security in the time following the post-Cold war period resides in the so-called new wars, sub-state conflicts that arise from ethnic disputes, or

failed states in regions of low development. For the vast majority of states, there is no significant risk of war. This is the fundamental reason why the nuclear non-proliferation regime is robust.

There is a substantial recent body of literature which argues that major war is becoming obsolete as an instrument of foreign policy or as an activity of states. For example, the work of Michael Mandelbaum, John Mueller and Christopher Fettweis is based on the observation that the costs of war have dramatically increased while its benefits have become marginal. The sources of wealth for knowledge-based economies in a world of global trade are no longer to be found in armed conquest. In the past, at the end of the 19th century, war was a normal, legitimate and necessary activity of states. But the norms governing international relations have changed. Now the use of force is no longer considered acceptable except under very exceptional and restricted circumstances, and war is considered to be akin to a form of criminal activity.

The ‘democratic peace thesis’ is based on the power of the normative constraints on modern states with regard to the use of force against another state. Even if there are exceptions to the ‘democratic peace thesis’ (depending on the definition of democracy, and the historical period under review), nevertheless there it is the empirical observation that 21st century liberal democratic states do not fear military attacks by other such states, do not develop armed forces with the purpose of using them against them and resolve their disputes in other ways than the use or the threat of force. Not only can it be said that liberal democracies do not tend to go to war with each other, but they are not perceived to threaten one another and the balance of power between liberal democracies has been relevant only in the context of responses to other external threats. Although the common external threat and the conscious endeavour to overcome the national enmities in Europe which have resulted in two world wars were undoubtedly important factors, a deeper structural principle seems to be

necessary to account for this difference in the role of military force. Among the factors that are part of the explanation are:

- a shared value system which includes the acceptance of international norms
- the existence of institutional mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts
- the more diffuse nature of political power in liberal democracies makes it difficult to sustain military conflicts, unless they are relatively limited in time and their objectives are widely accepted by the population. This generally rules out the acquisition of territory by force owing to the difficulties of absorbing hostile populations in the political system and the violation of political norms involved. It also means that domestic consent to a war depends highly on the nature of the regime against which war is to be conducted - i.e. it has to be credibly described as an aggressive and authoritarian (non-democratic) regime.
- the vulnerability of high-technology societies and their high standard of living has resulted in an unwillingness to support the costs of war, both in terms of casualties and damage to the society itself.

The work of Bruce Russett, William Antolis, Carol Ember, Melvin Ember and Zeev Maoz has shown that there is a strong correlation between the degree of political participation and normative constraints and the frequency of highly militarised disputes. They demonstrated that normative constraints had a substantially more significant effect that institutionalisation. This is a truly remarkable phenomenon. If there really is a class of states now that will not go to war with each other, this would mean that many of the assumptions about international relations current in the academic community would have to abandoned.

Even many states that are not full-blown liberal democracies nevertheless adhere to the norms governing relations between states and are not posing a threat to other states. Another way of expressing the results by Russett and others is that the likelihood of conflict is primarily a function of the normative asymmetries between states. The degree of normative

asymmetry is particularly high with states that have become known as 'rogue states'. A 'rogue state' is one that does not adhere to international law, behaves aggressively and engages in substantial human rights violations against its own population. The aggressive behaviour includes threats or even attacks on other states, state sponsored terrorism and the development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Iraq under Saddam Hussein was the ideal type of a rogue state. Most states nowadays consider the use of force against other states illegitimate except under very specific conditions.

There is a close relationship between the diffusion of norms and the building of trust, because international norms impose very severe restrictions on the legitimacy of the use of force. This explains the democratic peace, namely liberal democracies which have internalised norms in relation to governance, the rule of law and international conduct easily build relations of "rational" and "binding" trust with like states. The likelihood of armed conflict between states in the contemporary era is low.

'Rogue states' and International Terrorists

At the centre of the contemporary narrative of US national security, the combination of "rogue states", nuclear proliferation, ballistic missile proliferation and international terrorism creates a serious threat to the United States that cannot be addressed with traditional means of containment and deterrence, but requires instead a combination of ballistic missile defence and a proactive defence strategy that includes pre-emptive strikes to deal with threats before they have fully formed. (It also assumes that emerging ballistic missile powers can deploy ICBMs, but not in numbers that will saturate US defensive capabilities).

