



PAPER 6 .

PRESSURE POINTS OF THE NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION REGIME

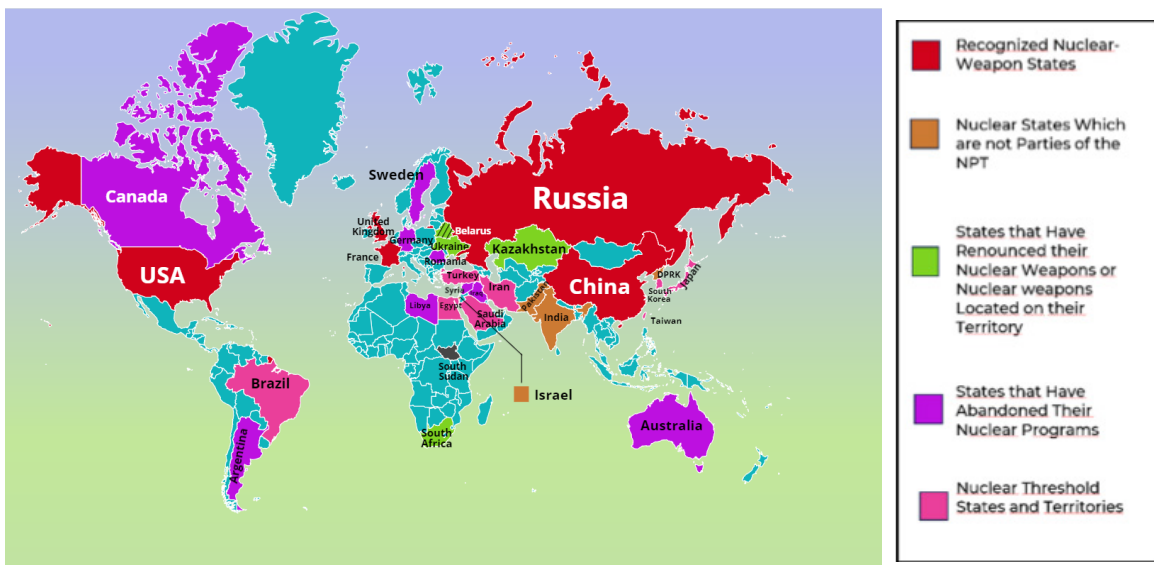
Vladimir Orlov

MAJOR PRESSURE POINTS OF GLOBAL IMPORTANCE

One should pay attention to today’s situation in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation. Some pressure points can be identified which will probably exist for some years to come and will be a part of the checklists at future Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) review conferences.

► *Pressure point №1 – The lack of universality of the NPT*

The NPT is remarkably strong because a vast majority of nations have been supporting it. Believe it or not, even Palestine³⁰ and Taiwan³¹, which legally cannot be parties to the Treaty, are such parties. One may say that the participation is larger than the globe. Unfortunately, not exactly like that because there are several nations that are still outside of this Treaty.



Statues of countries in relation to the NPT (as of February 2024)
©Vladimir Orlov

³⁰ Russia has always supported a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. – Editor’s Note.

³¹ Indicating Taiwan separately in this Paper does not imply recognition of its independent status. We consider Taiwan as a part of the People’s Republic of China. – Editor’s Note.



As it was mentioned previously, South Sudan has not signed the NPT so far since its independence in 2011, but it has never refused to accede to it in the future. Anyway, there are no nuclear weapons in South Sudan to make it very clear.

What is on the radar screen is the Middle East with Israel and South Asia with India, Pakistan, and the DPRK to a certain extent. India and Pakistan have never signed the NPT. Those two countries have always rejected the Treaty. Israel is believed to have a nuclear bomb, but the country has never admitted that it has nuclear weapons. At the same time it has never denied having them, pursuing the policy of *nuclear ambiguity*. The DPRK announced in 2003 that it would withdraw from the NPT and later, in 2006, conducted its first nuclear test. Speaking very practically, Russia does not consider the DPRK to be out of the NPT. It did not fully complete the procedures of withdrawal from the NPT. But the fact is that the DPRK has its own nuclear arsenal.

“ Each Party shall in exercising its national sovereignty have the right to withdraw from the Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events, related to the subject matter of this Treaty, have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country. It shall give notice of such withdrawal to all other parties to the Treaty and to the United Nations Security Council three months in advance. Such notice shall include a statement of the extraordinary events it regards as having jeopardized its supreme interest”.

