



Nuclear Proliferation: A Delicate Balance Between Force and Diplomacy

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to welcome our members and guests and to thank you all for joining us as we welcome Joe Cirincione to our program today. He will be discussing nuclear proliferation.



[Joanne J. Myers](#)

Before we begin, I just want to take a moment to thank my colleague, Marcus Roberts, who suggested that we invite Joe and for making all the arrangements. Thank you, Marcus.

In 1960, an article appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* in which the British novelist C.P. Snow said that "unless nuclear powers drastically reduce their armaments, thermonuclear warfare within the decade was a mathematical certainty." Although his prediction hasn't come to fruition, the cloud of nuclear proliferation is mushrooming and bringing us much closer to the reality that Snow

spoke about 45-plus years ago.

While on the one hand, the United States tries to contain escalation fallout from North Korea's bomb tests and efforts to persuade Iran to curb its own activities go unheeded, at the other extreme America, with support from Congress, is bending the antinuclear rules for India by promoting that country's nuclear energy technology. America's controversial nuclear deal with India, which is about to be signed into law, would for the first time in thirty years open up civilian nuclear cooperation with a country who is not a member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In essence, we are providing India with all of the benefits of being a member of this agreement without ever having signed the treaty. As a policy, this is puzzling and inconsistent.

Given this set of facts, America's non-proliferation nuclear strategy appears arbitrary and capricious, at best. The question thus becomes whether we can make it through another half-dozen or more decades without experiencing thermonuclear warfare.

As Mr. Cirincione has said so many times, the new proliferation challenges make it clear beyond denial that racing from threat to threat does not suffice. The current strategy reflects a lack of underlying principles to guide policymakers through conflicts, with the result being a non-proliferation policy that often works against itself.

All of this makes the U.S. policy unpredictable for allies and enemies alike. The outcome is that friends

are wary of following the U.S. policy, not knowing where this policy will eventually lead. The present non-proliferation regime needs fixing.

Our guest today has ideas as to how we as a nation can respond most efficiently and effectively without compromising our values and our vital interests. He urges us to utilize all the resources at our disposal to work constructively with our allies and other interested parties in order to deny these states the capabilities they all most surely seek to acquire.

In recent years, America has promoted nuclear energy technologies which might increase the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation, while counseling others that nuclear weapons are anachronistic.

Today, a great deal is at stake in constraining the missile and nuclear weapons capabilities of North Korea, Iran, and other rogue states, as well as terrorists. There is no argument that a more resilient forward defense and deterrent posture are essential to an effective American global strategy. With the clarity and expertise that we have come to appreciate from his numerous articles, Joseph Cirincione will tell us how we can achieve this goal.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our speaker this afternoon. Thank you for joining us.

Remarks

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Thank you very much. Could I have a copy of that? I want to give that as my next speech. That was a terrific piece of work. Thank you very much for having me here and introducing me in such a gracious way.

I have been working in this field—oh, I guess it was 1990, 1991, when I was then working for John Conyers at the Government Operations Committee. I had spent about ten years on staff at the Armed Services Committee and then Gov Ops. It was clear that the Soviet Union was collapsing, the Warsaw Pact was falling apart. He asked me to write a memo on what the new threats were. At the top of my list was proliferation of nuclear weapons. That was the number one threat facing us. He agreed and sent me to work on it.

I have been doing it ever since. I have written a number of books on this. [Deadly Arsenals](#) is probably my best seller. It is used in a lot of college courses. It is sort of a proliferation encyclopedia—maps, charts, numbers, graphs. I just finished a new book, called [Bomb Scare](#), which will be coming out from Columbia University Press—not far from here—in February. I was just going over the final proofs yesterday, so I am steeped in all this. I'll try not to tell you everything about this subject. Let me just hit the highlights on threats, policy, and politics, and how all these interplay.

It was about 46 years ago, October 1960, when then-Senator [Kennedy](#) was debating then-Vice President [Richard Nixon](#) in the third presidential debate, and he attacked the Eisenhower-Nixon Administration from the Right—something that Democrats envy—for not protecting America's vital national security interests, for not doing enough to stop the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons. But he had kind of a Left hook on this: he said you haven't negotiated a comprehensive test ban treaty, you haven't been urgent enough in negotiating a new non-proliferation pact, and if I am sworn in as president, Kennedy said, I will do something about that.

And true to his word, he did. When he became president, he made good on his promise. He had warned in that debate that if something wasn't done, that we could go from the current four nuclear nations—that's what we had in 1960: the United States, Russia, Great Britain, and France, who had just detonated their first nuclear test—he said if we didn't change course, we would be faced by the middle of that decade with ten, fifteen, or twenty nuclear nations, including Red China. And sure enough, by 1964 China had detonated their first nuclear weapon, and we then had five.

He started the process for negotiations of a comprehensive test ban treaty. He couldn't get the whole deal, but he got a limited test ban treaty in 1962, which ended atmospheric tests. There were mass demonstrations around the world against these tests. So the countries agreed to only do underground tests from then on.

