

Enlightenment and nuclear order

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There are black clouds hanging over the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. The challenges posed by the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran have not been solved, the deep disputes that came up during the review conference in summer 2005 still linger on, and the policies of the current US administration have caused many controversies. It might be useful to step back for a moment and to reflect on the very basics of nuclear non-proliferation. What has kept this regime together for such a long time, what is really at stake today and what kind of mistakes can political action cause? Viewing the efforts to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to create an international nuclear order as an enlightenment project is, in principle, a reasonable approach. It might help in understanding the current problems. This article, however, arrives at conclusions totally different from those presented by William Walker in his article in this issue of *International Affairs*.

Enlightenment is surely about the ‘mastery of nature’, as Walker assumes; but the term can no longer be used in the innocent sense that was prevalent in the eighteenth century. Isaiah Berlin equated eighteenth-century enlightenment with rationalism, universalism and empiricism—based on the notion of natural law—and the expectation that the application of these principles would lead to a free and prosperous society of a universal kind.¹ The traditional understanding of enlightenment comes from the French philosopher René Descartes. For him, enlightenment was a political and social process by which mankind would cultivate and apply scientific knowledge and reason and thus contribute to progress, welfare, peace and freedom. As an observer stated it, enlightenment as understood by Descartes could be characterized as ‘a type of political action . . . that forges the bond between philosophy or science and society in the common enterprise of the mastery of nature’. It presumes, he added, the existence of free and open societies.² The latter sentence is of great importance, since the simple mating of science and society (or politics) does not necessarily result in what Descartes had in mind.³

¹ Isaiah Berlin, ‘The counter-enlightenment’, in *Against the current: essays in the history of ideas* (London: Hogarth, 1979), pp. 1–24.

² Richard Kennington, ‘René Descartes’, in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds, *History of political philosophy*, 3rd edn (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987), pp. 421–55 at p. 435.

³ This point was stressed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947).

The French Revolution saw the application of this traditional understanding of enlightenment, and the world at that time witnessed its failure. After that, the innocence of the concept was gone.⁴ This is where counter-enlightenment comes in, a concept framed by Isaiah Berlin. Counter-enlightenment starts for him with Giambattista Vico in Italy and Johann Georg Hamann in Germany, and was continued by Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Wilhelm Josef Schelling. It was characterized by the replacement of rationalism, universalism and empiricism with subjectivity, nationalism and historicism. He sees counter-enlightenment as a historical phenomenon that gained its momentum from the resistance against Napoleonic imperialism.⁵ Counter-enlightenment eventually prepared the way for the nationalist movements of the late nineteenth century, but also for fascism, national socialism and Marxist communism in the twentieth century.⁶

As early as 1783 the German philosopher Immanuel Kant had attempted to define 'enlightenment' in a more subtle way. 'Enlightenment', he asserted, 'is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity', he continued, 'is the inability to use one's intellect without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of intellect, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another.'⁷ What Kant was insinuating was that immaturity is not just a historical category, but something that happens daily, and something into which even people who consider themselves to be part of the enlightenment process might fall back. We know today, much better than Kant did, that communities of human beings united in furthering a certain purpose or political aim often tend to devise systems of basic beliefs and mental attitudes that may be necessary for practical purposes but make them susceptible to the emergence of ideologies.⁸ Thus to pursue enlightenment today also means to look at communities that see themselves as part of the enlightenment process, and to ask whether they are still on course or whether they have developed systems of beliefs and attitudes that shield them from reality.

Today's processes of global governance and international regime-building are to an increasing degree shaped by so-called *epistemic communities*, and some of these

⁴ See the various contributions in James Schmidt, ed., *What is enlightenment? Eighteenth-century answers and twentieth-century questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

⁵ Berlin, 'The counter-enlightenment'.

⁶ The close link between historicism and totalitarian movements of the twentieth century has been demonstrated by Karl Löwith in *Meaning in history: a critical analysis of historical thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), parts II and III, as well as by Karl Popper in *The poverty of historicism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960). It has also been analysed by Hannah Arendt in *The origins of totalitarianism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951). For an overview see Ira Katznelson, *Desolation and enlightenment: political knowledge after total war, totalitarianism, and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁷ Immanuel Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', in *Immanuel Kant: Werke in sechs Bänden* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), pp. 53–61 at p. 53 (translation by the author).

⁸ In the 1930s the German philosopher Karl Mannheim pointed out that groups might form cohesive understandings about social reality and that groups can devise ideologies. He came to the conclusion that 'no given individual confronts the world and, in striving for the truth, constructs a world view out of the data of his experience. . . . It is much more correct that knowledge is from the very beginning a co-operative process of group life, in which everyone unfolds his knowledge within a framework of a common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties.' He defined an ideology as 'those total systems of thought held by society's ruling groups that obscure the real conditions and thereby preserve the status quo'. See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and utopia: an introduction to the sociology of knowledge* (London: Kegan, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936), pp. 26, 36.

have devised systems of beliefs and attitudes which, at least, raise the question whether they are working on the basis of ideologies that make them immune to contradictory evidence. Epistemic communities are usually valued as important forces of progress, since they often invest energy into global governance purposes. However, as John G. Ruggie has subtly pointed out, there might be a problem: 'epistemic communities . . . may be said to consist of interrelated roles that group up around an *episteme*: they delimit for their members the "proper" construction of social reality'. Ruggie defines the term *episteme*—which he borrowed from Michel Foucault—as a 'dominant way of looking at social reality, a set of shared symbols and references, mutual expectations and a mutual predictability of intention'.⁹

It is no secret that the political agenda of arms control and, in particular, of nuclear non-proliferation has been influenced over the past four decades by the school of liberal arms control. This epistemic community has defined the basic tenets of international arms control and non-proliferation politics. It encompasses not only scholars and researchers, but also a large number of diplomats, politicians, bureaucrats and journalists. Members of this school have shaped US arms control policy since the 1960s, many experts from that community having served various US administrations. But the group has also found adherents outside the United States. International arms control diplomacy has been to a great extent the result of diligent and devoted efforts by liberal arms controllers from several parts of the world. Without this epistemic community, international arms control and non-proliferation efforts would not have been so successful.