**Article X.1 of the NPT
1968**

Source: <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt/text/>

► *Pressure point N°2 – Persistence of risks of nuclear proliferation by state parties of the NPT in non-compliance to Articles I and II of the Treaty*

Articles I and II of the NPT have been preventing state parties to the NPT from the temptation to obtain nuclear weapons. One of the significant concerns is the risk of nuclear sharing by the *haves*. The United States does share knowledge with its NATO allies, particularly during their drills in Europe with aircrafts and bombers that involve the potential use of the US' nuclear munitions deployed in Europe.

It is also true that one should be very watchful about those nations of the world that are parties to the NPT but have their own advanced nuclear program. Again, there is nothing wrong with the fact that they develop nuclear energy or have strong interest in that. This is promoted by the Treaty. One should be very careful to avoid a situation when country X, developing its nuclear fuel cycle, for some reasons decides to switch its advanced peaceful nuclear program into a non-peaceful one by taking such a political decision.

At least nine nations of the world can be considered *threshold states*³²: Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Ukraine, Türkiye, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Brazil. This list is not necessarily limited to nine because one can add Poland, the UAE, Australia, etc. So, in general, there are threshold states: there are states with advanced nuclear programs, there are states that may advance their nuclear programs pretty quickly or build alliances based on nuclear sharing.

³² Find more: Новая ядерная девятка? Оценка угроз распространения ядерного оружия в мире. Доклад. Издание 2-е (исправленное и дополненное) / Ред. В.А. Орлов, С.Д. Семенов. М.: ПИР-Пресс, 2023. – 230 с. – (ПИР-Библиотека - книжная серия).



- ▶ *Pressure point №3 – General provisions of the Article VI of the NPT, or the importance of working on nuclear disarmament, on the cessation of the nuclear arms race and the inter-connection between nuclear and other types of weapons*

The noble goal of humankind should be a general and complete disarmament treaty which would be the real address to those who are concerned about a holistic response to this issue of nuclear disarmament. It is clear that progress with reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons is unsatisfactory. There is only one very efficient agreement – 2010 New START –, but it was not as sustainable as one would like it to be, and it is going to expire in 2026. Currently, there is no sign that there will be a new treaty ready to be a substitute for the New START after that year. The strategic arms control dialogue between Russia and the US has been frozen for the last years but it is obvious that the whole work on nuclear disarmament cannot be done only by those two nations.

- ▶ *Pressure point №4 – Politicization of nuclear proliferation, disarmament, peaceful uses of nuclear energy and arms control*

One example can be made to illustrate that this is a big problem that unfolded 20 years ago. Saddam Hussein's Iraq was working on nuclear weapons in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, the international community, including the Soviet Union, worked together to put the Iraqi nuclear ambitions under control after the First Gulf War (1990-1991). IAEA inspectors came to Iraq. There were commissions built to control other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and delivery systems in Iraq. Coming back to nuclear weapons, on the one hand, the inspectors were surprised with the advanced level of Iraq's nuclear weapons program. On the other hand, they managed to destroy Iraq's nuclear weapons program and to bring its capabilities back to zero.

“Remember discussing the real threat of nuclear proliferation in Iraq with the Americans in 2003. American experts, not politicians, were quite professional and they knew that there was nothing there, but they were instructed by the White House to provide a proof of Iraq working on nuclear weapons. They had to provide all those PowerPoint presentations at the UN Security Council, all the other fakes, which were good to sell to the international audience and the US domestic audience. Many years after the invasion they had to report that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but the troops were already there. Housewives watching the TV were still under the impression that those bad guys in Iraq were so bad because they were developing nuclear weapons. Americans under George W. Bush (2001-2009) used the We Will Fight Proliferation slogan when they intervened Iraq, and that was completely wrong because they basically provided disinformation, finding it easier to sell their aggression under the sign of nonproliferation or counterproliferation”.

Vladimir Orlov

- ▶ *Pressure point №5 – Attempts to solve nuclear nonproliferation issues outside the boundaries of the existing international legal framework*

There may be concerns about the intentions of this or that country. You do not like that country, you have bad relations with that country, but instead of using the tools and the instruments which are legally binding, i.e., the UN Security Council or the IAEA, you just make your own conclusion and then start imposing economic sanctions, intercepting the



ships of that country. You apply a lot of political pressure trying to demonize that country, to blame it, to describe it as a bad player in international relations. Some things that are worse than that happen as well, i.e., the assassinations of nuclear scientists, which Iran has experienced. That is the general logic of this problem.