And he started the process towards seeking a nuclear non-proliferation treaty. He couldn't finish the job, but [Lyndon Johnson](#) picked up the baton, told [Dean Rusk](#) to "go get me that treaty." Dean Rusk went and got him that treaty, negotiated in 1968. Johnson couldn't sign it himself, but Richard Nixon did. That really began this 40 to 45 year period of cooperation between Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, who had their different takes on it but were basically united in building up the international non-proliferation regime, this interlocking system of treaties, arrangements, and security assurances, backed up by military force, that effectively slowed, if not altogether prevented, proliferation.

So today we have nine nuclear nations. We were joined after the mid-1960s by Israel, who probably got a weapon around 1967, an undeclared arsenal, but we estimate they have somewhere between 100 and 200 nuclear weapons—I believe it is more likely in the lower range; and then India, which detonated a peaceful device in 1974, and then later conducted weapons tests in 1998; followed quickly by Pakistan. That's the "nuclear eight." And now we have North Korea knocking on the door with their test on October 9th of just this year. That's nine nuclear nations.

Iran is the next biggest threat, with a nuclear program that they claim is for peaceful purposes, but which could have decidedly non-peaceful applications.

That is the existing state threat that is out there. There are many more countries that could develop nuclear weapons, but because of these efforts for the last 40 years, they have made a political decision not to do so. So the [Non-Proliferation Treaty](#) is by far the most successful security pact in history. There are now 188 members of this pact—North Korea left—and of the 183 that don't have nuclear weapons, they believe what the treaty says: that they, those 183, should never develop nuclear weapons; and the five who are members of the pact, the original nuclear five, should reduce and eventually eliminate their arsenal. This is the essence of the agreement, and there is surprising consensus around the world that this should be the path that we should follow. That deal and the related pacts have essentially kept a dam on the nuclear technology.

We have made progress, over the last 15 years in particular, where we have seen the nuclear weapons go from a Cold War high of some 60,000 nuclear weapons to a current level of about 27,000, where we have seen the number of countries with nuclear weapons decrease, the number of countries with nuclear weapons programs decrease—there are actually fewer countries in the world now with weapons or programs than there were 15 years ago.

No new country has started a nuclear program since the end of the Cold War. Iran's and North Korea's began in the 1970s and 1980s—1970s for North Korea, 1980s for Iran. We have actually made a tremendous amount of progress cutting down these weapons and their military and political utility.

But we are now at a very critical point. This is a rather overused phrase, but it really is a nuclear tipping point. The policy decisions we make over the next three-to-five years will decide whether we keep that progress going or whether we launch another great wave of proliferation. The first wave began after the end of World War II, crested, and declined, and we could be seeing the beginning of another wave. It all depends on our policy decisions.

It is complicated, because it is not just the threat of new nuclear states that we worry about. That's the one that makes all the news and that's the one that most people talk about—Iran, North Korea, et cetera—but there are three other great threats out there.

For me the number one threat is the threat of nuclear terrorism, the possibility that some group—al-Qaeda or some other messianic, apocalyptic terrorist group—will acquire a nuclear weapon from the

stockpiles that currently exist, or the highly enriched uranium that exists in many locations around the world, and will fashion a crude nuclear device, bring it to an American city, and detonate it.

[Graham Allison](#) up at Harvard calls this the ultimate preventable catastrophe. He says if we just keep doing what we're doing, in ten years he believes that the chance of a nuclear terrorist attack is near 100 percent, that it will happen. I agree with that assessment.

Fortunately, there are a number of policies we can take to reduce that probability to near zero. The problem is we are just not taking them, we are just not doing them.

The third threat that we face is the threat from existing arsenals. The good news is the arsenals have been cut in half. The bad news is there are 27,000 nuclear weapons in the world, and a lot of them are still on Soviet missiles and bombers, not technically aimed at us, but capable of being aimed at us in a manner of minutes. And thousands of those weapons are still on hair-trigger alert—that is, the Cold War posture that said that your missiles had to be ready to launch with fifteen minutes' notice, so if you saw an incoming attack, you had to be ready to let yours fly before they were hit. Both sides still have that hair-trigger, high alert, launch-on-warning—different phrases for the same thing—a rapid retaliation response. As the Russian command-and-control system deteriorates, you are increasing the risk of a miscalculation, a mistake, or loss of command, which could cause some of those missiles to let fly.

In addition, you have the new threats of use from the existing arsenals in, for example, India and Pakistan, countries that share a common border—it's the first time in the nuclear age we have two nuclear nations that share a common border—and have fought three wars in the last fifty years, and came very close to fighting a war again over the [Kargil crisis](#), after both sides had developed nuclear weapons. So the risk is great that we would actually see these existing weapons used.

And finally, there is the other risk that the entire non-proliferation regime could collapse. [Brent Scowcroft](#) participated in a high-level panel at the United Nations two years ago, and in their report they warned that the entire non-proliferation regime was in danger of collapse; and, if it collapsed, this could let loose a cascade of proliferation.