This epistemic community, however, is not immune to the disease of ideology. In fact, over the years it has devised an ideological belief system of common tenets and attitudes that has led to a growing divide between reality and what members of that group think and believe. The most relevant indicator for the existence of such an ideology is that its members cling to historical 'facts' that turn out to be myths as soon as one puts them to simple empirical tests. The article by William Walker is itself an example of how ideological tenets have taken over today's liberal arms control school—with possibly negative political consequences.

What makes things difficult is that there is today a competing ideological school: the several variants of assertive conservatism that have shaped the Bush administration's policies. This assertive conservatism (mainly misnamed neo-conservatism, although neo-conservatism is just one strand) was promoted as an attempt to do away with the ideologies of the liberal arms control school. Unfortunately, what we have witnessed is the replacement of one ideology by another one. So much has been written on the ideologies and errors of the Bush administration that it would be futile even to list all these analyses. But the mere existence of an opposing conservative ideology is no excuse for failing to analyse critically the ideology of liberal arms control, since it is those ideological tenets that still dominate in the global arms control and non-proliferation community, and most likely will become more powerful again. This is where enlightenment comes in: first of all,

⁹ Quotations from John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the world polity: essays on international institutionalization* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 55.

it means to expose and debunk myths. Only on the basis of such an operation can one initiate an enlightened debate.

Today's guiding myths of liberal arms control

Liberal arms control has many merits and has achieved many successes. However, it has also devised over the years a set of basic tenets and attitudes. Some of them have been transformed into beliefs that could be termed myths, in the sense of fundamental ideas shared by members of this group which will not survive a serious empirical test. Usually myths reflect wishful thinking at best and premeditated distortion of historical facts at worst. The only way to dispose of myths is to lay open their fallacies.

The myth of the NPT being a disarmament treaty

The most prominent ideological myth of the liberal arms control school is the notion that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 (the NPT) was in essence not a non-proliferation treaty but a disarmament agreement. The NPT is said to be an agreement among nuclear weapon states (NWS) and non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) according to which the latter should disarm first with the NWS following later. As a recent document of liberal arms control—the Blix Commission Report of 2006—put it: ‘The original “bargain” of the treaty is generally understood to be the elimination of nuclear weapons through the commitment by non-nuclear weapon states not to acquire nuclear weapons and the commitment by five nuclear weapon states to pursue nuclear disarmament.’¹⁰ This contention is not only wrong in terms of historical evidence; it is also dangerous, since it triggers off a logic which tends to undermine the whole treaty regime.

The contention that the NPT was in essence a treaty on the elimination of nuclear weapons is not borne out by the relevant documents of the negotiations.¹¹ The Non-Aligned states and, in particular, neutral Sweden wanted this, but they did not succeed. In fact, Sweden, Brazil, India and other neutral and Non-Aligned states were initially against separate negotiations for a nuclear non-proliferation treaty and stated that, for them, any such treaty would be acceptable only as a first step towards nuclear disarmament agreements.¹² They later tried to put nuclear disarmament at the centre of signatories’ obligations under the treaty,¹³

¹⁰ The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (chairman: Hans Blix), *Weapons of terror: freeing the world of nuclear, biological and chemical arms* (Stockholm: Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, 2006), p. 62.

¹¹ The negotiations and their results are analysed by William Epstein, *The last chance: nuclear proliferation and arms control* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1976). There is a detailed documentary analysis of the negotiations from a Non-Aligned perspective in Mohamed Shaker, *The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: origin, and implementation, 1959–1979* (New York: Oceana, 1980), esp. ch. 9 (pp. 555–648); another detailed analysis of the ENDC (Eighteen Nations Disarmament Committee) negotiations can be found in Erhard Forndran, *Probleme der internationalen Abrüstung. Die Bemühungen um Abrüstung und kooperative Rüstungssteuerung 1962–1968* (Frankfurt: Metzner, 1970).

¹² See their joint memorandum from 15 Sept. 1995, document ENDC/158.

