

INSIDE VIEW

Nuclear Structure Shaken

Iranian Actions May Unravel Global Controls

Anarchy refers to a condition in which no one state or alliance rules the rest. Of course, anarchy does not mean there are no rules, only that states are sovereign and free from any institution telling them what to do.

In the world of nuclear competition, anarchy has prevailed in the sense that no world government has ruled the globe, but numerous rules and institutions regulate state behavior and constitute state identities. That structure now may be unraveling in



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regards to Iran, and Western states need to take certain steps to prevent further proliferation.

Since 1970, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has regulated the civilian and military control of nuclear power. Nuclear have-nots accepted the possibility of rule by nuclear weapon states on condition that no weapon state would threaten them with overwhelming, i.e., nuclear, force; that all weapon states must limit their rule through nuclear disarmament; and that they may withdraw from their non-nuclear commitment in case of a national emergency.

To sweeten the arrangement,

NPT parties agreed to support civilian use of nuclear power, so NPT member states appointed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to provide safeguards against cheaters and promote civilian nuclear programs.

But at a September meeting, European Union foreign ministers argued that Iran must be prevented from engaging in uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, which is legal under the NPT but essential to develop a nuclear weapon program.

In striking contrast to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's position that opposed supporting a U.N. Security Council resolution during the Iraq crisis, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer now claims that Iran miscalculates if it does not reckon with Berlin's eventual support for a referral of the Iranian case to the Security Council, and possibly sanctions.

Ever since the mid-1990s, and more forcefully the Sept. 11 attacks, Western states have come to believe that not all non-nuclear NPT members should be treated equally. Rather, those who have disrespected the treaty's rules and are thus deemed unreliable with respect to their non-nuclear commitment should be denied civilian nuclear technologies that are easily applicable in a nuclear weapon program.

The mixed results of earlier efforts to limit access to nuclear technologies for unfriendly regimes — Iraq through the U.N. Special Commission and North Korea through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization — have only reinvigorated the United States and, hesitatingly, its European allies to redefine the rules in the nuclear arena.

Iran's effort to end nuclear anarchy has prompted a variety of initiatives. In October 2003, the foreign ministers of France, Britain and Germany reached a political agreement that Iran would answer all questions regarding its past violations of its IAEA safeguards obligations. More importantly, the Agreed Statement substantially amended Iran's nonproliferation commitment under the NPT to include the temporary suspension of uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing.

Also, Russia has conditioned its continued cooperation in finishing and operating the light water reactor in Bushehr to Iran accepting Russian control over that facility's fuel cycle.

Many Iranians, and not only those close to the country's religious leadership, have balked at surrendering their right to develop and master the whole nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment and reprocessing. However,

over the past year, Tehran has repeatedly signaled that it may be willing to forgo this right for an extended period of time, without ceding the right for good.

This is not to suggest that in 2004 Iran has not been engaged in suspicious dual-use nuclear activities, such as uranium conversion or developing heavy water technology. Only recently, Tehran claimed that it soon would start uranium enrichment, although it has not done so since last fall.

Make no mistake: Iran is clearly pursuing a "nuclear hedging strategy" in which it keeps its non-nuclear status but develops, produces and stores technologies and material to allow the rapid production of nuclear weapons when desired.

But we are not there yet. And U.S. President George W. Bush and Fischer have made clear that Washington and its European allies are not prepared to accept an independent Iranian enrichment or reprocessing capacity.

Thus, Western states, including Germany, may want to consider the following options.

■ First, it is clear that if Iran limits its right to master the whole fuel cycle, it will ask for additional incentives other than excusing past misbehavior. Most importantly, these incentives will have to include a secure scheme to control sensitive nuclear mate-

rial in Iran and security guarantees for Iran.

■ Second, Western states may want to use the ongoing negotiations up to the NPT review conference in 2005 to launch a debate on what technologies and materials can be considered as "peaceful" under the NPT. This debate must consider recent revelations regarding the spread of covert centrifuge and reprocessing technology, weapon design, and the availability of separated plutonium and highly enriched uranium.

In this context, Western states should follow up on a recent French proposal to hold violators to account even if they have withdrawn from the NPT. These new rules should require known violators to surrender (or dismantle) critical nuclear capabilities they have built with the assistance of the IAEA under safeguards even after they have left the NPT.

■ Third, if the extension of current nonproliferation obligations within the NPT framework proves impossible, Western states may want to coordinate practical steps in other groupings, such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group, to ensure states of concern do not receive sensitive technologies.

These options may or may not be applicable to Iran, as its government may conclude that it will not accept "nuclear suzerainty." However, the Iranian case is crucial in determining the behavior of other states in the Middle East and in the NPT. Hence, Tehran's next steps will tell us if and how soon the era of nuclear anarchy will come to an end. ■