Now, all these threats interplay with each other. They are not independent. If we don't decrease our arsenals, it increases the incentive for other countries to acquire weapons of their own. If more and more countries acquire nuclear arsenals, it increases the risks that a terrorist could access that material from one of those arsenals.

And it doesn't necessarily neatly play out in the sort of categories that we are used to thinking about, that it is just a problem of some of the "bad" nations having nuclear weapons. I want to talk about this idea just for a second, to get into the policy issues.

What has happened in the last five years, starting a little with the Clinton Administration but it really was implemented by the Bush Administration, is that many people lost confidence in the non-proliferation regime. They didn't like the reliance on these multilateral agreements, these negotiated treaties. When the Bush Administration came in, they came in with a very different viewpoint. They talk about it in "[The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction](#)", which was released in 2002. They say that our policies will be a fundamental change from the past.

Basically, they changed the way we looked at the threat. In previous years, all presidents—Republican and Democratic, liberal and conservative—had seen the problem as the weapons themselves. Kennedy would say, "We have to abolish the weapons of war before they abolish us." So the answer was to reduce these nuclear weapons.

The same was true for chemical and biological. Nixon had a treaty to eliminate biological weapons. We have eliminated our biological weapons arsenals. Most states have done the same. These are largely removed as instruments of military power now.

Chemical weapons: George H.W. Bush negotiated the chemical weapons treaty banning chemical weapons. Most states have signed this; there are a few holdouts, but it has largely been removed from major states' arsenals. We no longer rely on these weapons that we used to as instruments of military force, as instruments of national policy.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was supposed to do the same for nuclear weapons. Negotiated agreements that Ronald Reagan started with the Russians were going to cut these weapons. That's why we have cut them in half. It has been these [START](#) [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] agreements that have reduced them over the last 15 years.

This Administration wanted nothing to do with that threat. So whereas Bill Clinton would say in the 1990s that the number one national security threat facing the United States is the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, George H.W. Bush in his State of the Union Address in 2002 says the number one threat facing us is hostile regimes who would acquire nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.

So we changed from the "what" to the "who," saying that the problem is not to eliminate the weapons, but to eliminate these regimes. And the administration had a policy for doing that: we were not going to rely on negotiated agreements; we were not going to drag the United States, the world's only superpower, into an arena where they thought the global Lilliputians would tie down the American Gulliver. No. We didn't want anything that would restrict American flexibility. So we reject the [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty](#), we reject the [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty](#), we don't want any part of [Kyoto](#), we don't want any part of the [Criminal Court](#)—nothing that would restrict our flexibility. We needed maximum flexibility in order to keep peace and security in the world.

Instead, we would use direct military force and coalitions of the willing. The mission would define the coalition—they would rise, they would fall down—to go target the bad guys, to take these guys out: "We knew who they are and now we're going to get them. What's the point of being a superpower if you couldn't kick a little butt?" And that's what we were going to do.

Iraq was the first implementation of this strategy. There were all kinds of reasons why we went to war, but the primary reason was that there was a weapon of mass destruction threat. We were told that we didn't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud. That was the threat, that a nuclear weapon could be used by Iraq or given to al-Qaeda—we were told that there were ties to al-Qaeda—and we had to go at it preemptively or preventively—as I'm sure you have discussed here, preventive war—to take that out.

There were no weapons. If you want to go into that, by the way, I spent several years looking at that issue. There were no chemical, no biological, no nuclear weapons; no chemical, no biological, no nuclear programs; no intention to start a chemical, biological, or nuclear program; nothing, not an isotope, not a gram, nada. Complete fabrication.

But the idea was that, not only would we take out this particular bad guy, but now we would set an example for the other bad guys. When I passed [John Bolton](#) in the airport—I was coming in, he was going out—I said, "Hello, Mr. Ambassador." He said, "Grrr." I just passed him. It's amazing who you see on the shuttle. [Rich Holbrooke](#) was on the shuttle with me. It's a lot of fun flying these days.

When John Bolton, then-Undersecretary of State, was asked what lesson North Korea and Iran should draw from the war in Iraq, he said, "Take a number." That was the bravado, that was the hubris of the time, that the war in Iraq was going to show there is a cost to be paid for pursuing these programs, there's a cost to be paid for running counter to U.S. interests.

And the talk in Washington just three years ago—still at this time everybody remembers it—the talk in Washington was that "men go to Baghdad, real men go to Tehran." We were going to run the table. We

were going to roll from Iraq to Damascus to Tehran, we were going to take care of this, and then we'd go out and pick up North Korea later on.

That strategy has been a complete and utter disaster. Every single proliferation problem has gotten worse, not better. Iran and North Korea accelerated their programs. They have accomplished more in the last five years than they did in the previous ten. Everything—we can go into more details if you want—has gotten worse. This policy is now a complete and utter failure.