¹³ See ENDC Provisional Verbatim (PV) documents ENDC/PV/235 (27 Jan. 1966); ENDC/PV/242 (22 Feb. 1966); ENDC/PV/244 (1 March 1966); ENDC/PV/245 (3 March 1966); ENDC/PV/250 (22 March 1966); ENDC/

Enlightenment and nuclear order

and, having failed to get support for this position, suggested that the text include a strong commitment by the NWS to eliminate nuclear weapons within short timeframes, or at least to link the conclusion of the negotiations on a nuclear non-proliferation treaty firmly with successful negotiations on comprehensive test ban and fissile material cut-off treaties.¹⁴ They were joined, rhetorically at least, by the Soviet Union; but after the Soviet Union and the United States had presented identical draft treaties in August 1967 and in January 1968, the attempt to anchor binding obligations on nuclear weapons disarmament in the treaty was given up. In her statement to the ENDC on 8 February 1968, the Swedish Minister for Disarmament, Alva Myrdal, conceded that it had become impossible to arrive at legally binding obligations requiring the NWS to eliminate their nuclear weapons.¹⁵

The case of the Non-Aligned states had been weakened by disagreement among themselves. The chief point of contention was the issue of peaceful nuclear explosions, an option that Brazil and India voiced a conspicuously strong interest in preserving. But there was also disagreement on how far the Non-Aligned should go in blocking the conclusion of the NPT for the sake of disarmament. Some shared the western position that the NPT was an important element of stability that could further the prospects for nuclear disarmament¹⁶—a position in principle shared by the Soviet Union—and were more or less content with language that politically committed the NWS to negotiations in good faith towards nuclear weapons disarmament; others, such as Sweden, wanted to make the signature and ratification of the NPT by the Non-Aligned states contingent upon the conclusion of parallel treaties banning nuclear weapons tests and the production of nuclear weapons material.¹⁷ The Swedish position was strongly influenced by Myrdal, who fought an almost personal battle against the superpowers, which she said were acting irresponsibly and irrationally and needed to be controlled by the world community.¹⁸

The eventual wording of the NPT remained vague with regard to disarmament obligations.¹⁹ Article VI is directed towards all states parties to the NPT. While imposing a specific political commitment on the NWS to negotiate in good faith towards the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date, it does so in the context of broad and vague formulations according to which nuclear disarmament (which is not necessarily tantamount to complete nuclear weapons elimination) should be the subject of negotiations, and makes clear that negotiations on general

PV/263 (10 May 1966); ENDC/178 (19 Aug. 1966); United Nations Document Assembly (A), Committee 1 (C1) A/C.1/PV.1432 (25 Oct. 1966); A/C.1/PV.1436 (31 Oct. 1966); ENDC/PV/294 (18 March 1967); ENDC/PV/298 (23 May 1967).

¹⁴ See ENDC/PV/300 (30 May 1967); ENDC/PV/304 (13 June 1967); ENDC/PV/310 (4 July 1967); ENDC/PV/294 (16 March 1967).

¹⁵ See ENDC/PV/363 (8 Feb. 1968).

¹⁶ See ENDC/PV/357 (18 Jan. 1968); ENDC/PV/358 (23 Jan. 1968); ENDC/PV/361 (1 Feb. 1968).

¹⁷ See ENDC/PV/364 (13 Feb. 1968).

¹⁸ See Alva Myrdal, *The game of disarmament: how the United States and Russia run the arms race* (New York: Random House, 1976).

¹⁹ According to Article VI: 'Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.'

and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control are also part of that commitment. The delegations of Sweden, Brazil, India, Italy, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Romania and Burma were dissatisfied with this language, and expressed their reservations. The draft treaty was unreservedly accepted on 14 March 1968 by only eight of the 17 members of the Eighteen Nations Committee.²⁰ The remainder indicated that the absence of a more binding commitment to nuclear disarmament was one of the reasons for their discontent. The states named above were joined in their criticism by many other Non-Aligned states as well as by some western and neutral governments. The discussions on the NPT in the UN General Assembly revealed dissatisfaction on the part of many states in the Non-Aligned Movement with the 'absence in the text of Art. VI of any specific measure'.²¹ These facts do not support the contention that the bargain of the NPT was in fact a unanimous agreement on a phased elimination of nuclear weapons.

Indeed, the whole notion of a broad accord towards an international nuclear order, in which everyone involved was fully aware of the destination, is wrong. Rather, many governments involved with the negotiations—either directly or indirectly—had no clear understanding of what the ultimate goal of the endeavour should be. The impetus had come from the United States, which saw the need to move its previously bilateral nuclear non-proliferation efforts on to a multilateral level. Many governments did not fully comprehend at the beginning of the process what this actually meant. Hence most of them remained sceptical about or downright inimical to the very idea. The United States was eventually successful because it persuaded the Soviet leadership to join it. Moscow's main motive at that time had nothing to do with international nuclear order or non-proliferation. Soviet leaders wanted to prevent West Germany from getting control over (or even possession of) nuclear weapons, and saw these negotiations as a means of ruling out the idea of a multilateral nuclear force (MLF) of the Atlantic alliance.²²

If one reads through the verbatim records and the protocols of the ENDC negotiations, one is struck by the degree of uncertainty among most governments about the final outcome of the negotiations. There was no consensus for any coordinated effort by the 'world community' to pursue an enlightenment project. On the contrary, most states were busy finding out what the American ideas would mean for them, and taking precautionary moves in order to avoid possible future negative consequences. No other multilateral instrument is hedged about with so many reservations and unilateral declarations—made either at the signing or at the moment of deposition of instruments of ratification—as the NPT. Hypocrisy was abundant too. The notion of disarmament was brought up during these

²⁰ France had absented itself from the negotiations; hence the Eighteen Nations Committee had become in fact a Seventeen Nations Committee.

²¹ Shaker, *The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty*, p. 577.

