



UN SECURITY COUNCIL

The Current State of Nuclear Weapons

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Introduction and Summary of the Problem

For over 60 years, countries wishing to gain political power in the world have begun to develop and stockpile vast quantities of nuclear weaponry, in particular due to fear of similar weapons in enemy hands. Though the first nuclear weapons were developed by the United States during World War II, since then the former USSR, the United Kingdom, France and China developed and expanded their nuclear arsenals, while North Korea, Pakistan, Israel and Iran have all developed weapons programs with the capability to build their own nuclear weapons.

While there have been some efforts, particularly in the past two decades, to make attempts at reducing or even eliminating the nuclear stockpiles, for the most part these efforts have produced few tangible results. It appears that there are no solutions to this problem that will please everybody. This update will help you to understand the growing tensions between the United States and its allies and North Korea, as well as China's role in stopping nuclear proliferation.

Focus of the Debate

Economic Sanctions on Iran

Since the inception of the Obama administration, the US government and its allies have been working to engage the Iranian government in negotiations to make its nuclear programs more transparent to the international community and to insure that the government was following the guidelines established by the International Atomic Energy Agency in its pursuit of nuclear technology. In September 2009, British Prime Minister Brown, French President Sarkozy and US President Obama revealed the existence of a secret nuclear enrichment facility located in Qom, Iran. Since then, there has been confirmation of a second facility capable of producing weapons-grade uranium. For a brief while, negotiations seemed to be progressing, as a potential deal was worked out between the Iranian ambassador at the IAEA, the P5 and Germany that would help improve Iran's ability to use nuclear energy while assuring greater transparency and supervision of the distribution of low enriched uranium, which while useful in the creation of energy, cannot be used to make nuclear weapons. Though the ambassador originally approved of the plan, the Iranian government has not agreed to the plan and has issued a plan of their own, with the threat that if the international commu-

nity did not agree to it by January 31, they would produce the low enriched uranium on their own.

As a result, the Western powers in particular have begun to consider a greater show of force to insure Iran's compliance. President Obama has said that though he would prefer to use diplomatic means to negotiate Iranian transparency, he will not rule out the use of military force in safeguarding American lives. He is supported by his allies in Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and France, though their governments remain reluctant to threaten the use of military force. President Sarkozy in particular advocates for the use of increased economic and diplomatic sanctions against Iran in the event that it does not comply with international nuclear nonproliferation agreements.

Both Russia and China, however, have shown increasing reluctance to force Iranian compliance. For Russia, good diplomatic relations with Iran will insure an *entrée* into the Middle East, a region of the world where it has long sought to regain past influences. Russia is working with the Iranian government to build a nuclear power plant at Bushehr, fulfilling a promise they made 15 years ago. Russian officials for the state's nuclear corporation have also recently assured Iranian agencies that "2010 is the year of Bushehr," suggesting that they, too, are running out of patience with Western attempts to force Iranian compliance.

China has also been reluctant to use more force, citing Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Though China has voted with the Western powers to place sanctions on Iran recently, it has begun to shy away from association with the more militant stance of the Western powers, sending low-level diplomats to talks with the other P5 nations and Germany.

Recent Developments

Countries have become increasingly divided on the issue of Iran's right to nuclear technology. While the P5 countries have voted together so far to sanction Iran, China is becoming increasingly unwilling to impose further economic strains on the Middle Eastern nation. Many countries, China included, feel that sovereign nations have the right to use nuclear technology for energy purposes.

Six of the world's major powers – the permanent members of the UNSC, with the addition of Germany – met in January to discuss an increase in the economic sanctions currently placed on Iran. Though no further sanctions have resulted from the talks, it was decided that should efforts to negotiate with Tehran become stalled, further sanctions would be imposed. Though both the Russian Federation and China have voted for three separate rounds of sanctions against Iran in the past, it remains

unclear if China especially would vote the same way in the future. However, time is running out for these decisions to be made, because the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is up for review at a conference in May, and the Western powers especially do not want increased tensions to complicate these talks.

Questions a Resolution Should Address

Though there has been much debate on how to solve the problem of nuclear proliferation, there have been few results from the imposition of economic sanctions and China in particular is becoming frustrated at their lack of progress. Should economic sanctions be the sole recourse for nations attempting to stop nuclear programs from developing? The United Nations Security Council needs to address what powers individual states have in imposing sanctions against other sovereign powers, as well as to what extent these sanctions can be imposed.

In addition, the UNSC needs to consider other courses of action in terms of forcefully stopping the proliferation of nuclear weaponry, particularly in regions where there are hostile regimes. Should the UNSC define what makes a hostile regime? Can the P5 countries form a consensus on what defines a hostile regime and what economic ramifications will result? With the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty slated for review later this year, the actions of the UNSC will have serious consequences in terms of the levels of cooperation at the talks. To what extent can the Western powers afford continuing on their current path?

Conclusion

Until there is a viable agreement between the major powers of the world, nonproliferation is impossible. Establishing firm guidelines regarding economic sanctions would provide greater stability, but have the potential to be diluted by disagreements between the nuclear nations, in particular between China and the United States. Regardless, a decision regarding Iranian sanctions must be made before the May review of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty or there could be dire consequences for the state of diplomacy.

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