This is a state-centric view of international security that was not weakened, but rather reinforced by the events of 9-11. The Bush doctrine firmly linked the threat of international terrorists with the states that harbored them. This manifested itself in the unwavering

conviction that there was a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda and what Peter Bergen has referred to as the "unified field theory of terrorism." With the suggestion that Iraq was somehow linked with the 9/11 attacks, Iraq was portrayed an imminent threat to the United States as a major sponsor of international terrorism. This indeed was the only way in which the United States government could construct a threat perception that involved Iraq in an imminent risk to the homeland. Some members of the administration, like Paul Wolfowitz, were firmly convinced that the attacks of 9-11 could not be have been carried out by international terrorists without support from a state, and Iraq was identified as the most likely culprit. It was alleged that there was a Saddam-bin Laden axis based on reports that Iraqi agents had met with Al Qaeda operatives in Prague and that Iraqis had instructed Al Qaeda members in the use of chemical weapons. In particular, the threat that Iraq might pass WMD to terrorists became a major reason for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Bush administration became obsessed with the Iraqi nuclear threat in particular. As President Bush put it: 'We cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun, that comes in the form of a mushroom cloud.' A similar statement was made by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. Vice-President Cheney sifted the raw intelligence and seemed to find evidence of active progress in Iraq's nuclear program that had previously been dismantled by UNSCOM after the Gulf War. Bush, Cheney and their colleagues issued statements to the effect that if Iraq could obtain enough fissile material it could build a nuclear weapon within a year. The Iraq War is a paradigmatic example of the "myth of nuclear proliferation" and its consequences. All of the elements of this threat analysis proved to be false. Iraq did not have nuclear weapons or a program of development that was going to provide a nuclear capability in the medium term. There was no collusion between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. There was no "axis of evil" linking Iraq to Iran or North Korea and international terrorist networks. There was no

imminent or even long-term threat to the homeland. In terms of the threat to the security of the United States, containment and deterrence was a viable option.

The phenomenon of “rogue states” is by no means new or unprecedented. The very term signifies the fact that most states in the international community are not “rogue”. To reject international norms with respect to the use of force has become very much the exception rather than the rule. This was not the case during much of the Cold War period. Indeed the Soviet Union and Mao’s People’s Republic of China were “rogue states” that were far more dangerous and aggressive than the current list of usual suspects, at least for a time. Stalin’s and Mao’s totalitarian rule resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of their own citizens and they spread their terror to other countries. Their ambitions to destroy and supplant the capitalist world, their support for guerrillas and terrorists world-wide, and the size of the nuclear arsenals that they acquired and deployed, created a truly global threat that confronted the human race with the prospect of annihilation. Those who now nostalgically look back to the Cold War period forget how dangerous this global confrontation really was. The number of contemporary “rogue states” is actually quite small, their military capabilities are limited and will remain so for the foreseeable future. They have no capacity to strike the homeland of the United States and their regional ambitions can be contained through alliances and extended deterrence. Only one of them has nuclear devices (North Korea) and one other (Iran) may acquire them in the medium term, although it remains uncertain whether Teheran will take final step to assemble weapons and leave the NPT. It is not at all clear whether the possession of nuclear weapons will make Iran more aggressive and dangerous. A likely consequence is that other states in the region will seek to balance Iran by closer cooperation with the United States and reliance on extended deterrence. This means, as Frank Procida has suggested, that Teheran’s political options will narrow and it will have to act with greater restraint. In any case, even though most experts agree that it is not desirable that Iran

should have nuclear weapons, it is not clear that such a development would create an unmanageable threat for the region or even the United States.

International terrorism is clearly a significant threat to international security. In terms of state-sponsored terrorism, it is mostly a regional threat in the Middle East. There remains a risk of attacks on the US homeland and Europe as *jihadist* networks continue to harbour ambitions to mount such operations. But this threat has to be seen in its proper perspective. The failure of Islamist extremists to mount a major attack on the United States since 9-11 is a tribute to the success of the defensive measures that have been put in place to prevent such an event. International terrorists do not have the capacity to destroy the United States, or even to destroy a city, and they have little chance of achieving their political objectives. At best they can achieve minor disruptions, which are tragic for the people who suffer, but from the long experience of terrorist threats that Western states have face it is clear that they are not a significant threat to resilient liberal democracies. As for the possibility of terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons, this still remains a purely hypothetical risk. As Peter Bergen has demonstrated, Al Qaeda's efforts in this regard were rather amateurish and fanciful. The historical experience shows that constructing a nuclear device is very hard even for states that can devote massive resources to the problem (e.g. Libya) and put in place a major infrastructure for such a purpose. The only realistic prospect for terrorists to acquire nuclear devices would be from a state. The only "rogue" state that currently has nuclear devices is North Korea and it has no connection to Islamic terrorist networks nor is there any reason to believe that Pyongyang will give nuclear devices to terrorists, despite its nuclear collaboration with other states such as Syria and Pakistan. Iran does not yet have a nuclear weapons capability, but there is no reason to believe that it would risk giving nuclear devices to third parties whose actions it would be unable to control, especially given the scale of US and Israeli nuclear capabilities.