²² See Helga Haftendorn, *NATO and the nuclear revolution: a crisis of credibility 1966–67* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); David Tal, 'The burden of alliance: the NPT negotiations and the NATO factor', in Christian Nuenlist and Anna Locher, eds, *Transatlantic relations at stake: aspects of NATO, 1956–1972* (Zurich: Centre for Security Studies, 2006), pp. 97–124; Catherine M. Kelleher, *Germany and the politics of nuclear weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975); Wilfried L. Kohl, 'Nuclear sharing in NATO and the multilateral force', *Political Science Quarterly* 80: 1, 1965, pp. 88–109.

negotiations mainly by states that were secretly—sometimes openly—exploring nuclear weapons options. Sweden, Brazil, India and other proponents of nuclear disarmament at that time had secret programmes for nuclear weapons; others, such as Egypt, Argentina, Pakistan, Taiwan and South Korea, did not want to give up the nuclear option. The Soviet Union, the most vocal supporter of nuclear disarmament, was in the middle of a huge programme of nuclear armament. France and China saw nuclear disarmament rhetoric as an instrument with which to fend off American non-proliferation efforts.

However, there was serious concern during the negotiations about the direction the US–Soviet nuclear weapons competition, as well as the East–West conflict more broadly, might take. These concerns were reflected in the final language of Article VI, which refers to measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race. This wording gave clear support for the arms control negotiations on which the United States and the Soviet Union embarked under the heading ‘Strategic Arms Limitation Talks—SALT’. Article VI also mentioned nuclear disarmament, but without clarifying exactly what was meant by this term. The language was so vague that it left open almost any possible interpretation, and so lacked any real political consequence. A lot of questions remained unanswered. Was nuclear disarmament meant to be complete or was it not? Was there a linkage or conditionality between nuclear disarmament and general disarmament? Would complete nuclear disarmament be envisaged only as part of general and complete disarmament, or should it be pursued independently? Most likely, accepting this vagueness was the only way to strike an agreement. The wording that was eventually agreed upon was clear with regard to immediate measures against the arms race (i.e. the pending SALT negotiation), but papered over the differences and ideological battles with language that was too vague to have any operational value.

To depict the negotiations in the ENDC (and the accompanying network of consultations and deliberations) as a premeditated effort of enlightenment, in which the governments of this world came together to decide solemnly that some of them would be allowed to have some nuclear weapons for an interim period while the others would renounce their possession immediately, is pure fiction, with no basis in the relevant documents of that time. It would be equally wrong to qualify the ‘grand bargain’, as the Blix Commission did, as one between the nuclear haves and the nuclear have-nots. There was no clear distinction between the nuclear haves on the one side and the have-nots on the other side. On the contrary, the nuclear weapons states were deeply split: the United States was genuinely interested in nuclear non-proliferation, while the United Kingdom was following reluctantly; the Soviet Union had its own agenda, and France and China were more or less adamantly opposed to the treaty. On the side of the have-nots there were so many different groupings that it is hard to name all of them, but three in particular are worth mentioning:

- The non-nuclear west European states and Japan were dependent upon the US nuclear guarantee and wanted to avoid any negative impact on that guarantee by the NPT; they were also afraid that the treaty might result in economic

problems for them. Most of them, including Germany and Italy, were highly sceptical about the whole idea of the NPT, but were dependent upon US leadership and were ready for a constructive engagement in non-proliferation so long as their security and vital economic interests were not negatively affected.

- Non-Aligned threshold states (such as India, Brazil, Argentina) that wanted to keep their own nuclear weapons options; for them a strong disarmament commitment for the NWS was important since it could give them a pretext later for their own nuclear armaments efforts. This group was quite small, but very vocal and influential within the Non-Aligned Movement.
- The silent majority, that is, those states that for different reasons—often rooted in their limited human, economic and technological resources—could not even ponder nuclear weapons options of their own. They considered any effective non-proliferation regime itself as a boon.

The negotiations were essentially led by the United States (supported by the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union) and the most vocal members of the first group, both inside the ENDC and outside (the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan were not members of the ENDC but were included through consultations and in this capacity were important players). The small but vocal group of threshold states were able to marshal the support of the Non-Aligned Movement but could never have a strong impact on the negotiations. The states of the silent majority remained more or less outside the negotiations; their hour came after the treaty was laid out for signature and ratification. Despite the many reservations expressed and unilateral declarations made, and despite the abundant criticism voiced against the NPT, it was promptly signed by more than 60 states and later became the most nearly universal multilateral agreement in the security field. The true bargain—the deal that has kept the NPT together—was the coalition between, on the one hand, the United States (as the only major power interested in nuclear non-proliferation) and, on the other, the silent majority of states who were happy to see a freeze put on nuclear proliferation. Most states in the other two groups were brought into the regime one by one—with the exception of Israel, India and Pakistan. In most cases, US security guarantees and special arrangements in the field of technology transfer were the keys to overcoming security concerns. Many political leaders came to the conclusion that—for both political and economic reasons—it was better to get into the regime than to stay outside. The basic bargain between the United States and the weak is still alive, and it was this that made possible the NPT's indefinite extension in 1995. The decision to extend the treaty without qualifications was based on a paper drafted by the US delegation and signed on 5 May 1995 by 102 other states, 24 of which had less than one million inhabitants each.

