

Nuclear enlightenment and counter-enlightenment

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‘Enlightenment, understood in its widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the whole enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.’¹ These famous opening sentences in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of enlightenment* were written during the Second World War, before the atomic bomb’s existence was public knowledge. Yet they seem to speak of Hiroshima, expressing the horror of the event and the Faustian nature of scientific enquiry that made it possible. Hiroshima drew attention to an inescapable modern predicament. The increasing mastery of nature achieved through science and technology had to be accompanied by an increasing political mastery if an ever greater destruction—and fear of destruction—were to be avoided. Unfortunately, the latter mastery was inherently difficult to achieve, and to achieve legitimately, especially in the anarchic international system.

Nuclear weapons were an unintended consequence of the scientific enlightenment. As if in recompense, but for clear political purposes, the attempt in the second half of the twentieth century to create an international order which would limit their dangers, while exploiting in controlled ways their capacities to discourage war, itself came to possess hallmarks of a grand enlightenment project.² It was permeated by assumptions of—and expressions of faith in—a ubiquitous rationality and commitment to reason; the attainability of justice in the face of obvious inequalities of power and opportunity; the possibility of achieving trust among states on the basis of international law; the ability of organizations to exercise control over complex technological activities; and the feasibility of progress in escaping a nuclear-armed chaos and realizing nuclear energy’s economic potential.

Through its emphasis on reason, containment and mutual obligation, this project, the particular child of the United States, embraced both deterrence and

* Among the many colleagues with whom I have discussed this article, I owe a special debt to Benjamin Ardit, Patrick Hayden, Tony Lang, Nicholas Onuf, Nick Rengger and Gabriella Slomp. However, the article’s contents are my responsibility alone.

¹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 1.

² Two classic texts are Immanuel Kant’s ‘An answer to the question: what is enlightenment?’ of 1784, reprinted in *Practical philosophy: the Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 17–22, and Isaiah Berlin’s ‘The counter-enlightenment’ and other essays in *Against the current: essays in the history of ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1989).

non-proliferation. It began to founder in the mid- to late 1990s, just as it seemed capable of approaching a fuller realization of its goals. Its zenith was marked by completion in 1994 of the political reconstruction of a nuclear superpower, the USSR; and by the decisions taken in 1995 to give indefinite life to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the text containing the nuclear order's foundational norms and rules, and to embark on a more ambitious non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. A turbulent decade later, the shambles of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and the travails over Iraq, Iran and North Korea bear witness to the disarray into which the project has fallen.

The effort to constrain the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons has lost little of its urgency. It has nevertheless been sapped of much of the character and semblance of an enlightenment project of the kind pursued previously. The project ran into difficulty partly because it could not satisfy its own expectations, overcome inherent flaws or provide satisfying responses to challenges after the end of the Cold War, among them India's and Pakistan's 'breakouts' and the clandestine weapon programmes mounted by Iraq, Iran and North Korea. It also ran into difficulty because it was becoming *too* successful in its encroachment on the strategic interests of some great and aspiring powers. Above all, it was unsettled by a movement against the prior conception of political order which gathered strength in the United States in the second half of the 1990s and dominated policy and strategy after the election of President George W. Bush and the terrorist attacks on America of 9/11.

This movement's supporters claimed that the previous approach to nuclear order was now exposing the United States and its allies to unacceptable risks. Indeed, they contended that the project had developed its own unreason in the persistent exaggeration of its advantages and failure to acknowledge dangerous new realities. The movement exhibited several of the hallmarks of counter-enlightenment, albeit a counter-enlightenment that championed another enlightenment idea rooted in American political culture: namely, that enmity can be overcome through the extension of political and economic freedoms. Stress was placed on the diverse behaviour and irrationality of actors (now including terrorist groups), some of whom were classed as 'evil' and thereby deemed to be beyond diplomacy and reasoning, and on the consequent unreliability of containment and deterrence. Justice was dismissed as irrelevant to security, its champions as disingenuous, and it was misguided to believe that general trust among states could be achieved. International organizations were derided as weak and prone to self-delusion, and the notion that progress could be achieved through multilateral cooperation was repudiated. Furthermore, an international order which turned its back on the use of force against actors who violated it, and who themselves held the values of enlightenment in contempt, was deemed unworthy of respect and incapable of survival.