The myth of nuclear proliferation

To speak of the myth of nuclear proliferation is not to deny that nuclear proliferation has occurred, or to claim that there is no risk that further nuclear proliferation may occur in the future. It is rather to identify a narrative about the risks of proliferation of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery that has served as the basis for a conceptualization of international security that is not warranted by the facts and that is based on an unrealistic assessment of risk. Put more simply, nuclear proliferation has been characterised as a threat to international security that is highly exaggerated. This in turn has resulted in national security policies that are inappropriate and out of proportion with respect to the actual sources of global insecurity. The myth of nuclear proliferation has proven to be considerably more dangerous than the phenomenon of nuclear proliferation itself. It has resulted in one major war involving hundreds of thousands of casualties, and the potential of further military action in at least two theaters persists.

The myth sustains the conviction that the United States is facing a mortal danger from its enemies abroad which must be urgently addressed. It is so central to the conservative ideology that it is simply inconceivable to its adherents that it might not be true, but it is shared by many across the political spectrum. During the Cold War period, it resulted in absurd statements by leaders such as Reagan and his Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger that the Soviet Union was outgunning the United States quantitatively and qualitatively at every level and the notions of the "window of vulnerability" based on the belief that the Soviet leaders were planning for the moment when they could destroy all land-based US strategic nuclear forces with a first strike (ignoring the 42% of the strategic arsenal based at sea) and "dictate terms" to the United States. After the Cold War, the myth of nuclear proliferation gave rise to the "axis of evil" and justified rising defence expenditures and a commitment to the development and deployment of ballistic missile defence. Unlike the Cold

War myths of a Soviet first strike and Soviet strategic superiority, the nuclear proliferation myth also has significant adherents among liberals, especially in the nuclear expert community in which there is widespread support for a pessimistic view of proliferation and the risk it poses to international security. Indeed, the Obama administration has only moderately changed the national security narrative, by emphasizing the importance of "soft power" and diplomacy and replacing the concept of "war on terror" by "regional conflict".

However, as the preceding sections have demonstrated, none of the central elements of this narrative stand up to scrutiny. In fact, the global international security environment is more benign than it has ever been, as the risk of inter-state conflict has practically disappeared for most countries. The United States in particular is secure from external attack and there is no other country that can challenge the United States with either conventional or nuclear forces. But the United States has failed to adapt to the new international security environment. Despite the absence of a discernible threat, the Clinton period did not manage to generate the kind of "peace dividend" that was expected in the aftermath of the Cold War. As military budgets throughout the world collapsed, the United States maintained defence expenditures at previous levels. During the first Clinton administration there were modest cuts in defence expenditure, but during the second time defence spending increased to the point where US defence spending came close to matching that of NATO and Eastern Europe (including Russia) put together. During the Bush administration military expenditure increased by 70% (not counting the $700 billion in separate appropriations for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq). By 2008 the United States accounted for 48% of global military spending, engaging in a massive arms race with itself. Expensive new weapons systems such as the F-22 fighter or the army's Future Combat System were being developed (not to mention ballistic missile defences), without any matching developments by other powers or

any clear understanding about the contingencies for which these new capabilities would be needed.

As we have seen, the fundamental paradox of the narrative of the threat of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile proliferation is that the threat either does not exist, or if it does exist, then the means used to address it (containment, isolation, sanctions and ballistic missile defence) are inadequate to eliminate it. This confronts the United States with the choice of either having to live with an unacceptable security threat or an unsupportable strategy to defeat it. But this choice, which is generated by the myth of nuclear proliferation, is false. As we have seen, the risk of nuclear proliferation is very limited and confined to a very small number of states of concern. More importantly, proliferation does not constitute an existential threat to the United States. The military capabilities of potential new nuclear powers dwarf those of the US, and whatever one may say about their leadership, there is no evidence that are prepared to risk a full-scale military response from the United States which would be the result of an attack on the US homeland. Even if it is conceded, in opposition to realist academics who view nuclear proliferation as a stabilising factor, that nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and East Asia is undesirable, the effect on US interests is not so clear. For example, with respect to North Korea it is the risk of massive civilian casualties due to North Korea's conventional capabilities, rather than it somewhat dubious nuclear stockpile that deters the United States and the Republic of Korea from using military force. At the same time it can be argued that the failed efforts to prevent North Korea from acquiring a nuclear capability prevented the development of more holistic strategy towards a united Korean peninsula. Similarly the fact that the nuclear program has become the vector of the strategic conflict between the United States and Iran has actually encouraged its development and has enabled the regime to use the nuclear program and the sanctions that have been imposed for the purposes of internal political consolidation. This is not an argument to ignore nuclear

proliferation, or to weaken the mechanisms provided through the NPT, the IAEA and other elements of controlling the supply of nuclear materials and dual-use technology, but rather to put the issue of nuclear proliferation into is proper perspective in terms of strategic analysis. The relentless growth of external debt has prompted a fundamental reconsideration of policy priorities in the United States, including defense. How this will affect the national security narrative of the United States government remains to be seen.