Not only is the alleged disarmament bargain in the 1960s between the so-called 'nuclear haves' and 'have-nots' a fiction at odds with historical facts and relevant documents; the constant repetition of this myth—as in the Blix Commission report—is politically dangerous. It is, in fact, undermining the very foundation on which the NPT is resting; it entails an intrinsic logic that might spell death

for the NPT. If the continued existence of the NPT is made contingent upon the readiness of the five nuclear weapon states to eliminate their nuclear weapons, this would give the most problematic actors within the regime not only an open invitation to denounce the treaty, but also ample opportunities to control the political non-proliferation agenda. It boils down to a deadly logic of 'all or nothing': either the nuclear weapon states give up their weapons, or everyone is allowed to have them. There had been similar debates in the ENDC during the 1960s. The result was that most governments represented in that body—among them the most radical proponents of disarmament—eventually refused this logic because of the risks associated with it for the overall project.²³

Today, disturbingly, this debate is fully under way; and it is to a great extent the responsibility of the liberal arms control community—but mainly driven by states from the Non-Aligned Movement—that nuclear non-proliferation diplomacy is now on this slippery slope. Certainly, after the end of the East–West conflict the role of nuclear weapons and the scope of obligations under Article VI need to be redefined. This had to be done with necessary care and a sense of responsibility, and the 1995 review and extension conference would have been the best place to do it. Unfortunately this did not happen. This author, as a member of the German delegation to that review conference, was surprised to see how poorly most delegations were prepared to address the issue. The contributions by Non-Aligned delegations were full of polemic and emotion but devoid of any reasonable substance. The US delegation, as well as the delegations of other nuclear weapon states, had no significant contributions to make. On the contrary, they remained passive and reacted only to the pressure exerted by the Non-Aligned states. It would have been easy for them to point to the substantial progress that had been made in the field of nuclear disarmament and to outline the plans that were already available for further cooperation with Russia and other governments. It would have been a golden opportunity to refer to the declaration by the UN Security Council summit meeting in January 1992, in which the importance of the system of collective security had been reaffirmed with special responsibility given to the nuclear weapon states as permanent members of the Security Council. Nothing like that was presented. The liberal arms control community within the Department of State did not want to initiate such a step; nor did the military in the Pentagon want to open 'Pandora's box', as they might have seen it. The result was confusion and fruitless debates with dubious outcomes.

During the 2000 review conference much of the evidence of actual nuclear disarmament was presented and the resultant text of the final document was more balanced.²⁴ However, as part of this document, the famous list of 13 practical steps was agreed upon, which contained under item 6 the following: 'An unequivocal

²³ In his intervention at the ENDC on 14 March 1968 the representative of India, while stressing the need for more binding provisions for the nuclear weapons states, clearly rejected the notion of an all-or-nothing logic, because this would endanger the whole project: ENDC/PV/379 (14 March 1968).

²⁴ The text is reproduced in *Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: key documents*, 2nd edn, edited by the German Federal Foreign Office and compiled by the Institute for Security Studies at the University of Kiel (Berlin: German Federal Foreign Ministry, 2006), pp. 113–37.

undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed under Article VI.²⁵ The Bush administration has since made it clear that it does not feel bound by this language, which in fact boils down to a reinterpretation—a material change in substance—of the original text of the NPT. This move caused a lot of chagrin among the Non-Aligned states and contributed to the failure of the 2005 NPT review conference. It could have been avoided had the Clinton administration been more cautious in 2000.

Further efforts towards rewriting the NPT are under way. The Blix Commission report, for instance, already treats the generally worded political commitments under article VI as equal to the primary treaty obligations under articles I, II and IV. According to the report, the NPT

does require all non-nuclear-weapon states parties to forgo nuclear weapons, and all parties, notably the five nuclear-weapon states, to both pursue global nuclear disarmament and facilitate the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Non-compliance with any of these obligations might trigger withdrawals, might lead to collective reactions or might simply weaken the glue that holds the parties together in the treaty. Compliance by Iraq, Libya and Iran in today's uncertain atmosphere is important to all. So is compliance by the nuclear-weapon states. They need to uphold the commitments they made at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference to secure the extension of the treaty—and consequently also the thirteen steps agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference in order to implement the 1995 agreements.²⁶

The NPT is a treaty that was agreed upon as a measure to stop horizontal nuclear weapons proliferation, but it has never been a disarmament treaty. It is a treaty with unequal obligations and it might even be called an unfair treaty. But it has found broad support because the huge majority of states know that without this treaty their security would be diminished. If the NPT is transformed into a de facto disarmament treaty, its very basis will be destroyed. The current crisis over the Iranian nuclear programme is a clear proof not only of how far the debate about the disarmament obligations of the nuclear weapon states is deviating from the real problems—states on the verge of breaching core provisions of the NPT—but of how much it is aggravating these problems by giving Presidents Ahmadinejad and Kim Jong Il additional arguments to defy the NPT. This debate has already resulted in irreparable damage to the non-proliferation regime.

The myth of managed nuclear weapons deterrence

Another myth of the liberal arms control school is the notion that, in order to gain support for the NPT, the superpowers had altered their nuclear weapons strategy in the 1960s. According to this argument, the superpowers had devised strategic doctrines that were based on a purely political utility of nuclear weapons (as weapons of retaliation and not as weapons of war-fighting), and their sole purpose

²⁵ *Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction*, p. 130.

²⁶ Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, *Weapons of terror*, p. 48.

was to ensure mutual vulnerability and hence mutual restraint. At the centre were the concepts of massive retaliation and mutual assured destruction (MAD). William Walker sees this alleged change in nuclear weapons doctrines as part of a broader system of 'managed deterrence'.²⁷ Looking at the facts, however, one has to come to the conclusion that MAD was never at the heart of nuclear weapons doctrines either in the United States or in the Soviet Union. The concept of MAD had been devised by US arms control experts in the mid-1960s as an attempt to define stability under conditions where each possessed (the US and the Soviet Union) nuclear weapons of intercontinental range. Mutual assured destruction just means that a certain set of conditions needs to be fulfilled in order to make sure that first-strike incentives are removed and an arms race can be avoided. Crucial elements are the invulnerability of one's own nuclear strike weapons and of command and control facilities, and a renunciation of anti-ballistic missile defence (ABM).