The Israelis, who themselves are considered to have nuclear weapons, believe that it is against their interests to have other nuclear nations in the Middle East. They are extremely active in doing the immediate counterproliferation. They already bombed a reactor in Iraq in 1981 and a nuclear facility in Syria in 2007. It is too difficult to destroy the Iranian nuclear cycle. Together with the Americans, the Israelis used cyberattacks, *Stuxnet* or the *Olympic Games Operation*, and directly killed nuclear scientists and engineers key to the Iranian advanced peaceful nuclear program.

► *Pressure point N° 6 – The risks of nuclear terrorism*

This threat should not be overexaggerated. While the risk may be low, the consequences, if violent non-state actors, terrorists get access to nuclear munitions or fissile materials, will be very noticeable for some countries, for some regions, and perhaps for the whole world. What are the faces of nuclear terrorism?

Number one is sabotage at nuclear facilities. This is not impossible, especially if a terrorist organization has support within the nuclear facility. The second face is unauthorized access to weapons-grade materials. This face of nuclear terrorism has a low probability, but noticeable consequences. Number three is nuclear munitions the risk of which is very low. The physical protection of nuclear munitions is well established in most states.

In the 1990s, Russia experienced quite a number of cases of nuclear terrorism from Chechen separatists, putting radioactive materials in Izmaylovo Park in Moscow and trying to get an access to the train tracks with nuclear munitions during the process of their dismantlement. This is a situation where nuclear disarmament could unfortunately play in favor of those terrorist groups. Moreover, they had strong interest in getting access to Russian nuclear *closed cities*. Being in economic distress and social crisis, Russia put a lot of effort into preventing terrorists from getting access to nuclear munitions. With international support throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia managed to remove that risk and the issue of illicit trafficking.

Osama bin Laden³³ was hoping to get nukes from the Russian Ural. Very soon he was advised that it would be unrealistic, impractical, and he turned to the much cheaper option of using the airplanes, and we still remember what 9/11 was like for New York and Washington and for the rest of the world.

Terrorists analyze what is more realistic for them. Sometimes what they want is not the effect of devastation, but global attention. The word *nuclear* on TV channels, front pages of newspapers, Internet browsers, etc. still works to attract attention. It is better to sell news with the word *nuclear*, which does not serves the purpose of nuclear nonproliferation.

³³ Osama bin Laden was a militant, a terrorist and founder of Al-Qaeda, this organization is recognized as terrorist in the Russian Federation. – Editor's Note.



► *Pressure point N°7 – Stalling of the NPT review process*

In 1995, the NPT was extended indefinitely, but state parties still meet every five years to review the Treaty. In the current global situation, achieving a real consensus within the NPT review process is probably close to unrealistic.

The two recent NPT review conferences held in 2015 and in 2022 ended without final documents. In 2015, it was explained by the lack of the progress in establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East (MEWMDFZ). Also, there were many demands, and requirements by the *have-nots* for more reporting by the nuclear-weapon states on their arsenals. Moscow thought that we could accept that. The problem was with the US, Canada, and the UK that chose to ignore the will of the majority to make more effort related to the Middle East zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. At the 2022 NPT Review Conference, the *collective West* led by the US, the UK and France, supported by a number of other NATO members, decided to diplomatically attack Russia with accusations and provocations that had nothing to do with reality and nothing to do with the Treaty. The Russian position was not taken into consideration. That was why Russia did not support the final draft document.

REGIONAL PRESSURE POINTS

Those days nuclear nonproliferation is not far from the attention of Russian decision makers. Why? Most of the regional tensions, involving nuclear issues, are *located* along the perimeter of Russia's borders. For Russia preventing proliferation and avoiding the introduction of the nuclear factor in regional conflicts is a part of its foreign and security policy.

► *The situation in the Middle East*

The Middle East calls for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the region. It has a long history starting in the 1950s. But it was in May 1995, at the NPT Review and Extension Conference, when that call was put on paper as a decision on the Middle East adopted by the Conference. Not much happened after that.

There is at least one nation with nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and this is Israel. Israel has the legitimate right not to be a party to the NPT. However, Israel participates in the NPT review conferences as an observer. Being the only country in the Middle East with nuclear weapons, it destabilizes the whole region when nuclear issues are concerned. Not Iran, but Israel may be the primary source of a nuclear chain reaction in the Middle East. By ignoring the calls for such a treaty on a MEWMDFZ, by not participating in conferences which are now held on a regular basis in New York, Israel certainly does not behave wisely. Tactically, it can be understood why Israel does not want to be involved in this negotiation process. Strategically, it is not a solution.