[Sam Rayburn](#) used to say, "Any jackass can kick down a barn, but it takes a carpenter to build one." Well, these guys proved excellent at kicking down barns, but they haven't built anything to replace them.

That's the challenge we now have. As they leave power—and they are going—what policy can we construct to replace it? And I'm not talking about the Democrats alone; whoever assumes office in 2008 is going to bring in a different set of policies. This is what makes the next couple of years so interesting. This is where we now get to construct that policy. Whether it's [John McCain](#) or [Hillary Clinton](#) or whoever is in the White House, they are going to bring with them a different policy, and you are seeing the 2007 Congress start to play that game. They are not waiting for the 2008 election. They have already started shaping that policy. This is the politics part.

You see at the head of the Foreign Relations Committee [Joe Biden](#), at the head of the Senate Armed Services Committee [Carl Levin](#); over in the House you have [Ike Skelton](#) at House Armed Services, [Tom Lantos](#) at Foreign Relations. They want a different way. They are already talking about it. They are pushing for direct negotiations to solve these problems, direct negotiations with North Korea, with Iran. They want to reallocate funds from the so-called [Ballistic Missile Defense Program](#), the one we are building up in Alaska that is costing us \$10 billion a year, the largest single weapons program in the budget. It doesn't work. We don't need it. This program is an Alaska frozen turkey of a program, but we are still doing it. You're going to hear a lot of talk about cutting that budget, shutting down that program.

There will be debate over the necessity to build new nuclear weapons. There is a program called the Reliable Replacement Warhead that some in the labs want to build, to develop a new nuclear weapon that would come and replace the existing nuclear weapons, that would be more reliable than the ones we have. They say it won't require nuclear testing, but we have never accepted a nuclear weapon into the arsenal without testing. This will be a debate that is likely to unfold, with Republicans and Democrats now highly skeptical of doing that program.

You are going to see debates start up about whether we need to replace our existing arsenal, the missiles, bombers, and submarines that house currently around 9,000 nuclear weapons in our arsenal, nearing the end of their operational life. They will start to phase out of deployment in the next decade. What is going to replace them?

Just this week, there was a decision by Tony Blair to commit somewhere between \$40-to-\$60 billion to replace his nuclear delivery system, the Trident System. They buy it from us. That is going to be a very controversial decision in Great Britain. That is a lot of money to be spending on a nuclear program. You can take that and basically multiply it by ten and get some idea of what it would cost us. So there are going to be cost factors in this too.

All these debates are going to play out. In my view, you are going to start to see presidential candidates—and this is my personal mission, to convince the presidential candidates of what I am about to say—you are going to see presidential candidates take up this issue of nuclear terrorism. I am convinced that the candidate who articulates this clearly and convincingly will garner votes, will win approval, will have an issue that resonates with the American public. They should be campaigning on a program in their first term in office to eliminate the possibility of a nuclear terrorist strike in the United States.

And here is the good news: that is not an empty promise. We can do this. We know how to do this.

Here's how.

The good news, again, is that a terrorist can't build a nuclear weapon from scratch. It's too hard. It's not the design—there's lots of designs out there. It's not the technology—there's technology you can buy. It's the "stuff," it's the highly enriched uranium and the plutonium. You need a factory to build that. This is a massive industrial operation that requires large-scale industrial capability, massive amounts of energy, high technological skill, a lot of capital. It is beyond the capability of any terrorist group to do this kind of operation.

But if they can get it from somebody else, if they can get the highly enriched uranium—this is the number one problem—then a well-funded and organized group, such as al-Qaeda, probably could construct a crude nuclear device.

The device that we first used, the Hiroshima bomb, was made of highly enriched uranium. It's a very simple design. It's called the gun assembly design. You take a sub-critical part of highly enriched uranium over here, you take a slug of highly enriched uranium over here, you fire this into that—it turns out to be 1,000 feet per second, sort of Howitzer speed. When they mesh, they reach critical mass, the chain reaction begins—bang! You can turn fifty pounds of highly enriched uranium into about 15,000 tons of explosive force. So fifteen kilotons, which was the Hiroshima bomb, that's what is within the capability of a terrorist group.

If that was detonated on Manhattan, if there was a nuclear 9/11, Manhattan would be devastated—I'm sorry—from the ports all the way up here and into the Bronx. It would be a radioactive wasteland. Everything would be destroyed. Hundreds of thousands would be killed. Trillions of dollars in economic damage.

The political life of this country would be changed forever. You could basically take the Bill of Rights and put it up on the shelf and you might never see it again. People would be in fear of something like this happening again. They would be willing to tolerate the most brutal form of martial law for protection.

So we don't want to ever get there. We don't want to get in that situation. We don't want to be faced with that "what if"—what do we do, how do we respond? We want to stop the terrorists from getting the uranium in the first place.

There is only a limited amount of this uranium in the world. We know where it is. We have programs that are actively going out and securing and eliminating this uranium, turning it so that terrorists can't get it.