It is a common misunderstanding among liberal arms controllers that mutual assured destruction had been a strategic doctrine by which the role of nuclear weapons was reduced to a political function. According to this myth, nuclear weapons only had the purpose of threatening massive retaliation, and MAD was devised to ensure that this threat remained balanced, so that no one could ever realistically expect nuclear weapons to be employed. The reality was quite different. The whole body of literature on nuclear arms strategies and doctrines, as well as the relevant documents, suggests that nuclear weapons doctrines essentially were war-fighting doctrines and that nuclear weapons strategies were strategies devised in order to apply these doctrines to particular theatres and contingencies. There is not a single serious book about nuclear strategy suggesting that MAD was the core doctrine of nuclear weapons strategy in the United States or within the framework of NATO nuclear planning.²⁸ The nuclear weapons doctrines and strategies of both Cold War superpowers were quite sophisticated and were usually serving different purposes. On the US side, one of their purposes was to extend deterrence to states (mainly in Europe) which were under a Soviet threat. In the 1950s and 1960s the Soviet Union had built up a huge conventional invasion capability directed against western Europe, and was further refining its offensive options in the 1970s and the 1980s. Originally, US nuclear strategy had the purpose of deterring such an invasion by threatening retaliation and by being capable of conducting a limited nuclear war against a Warsaw Treaty Organization invasion. As long as the United States remained invulnerable to Soviet nuclear weapons, this threat was quite credible. Consequently, the Soviet Union did its utmost to neutralize the US deterrent by acquiring the capability to strike US territory with

²⁷ William Walker, *Weapons of mass destruction and international order*, Adelphi Paper 370 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).

²⁸ The best book on nuclear strategy is still Lawrence Freedman, *The evolution of nuclear strategy* (New York: St Martin's, 1990). On nuclear targeting, see Desmond Ball and Jeffrey Richelson, *Strategic nuclear targeting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); see also Paul Bracken, *The command and control of nuclear operations* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1983); Ashton B. Carter, John D. Steinbruner and Charles A. Zraket, *Managing nuclear operations* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1987); also, from the perspective of a critical peace researcher, Daniel Charles, *Nuclear planning in NATO: pitfalls of first use* (Cambridge, MA: Balling, 1987).

nuclear weapons. By the mid-1960s the Soviet Union had mastered the technical and industrial problems associated with building an intercontinental ballistic missile threat. From that moment on, the dynamic of the US–Soviet nuclear competition was clear: while the US nuclear doctrine and strategy were constantly adapted and improved in order to uphold a credible nuclear deterrent, the Soviet Union was trying to put the United States under a constantly growing threat in order to neutralize Washington’s ability to deter the Warsaw Treaty Organization from invading western Europe. This combined conventional and nuclear armaments competition was at the heart of the nuclear arms race. It resulted in a counter-vailing nuclear strategy on the side of the United States. The Soviet side was more interested in keeping the United States at bay and in denying it any such capabilities (with nuclear war-fighting strategies of its own). This competition could only have been terminated with the Soviet Union giving up its invasion option and withdrawing its conventional forces from eastern Europe—and this is exactly what happened after Gorbachev decided to end the East–West conflict.²⁹

Had the US embarked on mutual assured destruction as the guiding principle of its nuclear weapons doctrine, it could not have deterred the Soviet Union from an invasion of western Europe. The result would have been the collapse of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, since this was based on a credible extended deterrence for states that otherwise would have gone nuclear. It is true that there is a historical link between nuclear non-proliferation and deterrence; but this link is not the one claimed by adherents of the liberal arms control school. Rather, the readiness of the United States to pursue nuclear deterrence options even under conditions of an increasing Soviet nuclear threat made it possible for nuclear weapons candidates to refrain from pursuing nuclear weapons options of their own.³⁰

It sounds paradoxical, but the often criticized nuclear arms race was, on the US side, a desperate attempt to uphold extended deterrence under adverse conditions, and was thus responsible for the continued effectiveness of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This logic is almost incomprehensible for many liberal arms controllers, since it totally contradicts another of their most cherished tenets: that arms races are always dangerous and that arms races cause wars. Again, these notions are hardly reconcilable with historic facts. The only war that was conspicuously preceded by an arms race—the naval arms race between Germany and Great Britain—was the First World War. There is, however, hardly anything to suggest that that war broke out *because* of that arms race, or that the naval competition between Germany and Great Britain was of great relevance for the outcome of that war. All the evidence available, as well as scholarly works, militate against this notion, although it has been repeated time and again and was a widely held view in the 1920s and 1930s. The damage that could be caused by such ideologies became evident in the late 1930s: the outbreak of the Second World War was facilitated by the pacifism of the western powers. The armaments efforts by the Third Reich

²⁹ See Joachim Krause: *Prospects for conventional arms control in Europe*, occasional paper no. 8 (New York: Institute for East–West Security Studies, 1988).

³⁰ Philip Bobbitt, *The shield of Achilles: war, peace and the course of history* (New York: Anchor, 2002), p. 682.