One should not forget that the US nuclear weapons are located on Turkish soil. Türkiye does not control those nuclear weapons, but there are other players in or next to the region with nuclear weapons on their soil. There are other states in the region that histor-



ically cheated and, while being within the NPT, they developed their clandestine nuclear military programs. These are Iraq, Syria, Libya. There are nations that have great interest in nuclear energy, such as Türkiye, Egypt, Saudi Arabia.

“ My teacher Ambassador Roland Timerbaev told me that for Israel the only solution related to nuclear weapons will be to repeat what South Africa once did in early 1990s, probably without any transparency, but to destroy its nuclear arsenal one day and then to join the nuclear have-nots club. Clearly the situation in the region demonstrates that we are very far from that scenario”.

Vladimir Orlov

The nuclear problems of the Middle East also involve also chemical and biological weapons issues. Until relatively recently, Syria had a chemical arsenal and declared that the arsenal was its security needed to counterbalance Israeli nuclear weapons. With the active participation of Russia, in 2014, Syria agreed to destroy its chemical arsenal and to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). But that example was not followed by others.

► *The situation in East Asia*

The North Korea was watching the nuclear developments in the world very closely. Its leaders noticed that they were on the list of the *Axis of Evil* developed by the US administration. They noticed what happened to Saddam Hussein. They noticed what happened to Colonel Gaddafi, who was playing with the nuclear weapons idea or exchanging his nuclear weapons program for recognition of himself by the Western leaders.

“ Do not demonize those who you do not understand. Try to understand why, for what security needs, or for what other needs they develop their nuclear weapons program. Then you will realize that the problem lies in the whole East Asia and not only in the part of the region”.

Vladimir Orlov

Technologically Japan would probably need just a few months, if not a few weeks, to switch from its peaceful nuclear program to a non-peaceful one if such a political decision was made. At the same time, it is true that, being the victim of nuclear weapons, Japan would hesitate to turn to the military nuclear option. It is also true that Japan is under the US nuclear umbrella, and it has to follow the US' endorsed Constitution, which prohibits Japan from developing nuclear weapons. At some point, Japanese leadership may think differently than today.

Until the early 1990s there were nuclear weapons in South Korea. True, they were owned by the US and the US decided to withdraw them at some point. Of course, the North remembers that part of the story as well. It is also true that there were attempts by South Korean dictators to develop their own nuclear weapons program in the past.

The special case is Taiwan. Nowadays Taiwan indicates no interest in nuclear weapons. But historically there were times when Taiwan was looking into going nuclear, keeping in mind the intentions of the People's Republic of China vis-a-vis Taiwan.



► *The situation in South Asia*

Since 1968 India and Pakistan have been outside of the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, and since 1998 they both have nuclear weapons. It is not that important which of them has more nuclear weapons. The most important problem is that a regional rivalry between the two states still exists.

Pakistan has developed its nuclear weapons because of India. But India concentrates more on the Chinese nuclear arsenal. One cannot explain why China is a *have* and India should be a *have-not*, just because India *jumped on the nuclear weapons train* slightly later than China did in 1964. Getting rid of India's nuclear weapons would be possible when China does the same. Pakistan looks at India in this very unusual triangle.

► *The special case of Iran*

In 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed. It was rather difficult to negotiate an Iranian nuclear deal. The JCPOA was a real compromise between parties involved in the negotiation process. Besides, it could make Iran's advanced nuclear program more transparent, put it under control, and also meet the concerns and needs of Iran.

Very unfortunately, in 2018, US President Donald Trump (2017-2021) decided to withdraw from the agreement. At this point, although there have been some attempts to restore the letter and spirit of the JCPOA, there has been no success.

Iranians are very disappointed about the failure of the JCPOA. Moscow is disappointed as well. Russia has nothing against Iran and the US achieving a new compromise that would serve their own interests and, what is important for Moscow, the interests of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. It is a big question whether informal promises can be kept, but it is more worrisome that each new US administration comes with a new policy towards Iran which knows itself that trusting the US is completely impossible.

CONCLUSION

The list of nuclear nonproliferation pressure points can be continued. Suffice it to say, the NPT will survive, but the list of problems associated with nuclear nonproliferation will be expanded as well. There are still a lot of things to address, to analyze, and, hopefully, to fix. ■■