For example, we have a program called Megatons to Megawatts in the United States, where we have bought 500 tons of highly enriched uranium from Soviet warheads. This uranium used to be in Soviet warheads. They have disassembled the warheads. They have taken the highly enriched uranium out. We take the highly enriched uranium and in Russia blend it down with natural uranium to make low-enriched uranium. Low-enriched uranium is used for fuel rods. We take these fuel rods and we sell them to nuclear utilities here in the United States.

One out of every ten of these light bulbs in this room is powered by uranium that used to be in Soviet warheads. About 20 percent of the electricity in the United States comes from nuclear power. Half the fuel of those nuclear utilities comes from Soviet warheads.

That is a remarkably successful program. It burns it up. It can't be used ever again. It is destroyed. It is gone.

The problem is these programs are moving too slowly. Why haven't we bought up the other 500 tons that the Russians are willing to sell us?

The [Nunn-Lugar programs](#) that exist to secure and eliminate the stockpiles of weapons and materials,

both in the former Soviet Union and now in other states as well, have proven highly successful. In the fifteen years of their existence, we have secured or eliminated half of the material. The problem is we haven't secured or eliminated the other half.

And we are creeping along at this petty pace, spending about a billion dollars a year on these programs, or about what we spend in Iraq every three and a half days. Our priorities are out of whack. Our threat assessment is out of whack. We have to restore that.

A bipartisan group—the Baker-Cutler Commission, with [Lloyd Cutler](#) and [Howard Baker](#)—recommended six years ago that we triple that funding to \$3 billion a year, and accelerate the programs. If you do that, and if you have high-level presidential attention, you could secure and eliminate all the highly enriched uranium and plutonium in the world within the next four years. Bang! Bang! Impossible for a terrorist to get that material. You have eliminated the possibility, as much as one can, of a nuclear terrorist attack. You could do this.

And if you coupled that kind of program with a pledge to stop new countries from getting it and a pledge to reduce further and more dramatically in conjunction with Russia the existing stockpiles—why do we need 9,000 nuclear weapons? Why do the Russians need 16,000 nuclear weapons? We don't. There's no conceivable military mission for that. You could draw down to low hundreds very quickly.

My number is 600 total warheads. So instead of the 5,000 that we are planning to withdraw down to by the end of this decade, let's go to 600. Why do I pick that number? [Gene Habiger](#) told me that that's what he would support. He's the former commander of the Strategic Command, Eugene Habiger. He said he could live with 600. That would cover everything. Fine, let's agree on that.

You have surprisingly broad agreement across the political spectrum. [Richard Perle](#) says we don't need these damn things. We're never going to use them. We could go down to low hundreds. That's almost a direct quote.

You can get this kind of agreement if you just have a high presidential attention. You need that to overcome the nuclear bureaucracies, the nuclear Neanderthals, that are still clinging to these weapons and these high levels. You could do that. The American people would be overwhelmingly in support of this. How do I know? Because we have asked the American people.

Last year, there was an Associated Press poll that asked the American public what they supported. It turns out that 66 percent of the American public is in favor of no nation, including the United States, having nuclear weapons. And these kinds of polls are consistent over the last 40 years.

When they were asked whether they would support a policy where the United States and its allies kept nuclear weapons but other states were prohibited from getting them, only 13 percent said yes. But that is basically our policy.

You get broad support for a policy of drawing down dramatically, even eliminating—although I don't think any politician running for office would go that far—nuclear weapons. That campaign platform is waiting out there for the taking.

What I am going to be doing over the next year, two years, is trying to convince candidates to take up that plank and run with it and bring this debate up to the national level.

Let me stop my formal remarks at that point and open it up for questions or discussion.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: You haven't addressed the question of the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs. I wonder if you could give us the benefit of your wisdom on that.

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Sure.

So here's the problem. Let's try Iran first, which is by far the most difficult. The problem isn't the nuclear reactor. Iran says it needs nuclear power. Do they, do they not? I don't know.

Other oil-rich states have said they need nuclear power. The [Shah of Iran](#) had a nuclear power program. He wanted to build twenty reactors as well. We didn't object to that; we just wanted to sell him the reactors. So they say they want nuclear reactors.

The problem is not nuclear reactors. It's what goes into the reactor and what comes out of the reactor. The problem is that they also want to build facilities for making the fuel rods. The same facilities that could enrich uranium to low levels, 3-to-5 percent for fuel rods, can enrich it to high levels, 90 percent for nuclear bombs. Same facility, you just change the piping a bit. If inspectors weren't there, you would never know it was going on. That's one concern.

The second is what happens when you put those fuel rods in the reactor. You burn them up for about three years. The fission is controlled. It generates heat. It turns the water into steam. The steam turns the turbines. Nuclear power, electricity.

After about three years, they are used up. You take them out. You've got to dispose of them. One method of disposing of them is reprocessing. The Iranians want to build this facility too. That is where you chop these things up into little bits, you put them in nitric acid baths, other baths, and you precipitate out the plutonium. The plutonium is the other material you use for nuclear weapons. So that reprocessing could be not just for disposal but for a source for nuclear bombs.