An understanding of the history of nuclear order in all its complexity cannot rest only on ideas of enlightenment and counter-enlightenment. They are nevertheless valuable tropes for illuminating the nature and construction of international

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nuclear order and its eternal predicaments. Yet they are more than tropes, especially if enlightenment is understood (as here) to represent, more than just a preoccupation with rationality, a sensibility that is open, questing, undogmatic and committed to the use of public reason. The nuclear weapon's vast destructiveness demanded some unifying conception of political order in which peoples and states could place their hopes and trust, and through which conflicting norms and interests could be reconciled. It demanded public discourse. By enveloping the international politics of nuclear weapons in progressive enlightenment values, it became easier to draw states into a rule-based order that could moderate the power play that nuclear weapons encouraged, and win their support for problem-solving and institutional innovation. In addition, states sought by this means both to banish a romantic politics inimical to restraint, and to erect guards against the 'unreasonable rationality' that always lurks where politics and technology meet in a competitive and interest-driven environment.³

Supporters of the counter-enlightenment of which I shall speak eschewed the use of public reason and unilaterally sought to impose their own versions of what is right. However, they could offer only a unifying conception of encroaching *disorder*, or of an order reached through the revising power of religion, ideology or economic and military might. As we shall see, they also inadvertently tampered with the basic principle that nuclear weapons are intrinsically illegitimate. They drew the United States into placing trust in its enormous hegemonic capacities, using the constitutionalism of the NPT and other multilateral treaties as disciplinary instruments but abandoning them as vehicles for cooperative engagement and innovation, and ignoring the cautionary advice of realists. It has taken only a few years for the perils of this approach to be revealed—the violence intrinsic to it, the damage to international laws and norms, the loss of US authority and prestige, and the space that it has opened for others to justify aberrant behaviour.

My main point is that the exceptional nature of nuclear weapons calls for an exceptional kind of cooperative politics, and that we are in grave danger of losing the ability to conjure—even to imagine—that kind of politics. An ordering strategy founded on the enlightenment values discussed herein is full of pitfalls and has become increasingly hard to sustain as weaponry has diffused within and beyond the NPT's confines. Yet it has an inherent superiority. The alternative is a degraded international politics, a more frequent recourse to violence and a perpetual vulnerability to catastrophe.

I make no apology for developing my argument by recounting, albeit in a particular and highly condensed manner, the history which brought us here. Reconnecting with this history, the denial of whose positive relevance formed part of the counter-enlightenment, is a necessary condition for recovery. Nor is there need to defend placing the United States at the centre of the analysis, since it has dominated ordering strategies from the start of the nuclear age.

³ 'Unreasonable rationality' is borrowed from Raymond Aron, 'The anarchical order of power', *Daedalus* 124: 3, Summer 1995, p. 28.

The quest for safety after Hiroshima

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 created an immediate global awareness of the nuclear weapon's significance: its efficiency as a killing machine, the power acquired by its possessors, and the dangers that every person, society and state would face if the technology were widely adopted in warfare. There followed urgent enquiry into the weapon's implications and prospects for its abolition. An instinctive reaction was that radical change in the international political system was required. In June 1945 the secret Franck Report had argued that 'the efficient protection against the destructive use of nuclear power ... can only come from the political organization of the world'.⁴ This assertion would be repeated in numerous subsequent reports and statements, including the Acheson–Lilienthal Report and the Baruch Plan which the US government published in March and June 1946 respectively.⁵ Diplomatic attention quickly focused on how to exercise effective international control: how to establish an international body with unchallenged authority over the technology's development and diffusion, verify states' renunciations of nuclear weapons, and respond to 'breakout'.

International control proved beyond achievement as the East–West conflict intensified. The need to find solutions in 'the political organization of the world' was also questioned. In July 1946 Bernard Brodie wrote that 'the passionate and exclusive preoccupation of some scientists and laymen with proposals for "world government" and the like ... argues a profound conviction that the safeguards to security formerly provided by military might are no longer of any use'.⁶ He suggested that nuclear weapons would not inevitably be dangerous and unmanageable in the competitive international system. On the contrary, restraint might be entrenched through a balance of terror once governments and their leaders felt threatened with devastating nuclear retaliation. The important transformation should therefore be sought in the aims and strategies of states and their armed forces, rather than in the international system and its institutions.