Enlightenment and nuclear order

after 1933 went on for many years without eliciting adequate responses by the governments of Great Britain and France—not to speak of the United States—because public opinion in these countries was so much in favour of avoiding an arms race. In Britain and America especially, most people wanted to negotiate instead of preparing themselves for war, and the pacifist movements were most instrumental in perpetuating that momentum.³¹ The result was that any option of building up a credible deterrent against Hitler's expansionist schemes between 1934 and 1938 was forfeited.³² Winston Churchill, who was one of the first to warn against the armaments efforts of the Third Reich, later called the Second World War the 'unnecessary war'. He continued by writing that 'there never was a war more easy to stop than that'.³³ This war ended with 35 million dead in Europe alone. The East–West conflict saw an armaments competition, but it was not the cause of that conflict and it did not do much harm. On the contrary, the armaments competition provided scope for the intrinsic weakness of the communist regimes to become apparent. It resulted in a stalemate which, as Philip Bobbitt rightly put it, 'gave the political systems of the Warsaw Pact states enough time to collapse of their own inner inefficiency and self-disgust'.³⁴

One of the reasons members of the liberal arms control community tend to ignore these historical facts is that they have a generally negative attitude towards nuclear weapons. For William Walker, nuclear weapons are an 'unintended consequence of the scientific enlightenment'. He calls them 'intrinsically illegitimate and dangerous' and claims that it was the wish of 'mankind' to abolish them. Again, this runs counter to all established facts of history. Walker overlooks the fact that nuclear weapons were developed during the Second World War as the final line of defence of the last remaining powers that upheld the idea of enlightenment against the storm of forces that were the end-product of different sorts of counter-enlightenment: Nazi Germany and the authoritarian and racist Japanese regime. Nuclear weapons ended the war in the Asian theatre and later became the most efficient weapon to defend the West against another powerful force of counter-enlightenment—the Soviet Union. Without US nuclear weapons, the political breathing space for enlightenment would have vanished in Europe some 50 years ago.

The myth of a radical shift in US non-proliferation policy

The policies of the current Bush administration have had a polarizing effect both in the United States and on a global scale. It is understandable that authors who criticize the Bush administration turn to somewhat stark expressions. It seems to be inappropriate, however, to use Isaiah Berlin's concept of counter-enlightenment as a description of the Bush administration's policy. That concept of counter-enlightenment is a purely historical one and has nothing to do with

³¹ See Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The United States as a world power: a diplomatic history 1900–1955* (New York: Henry Holt, 1955), pp. 432ff.

³² See Basil Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970), ch. 1.

³³ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 1: *The gathering storm* (London: Cassell, 1948), p. viii.

³⁴ Bobbitt, *The shield of Achilles*, p. 678.

today's problems. William Walker is also wrong in his contention that there was an abrupt shift in US non-proliferation policy as George W. Bush came into power. The major changes in US non-proliferation policy had already started during the Clinton administration, and some of them can be traced back to the tenure of President George Bush senior. They all reflected the changed international environment and represented necessary adjustments of the non-proliferation strategy. The Clinton administration left some of the traditional paths of arms control and rightly undertook some changes that were necessary because traditional instruments of arms control were no longer adequate.

This was particularly true for the whole area of counterproliferation. This term was promoted by the Clinton administration and implied (1) that the military has a role in non-proliferation and (2) that one has to take precautionary measures in case non-proliferation efforts fail. Counterproliferation was heavily criticized by the liberal arms control community in the 1990s. The Bush administration has continued on this path, yet it has done so in a more radical and, regrettably, quite ideological manner.

The Clinton administration saw itself facing three imperatives:

- to react to the challenges posed by 'loose nukes' on the territory of the former Soviet Union;
- to find solutions to the problems posed by dictatorial states such as Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea, which were openly defying the international order by violating their NPT treaty obligations (the so-called 'rogue states', a term that was coined by the Clinton administration); and
- to devise a formula for the future role of nuclear weapons that could serve as a model for a broader international consensus about the legitimacy of nuclear weapons (or the limits of that legitimacy).

Concerning the first point, the Clinton administration was quite successful and developed an impressive array of cooperative measures of a mainly technical nature. Regarding the rogue states problem, the Clinton administration promoted counterproliferation, for which it was criticized heavily by the liberal arms control community. However, it had no other choice. Given that North Korea, Iraq, Libya and Iran were quite problematic regimes, and given that the traditional instruments of technology denial were becoming less and less effective, there was no alternative to involving the military on a larger scale as part of the overall non-proliferation effort. By including counterproliferation in its non-proliferation toolbox, the Clinton administration did what was necessary. Counterproliferation boils down to three main elements: ballistic missile defence; improved nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) protection; and preparedness to make strikes against weapons of mass destruction targets. As regards the third point—defining the role of nuclear weapons—the Clinton administration's record was poor. The Nuclear Weapons Posture Review of 1994 was a disappointment, retaining too many features of the Cold War period.