Most countries that have nuclear reactors—there are about 40 in the world—do not make their own fuel. They buy it from the four or five countries that do—us, the Canadians, the Russians, the Europeans.

We have to strike a deal with Iran that convinces them that they can have the reactors but they can't have this capability. It turns out it doesn't make any economic sense for a country to have that kind of capability if they have fewer than 20 reactors. But Iran is racing ahead with the fuel plant before they have opened up even their first. So we have to convince them to pull back—not relinquish their right, which they have under international treaties, to this capability, but not to exercise that right.

In order to do that, we are going to have to basically offer them the same kind of deal we offered Libya: you give up your program and we will give up our efforts to change your regime. We will give you the security assurances that you may be seeking from acquiring this kind of capability. We will integrate you into the regional and international security and economic regimes. This will be worth much more money to you than you could possibly get without it.

And if you don't do this—there's got to be a stick to this too—if you don't do this, you are not going to get any of those benefits. You are going to continue to have an economy that stagnates.

Iran needs to produce 800,000 jobs a year to keep up with its population; it is producing 400,000. Their stock market is in tatters, just from the threat of sanctions about their program. Investment is drying up. You have levers. We have to be willing to use them.

The key is that we have to be willing to give up regime change. We have to be willing to make a deal with this particular devil. We did it with [Moammar Kadafi](#). This guy went from the poster child of rogue state leader to a man that President Bush calls a model. And the Libyan nuclear program is now in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. We moved it out lock, stock, and barrel.

Now, Libya was easy. If Libya was like playing checkers, Iran is three-dimensional chess. This is really going to be hard, because with that there has to be a regional security structure that we have to at least

start towards, which would include efforts to resolve the underlying conflict in the region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There would have to be a guaranteed supply of the fuel—[Mohamed ElBaradei](#), the head of the [IAEA](#) [International Atomic Energy Agency] talks about this—about establishing an international source of fuel so Iran can be guaranteed that their fuel would never be cut off if they don't make it themselves. And there has to be a fundamentally new relationship towards the United States. I believe we can do that. It just requires us to make the decision that that's the path we want to go down and then convince the Iranians to do it.

We may not succeed, so you have to be ready with Plan B, which is a long-term containment regime: no rewards if you don't agree, you stew in your own juices, your government will fall from power of its own accord because you can't deliver on the promises.

I have spent most of my time on Iran. The same sort of dynamic applies with North Korea, except I think North Korea is easier. It doesn't have oil. It has nothing. It is poor, isolated. I think you could make a deal with them. In fact, we did make a deal with them in 2005, [the September 19th deal](#), where for the first time they agreed to give up their program.

The problem was not just that the North Koreans were difficult. The problem was the divisions in our own administration. This administration is split between the pragmatists, like [Condoleezza Rice](#), who want to make a deal, and the hardliners, like [Vice President Cheney](#), who still want to overthrow the regimes. So they opposed the dealmakers. They will let it go so far and then they will pull the rug out from under them.

That's what happened in the North Korea case. Until we make up our own minds—do we want to eliminate the program or eliminate the regime?—we are going to be unable to make any progress in either one.

QUESTION: First of all, I've admired your work for a long time.

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: I have two questions with regard to the terrorists getting the atomic bomb. The first is that you say if you don't have the stuff you can't do it. Well, how secure is our own stuff? Is it less secure than it used to be? Is it more easily stolen from our own country and used within our own borders? That's my first question.

My second question is that, given in the last few years we have seen a terrific exodus of both technical expertise and—what shall we call it?—diplomatic expertise, even if the next president, whoever he or she may be, buys your program and wants to do this, will they have the technical and diplomatic power to do it because of the erosion in the last few years of this power?

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Two very good questions. Thank you very much.

Good news. Our stuff is very secure. What we want to do is bring the rest of the world up to our standards.

Most experts have very little concern about some James Bond kind of scenario, where they hijack a tactical aircraft with nuclear weapons. We don't even fly aircraft with tactical nuclear weapons anymore. So it is very secure.

The problem you worry about is actually terrorists attacking a nuclear facility, like a nuclear reactor or a storage facility, which are vulnerable to terrorist attack, and creating a very large-scale dirty bomb. You know, people talk about this a lot. It is actually one of the terrorist scenarios that I fear the most. It's nuclear, but it's not an explosion. It is taking what terrorists know how to do, a truck bomb, and lacing it with radioactive material, like [cesium](#).

Many "Exit" signs use a little bit of cesium to give it that red glow. Americium is in a lot of smoke detectors. Very radioactive material, in minute quantities basically harmless, but, like [polonium](#), which everybody is now familiar with, highly radioactive when ingested. It is carcinogenic. It will kill you slowly in small amounts, rapidly in large amounts. If you put this kind of material in a conventional bomb, you blow it up, you would contaminate ten, twenty square blocks of a downtown area, like Wall Street, and you would cause havoc, terror. I am actually surprised this hasn't happened yet.

But you can also do the reverse: you can bring the explosive to the radioactive source. That is what I'm worried about with our nuclear reactors and our nuclear storage facilities. Blowing up a storage pool, for example, draining the coolant from it, means that those reactor rods then go hot, they explode, and you're going to spread radioactive material over thousands of square miles. That is a real threat, and we are not doing enough to counter it.

Technical and diplomatic power: we definitely have the technical know-how to do this. We are the most technologically advanced country in the world still. We have the best nuclear scientists in the world at our nuclear laboratories. We know how to do this. We have had programs in existence for fifteen years. We know how to secure and eliminate this material.

We know how to negotiate reductions in this material. The problem we have with the diplomatic power is we now are suffering a crisis of legitimacy of the United States. Will countries still follow our lead?

I was in a dinner discussion several months ago with a lot of former senior officials. One of them said that they never can remember a six-year period in American history where we have suffered such a precipitous decline in power, in prestige, and in legitimacy. I think that is true. That is a hole we are going to have to dig out of. It is going to take us years to get back to where we were.

QUESTION: I would like to ask you about three countries, starting with [Pakistan and Mr. Khan](#); then India and, as Joanne mentioned, the recent approval by the Senate of the agreement with India, which subverts the very agreements that you said Kennedy started; and the third is China—where does China stand in all this?

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Pakistan is the most dangerous country on earth. I am much more worried about Pakistan than I am about North Korea. The danger if North Korea gets a bomb, or if they actually have the bomb, is not that they are going to attack us. Deterrence is alive and well. They understand what would occur next: it would be the end of their decadent little regime and most of their capital.

It isn't even that they are going to sell it to a terrorist group or another nation. That's possible, but no country ever has, and these are very valuable assets to them. It's hard to believe they would give them up, even for a great deal of money.

It's what happens next in the region. It's what happens if North Korea gets the bomb. What do its neighbors do? What does Japan do? I'm convinced that if North Korea tests again, does two or three more tests, that's it. The debate that is now starting in Japan—for the first time we have senior Japanese officials saying, "We should have a debate about nuclear technology"—will escalate and you could see Japan go nuclear. That's the danger with North Korea.

But with Pakistan, that's a much more urgent question. We have an unstable government that is headed by a military dictator, [President Musharraf](#). I have met him. He's a very capable man, but he is a military dictator. They have 50 to 100 nuclear weapons in that country. They have large, mass-based Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in the country. They have armed Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in the country, probably al-Qaeda itself.

What happens if Musharraf's motorcade is ten seconds slower next time? Two assassination attempts in 2004. What happens to the bombs? What happens to the material? What happens to the technicians who

know how to build the bombs? Do some Islamic fundamentalist factions grab some of this and grab the material? Or, even worse, does an Islamic fundamentalist faction seize control of the entire country?

So we could go from a major non-NATO U.S. ally, which is what Pakistan is, to our worst nuclear nightmare just like that [snapped fingers]. That's the country I worry about the most.

India: you know, if you're going to solve the Pakistan problem, you've got to solve the India problem. And, as Joanne said, we just made it worse. We just broke the basic deal. The basic deal was you don't get nuclear technology for peaceful purposes unless you join the Non-Proliferation Treaty and promise that you are not going to develop nuclear weapons.

We just made an exception for India. And it won't be the first exception. We just said that they are a reliable nuclear power. They acquired their weapons legitimately, which is semi-true— they never actually signed the Treaty, and so they never promised not to get them. There are questions about that, but we won't go into that.

The problem is it's this "good guy, bad guy" diversion. They're a good guy, so India should be allowed to get it. Iran is a bad guy, so they can't get it. Pakistan is a good guy; maybe we'll give them a deal too. North Korea is a bad guy; we're never going to—

You can't keep that double standard, because the good guys and the bad guys keep changing. You know, Iran used to be a good guy. We sold Iran their first nuclear reactor. Iraq used to be a good guy. We armed [Saddam](#) to fight the bad guy of Iran. Pakistan is a good guy now. You can't make a policy based on this double standard. It doesn't work. There's got to be one standard for all.

I am afraid that this India deal is knocking another leg off the non-proliferation regime. It is making the whole regime much more tenuous.

Finally, China. This is actually a good-news story. China has gone from a country that actively endorsed proliferation—[Mao Zedong](#) said bombs are good, everybody should have them; we've got to counter the superpowers. First it was just the United States, and then it was the Soviets. He actively helped other countries proliferate. Pakistan's nuclear design came from China.

Then, they shifted over to a country that said, after India got the bomb, "Maybe proliferation isn't so great after all," and they started to contain their trade of technology. In the last ten, fifteen years, you have seen them steadily integrate into the existing international norms.

We no longer consider China a major proliferation risk. There are still some questionable activities that some enterprises are trading dual-use technology, mostly in the missile field, but that is a problem we have with Europeans too. So China is no longer a major proliferation risk. In fact, they are part of the proliferation solution. It is China that is bringing pressure on North Korea to bring them to the deal.