The Bush administration continued the policy of the Clinton administration in

all three areas and put its imprint on the respective policies. However, the changes were not as radical as many would have wished. The cooperative threat reduction efforts with Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union were—after some early irritation—continued, and, from 2002, the initially reluctant European allies eventually agreed to join the United States within the framework of the G8. Counterproliferation was pursued with much more vigour (and with much more openness) than under Clinton. Instead of restricting itself to theatre missile defence, the Bush administration has placed greater emphasis on devising defences against ballistic missiles of all types, including those of intercontinental range. In the National Security Strategy of September 2002 the administration announced that under certain conditions it might envision pre-emptive military strikes against weapons of mass destruction targets even when there was no imminent threat. Such contingencies had been pondered by the Clinton administration, too. However, that administration never wanted to conduct this debate in public, realizing the negative political implications it might have.³⁵ With regard to the third point, the Bush administration started with the promise to move away from MAD and to make much deeper cuts into existing strategic nuclear forces than the Clinton administration had even dared to envisage. It also issued a Nuclear Posture Review in 2001 that marked major progress in comparison to that of 1994.³⁶ The record is not bad, even if the actual reductions seem to be less radical than announced. So far, the agreed reductions of strategic offensive weapons under the US–Russian Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions of 24 May 2002 remained virtually on the same force levels as had been agreed earlier between Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin.³⁷ In 2004 the Bush administration announced further cuts in the overall size of the nuclear weapons capability (including non-strategic nuclear weapons), which would amount to a nearly 50 per cent reduction of the US nuclear arsenal between 2002 and 2012.³⁸

Even the most salient policy decision of the Bush administration—the forcible regime change in Iraq—had been on the political agenda during the Clinton era. In October 1998 Congress passed almost unanimously the Iraq Liberation Act, which stipulated ‘as US policy’ that regime change in Baghdad was the only remaining option to deal with the problem of Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction. In 1999, the Clinton administration initiated consultations within NATO on how to implement this policy. It certainly did not pursue this path as aggressively as the Bush administration (and any Democratic administration would have done

³⁵ See statement by Dr Ashton B. Carter, Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Policy), before the Committee on Armed Services, US Senate, 28 April 1994.

³⁶ See David Yost, ‘The US Nuclear Posture Review and the NATO allies’, *International Affairs* 80: 4, July 2004, pp. 705–29.

³⁷ Clinton and Yeltsin had agreed in 1997 on ceilings of 2,000 to 2,500 strategic warheads, whereby no differentiation was made whether nuclear warheads were operationally deployed or temporarily taken out of stock for technical purposes: the SORT ceilings for 2012 are at 1,700 to 2,200 strategic nuclear warheads; since the Bush administration has changed the counting rules in a way that the term ‘operationally deployed strategic warheads’ is being defined more narrowly than before, the actual reduction effect would be similar to the one agreed upon by Clinton and Yeltsin. See Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, ‘A new agenda on nuclear weapons’, *Brookings Policy Brief No. 94* (February 2002).

³⁸ ‘US to make deep cuts in stockpile of A-Arms’ *The New York Times* (4 June, 2004).

this with much more care, professionalism and diplomatic preparation), but the concept was already there, and there was a great deal of support within Congress for regime change in Baghdad.

Enlightenment and nuclear non-proliferation

Liberal arms controllers in the United States rightly complain about the way many of them have been sidetracked or excluded from public service during the first six years of the current Bush administration. In many cases they have been replaced by people with less expertise, less experience and less creativity than they were able to marshal. They rightly criticize the Bush administration for pursuing a rather ideological and mainly unilateral approach towards arms control. What most of them do not understand is that they too are clinging to ideologies, and that their reluctance to call their own ideologies into question is part of the explanation for their defeat. The congressional elections in November 2006 seemed to mark the end of the heyday of assertive conservatism within the Bush administration, and many liberal arms controllers hope to regain their former positions or to be able once more to shape political processes. They might be right in those expectations; but the fact remains that the ideological tenets of liberal arms control might aggravate rather than solve the current set of problems in the field of nuclear non-proliferation.

Applying the method of enlightenment in a correct manner to the area of nuclear non-proliferation would have two key implications. First of all, a substantial and sustained effort to evaluate ideologies critically is needed on both sides. The current debate is so full of ideological polemics that it is hard to identify the middle ground any longer. Nuclear non-proliferation policy needs an unprecedented reshuffling of strategic expectations and of instruments. This need has been well known since the 1990s,³⁹ yet little strategy change has taken place. The debate about the strategic options of nuclear non-proliferation has been shaped by various ideological positions rather than by an enlightened dialogue. The second implication relates to the fact that possession and non-possession of nuclear weapons cannot be dissociated from the issue of democracy and freedom. Nuclear weapons in the hands of long-established democratic governments with a tradition of restraint and responsibility concerning international order are usually not a problem—except for rogue actors, ambitious non-democratic rulers and, surprisingly, liberal arms controllers. One might even argue that international order—defined as the rule of non-use of force—is possible only when a small number of responsible states possess nuclear weapons. The issue is, however, how to keep problematic actors from getting control over nuclear weapons. There is no golden key available to solve this dilemma, but the 1968 NPT was at least a very successful instrument in striking such a deal. It should not be given up for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, which would spell much more insecurity as

³⁹ See Brad Roberts, *Weapons proliferation and world order: after the Cold War* (The Hague, London and Boston: Kluwer, 1996), ch. 1.

Enlightenment and nuclear order

long as the world remains as it is.⁴⁰ The nuclear non-proliferation regime certainly needs to be adapted to the changed circumstances of the new world, but there is no need to destroy it by turning it into a disarmament treaty.

⁴⁰ This issue had already been raised by Hedley Bull, who in 1961 came to the conclusion that the abolition of nuclear weapons would 'entail risks of the resumption of the nuclear arms race in an uncertain world, and it would not preclude the continued prosecution of the qualitative arms race in other fields'. Hedley Bull, *The control of the arms race: disarmament and arms control in the missile age* (New York: Praeger, 1961), p. 98.