The other nuclear issue with China is their offensive—or defensive, depending on your point of view—nuclear capabilities. They have about twenty long-range missiles that could hit the United States. That's bad. The good news is there's twenty of them. Their modernization program is going underway, but it is proceeding very slowly. They have a policy of what they call a "minimal nuclear deterrence," just enough to stop us from attacking them. There is no sign that they have any kind of plan to go off on the nuclear binge that either the United States or the Soviet Union did.

The sooner we get back to the business of reducing nuclear weapons globally, basically starting with the United States and Russia, the easier it will be to scoop up the Chinese weapons.

The longer we wait, the greater the risk that they will decide that they—no kidding—need to match our capability, and in ten or twenty years, thirty years at the latest, they would be able to do it. They could start turning these things out like sausages if they wanted to. They just don't want to yet.

QUESTION: I want to thank you, sir, for giving me a sense of hope at least that there are possibilities that exist. But I want to ask you this question. The gentleman a moment ago raised the question of India and Pakistan. What about Israel? How do you draw Israel into the club that says, "If Iran will give up, then Israel will give up"? How do you do that?

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: First, let me give you my bias right off the top. I have family in Israel. They are within range of Katyusha rockets. Anything I want to do I want to make sure that it is in Israel's national security interest, not just ours.

I actually believe it is in Israel's interests to give up its nuclear weapons. I completely understand why [Golda Meier](#) started the Israeli nuclear program. Some say it began even before there was a state. They saw these things, and they said, "Didn't Jewish scientists build those things? Maybe we should get a few of those." They were right, and there was a lot of support, and they started their program even before the state. My friend, Abner Cohen, has written the book [Israel and the Bomb](#), which is sort of the definitive history on this.

They needed this. This comes straight out of the Holocaust experience: never again would Jews be defenseless. They needed a weapon to counter the combined armies of the Arab states that were arrayed against them.

Since they have acquired those weapons, however, they have also acquired substantial conventional military power. Israel now conventionally can defeat any Arab army or combination of Arab armies arrayed against them. In fact, nuclear weapons are the one weapon that could offset Israel's conventional military superiority. So Israel's overriding security concern, in my view and in the view of some in Israel, is to prevent any state in the region from getting that nuclear capability.

There are two ways to do that. You can bomb them before they get the bomb themselves—a high-risk strategy. I won't go into the history of the raid on the Osirak reactor in 1981, which is said to be a success, when they stopped Saddam Hussein's reactor from producing plutonium that could be used in a bomb. It actually in my view backfired. It accelerated a completely hidden program that ten years later was on the verge of churning out highly enriched uranium for a bomb.

Whatever you think about that, you can't do it with Iran. There is no way that a conventional military strike in Iran is going to stop Iran from getting the program. It is probably going to accelerate it, just the way it did with Iraq. It would be a "pedal to the metal" race to get the capability as quickly as possible.

So you can either try to bomb another country before they can get this capability, or you can negotiate and you can decide we're all going to give up our weapons. This, in fact, is U.S. policy and Israeli policy, to have a Middle East free of nuclear weapons.

The problem is you can't get there until you resolve the Israeli-Palestinian problem. Until you have a regional peace agreement, you can't get to that nuclear phase. I believe that we can do this. Just as I believe that the once-impossible dream of ending the Soviet Union could be realized, the impossible dream of uniting Germany could be realized, the impossible dream of having a majority government in South Africa can be realized—all things we have seen in our lifetime—you can have peace in the Middle East. It is hard, it is difficult, but you can get to that point where you not only have a regional peace agreement, you have a nuclear-free Middle East. You draw Iran into it.

It's hard and difficult, but it is much easier than dealing with the alternative, which is you cannot maintain Israel's unilateral possession of nuclear weapons. It is not a choice between the way it is forever. The choice is between no nuclear weapons and five or six nuclear nations, because if Iran gets a weapon, Saudi Arabia is not going to sit still; I think they are going to take a nuclear shortcut and try to get some weapons from Pakistan, whose program they financed.

Egypt will restart its nuclear program and Turkey will restart its nuclear program. They both had programs in the 1960s. They are both capable of making nuclear weapons. We just heard Mubarak's son announce two weeks ago that Egypt should reconsider its nuclear power program. It too needs nuclear power. Turkey said the same thing.

Some of the Gulf States said that they were interested in developing nuclear power for desalinization. I don't believe it for a minute. I don't believe any of them are interested in the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. I think they want to follow the Iran model.

So that's the challenge we face there. Do we go for no nuclear weapons in that region or do we go to four, five nuclear states with the existing unresolved political, ethnic, and territorial disputes? That is a recipe for nuclear war.

JOANNE MYERS: I want to thank you. You made the hour go by so quickly. It was just a fascinating discussion. We really appreciate your coming up from Washington.

At this time, I invite you all to join us, continue the conversation. Mr. Cirincione is here to answer any more questions you have.

Thank you.

JOSEPH CIRINCIONE: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure being here.

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