In essence, Bernard Brodie maintained that a common profound fear would engender a common rationality and reasonableness among disparate states and their leaders, even when their actions and words suggested irrationality and the rejection of basic standards of humane behaviour. The absolute weapon need not lead to an absolute insecurity in the presence of enmity: the weapon's very absoluteness could be used to 'reduce' enmity to a manageable rivalry through the practice of nuclear deterrence.⁷

⁴ Report of the Committee on Political and Social Problems, Manhattan Project 'Metallurgical Laboratory', University of Chicago, 11 June 1945 (The Franck Report), sec. III.

⁵ Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy (the Acheson–Lilienthal Report) prepared for the Secretary of State's Committee on Atomic Energy (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 16 March 1946). Bernard Baruch presented his plan to the UN in June 1946.

⁶ Bernard Brodie, 'Implications for military policy', in Bernard Brodie, ed., *The absolute weapon: atomic power and world order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), p. 72 (emphasis in original).

⁷ The notion of enmity reduced to rivalry comes from Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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This conjecture was absorbed into NSC-68, the Cold War's seminal document, and provided the foundation of the strategy of containment.⁸ NSC-68 emphatically rejected the option of launching a preventive war to avoid the emergence of a more dangerous nuclear-armed opponent.⁹ However, only economic and military superiority could reliably induce caution in the aggressive and tyrannical Soviet empire. 'A substantial building up of strength in the free world is necessary to ... check and roll back the Kremlin's drive for world domination ... It is mandatory that ... we enlarge upon our technical superiority by an accelerated exploitation of the scientific potential of the United States and its allies.' Thus did NSC-68, and the concomitant Soviet refusal to accept inferiority, provide the impetus for the arms racing that characterized the Cold War.

The construction of international nuclear order

A highly dangerous absence of political and instrumental mastery accompanied the rapid development and accumulation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in the early Cold War. The search for security through international control was revived in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Commercial pressures to allow technologies and materials to be diffused for civil purposes were also increasing, along with anxieties that the proliferation of nuclear weapons might soon extend to Germany, Japan and other states. Above all, the Cuban missile crisis demonstrated the enormous dangers of the unregulated strategic competition that had developed between the US and the USSR.

In international discourse, these developments led to the replacement of the hitherto non-negotiable demand for complete nuclear disarmament by a pragmatic demand for a halt to nuclear proliferation and the arms race prior to elimination of the weapons. The shift was expressed in the 'Irish Resolution' of 1961.¹⁰ In effect, it proposed the elevation of non-proliferation to a universal norm and rejected the argument (later given theoretical expression by Kenneth Waltz) that a gradual proliferation of nuclear weapons would spread restraint across the international system.¹¹ The initiative gained impetus from the understanding shared by Moscow and Washington that they had to accommodate one another and engage in meaningful arms control, and that they possessed a common interest in the development of a non-proliferation regime.

The 1960s and 1970s therefore brought concerted efforts to construct an international nuclear order meriting that title. As observed elsewhere, it was founded on two interlinked systems: a managed system of deterrence and a managed

⁸ 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security' (Washington DC: National Security Council, 14 April 1950).

⁹ On proposals to launch preventive wars against the USSR, see Marc Trachtenberg, *History and strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). Preventive war was rejected in NSC-68 on the grounds that it would have 'morally corrosive effects' and that it would be 'difficult after such a war to create a satisfactory international order among nations'.

¹⁰ 'Prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons', General Assembly Resolution 1665, 4 Dec. 1961.

¹¹ Kenneth Waltz, *The spread of nuclear weapons: more may be better*, Adelphi Paper 171 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1981).

system of abstinence.¹² Among other things, the former system involved the deployment of military hardware under increasingly sophisticated command and control; the development of strategic doctrines to ensure mutual vulnerability and restraint; and the establishment of arms control processes through which policy elites engaged in dialogue and negotiated binding agreements, including the ABM Treaty which banned development and deployment of ballistic missile defences. The system of abstinence involved, among other things, the NPT of 1968 and its safeguards machinery; the nuclear umbrellas (extended deterrence) held over US and Soviet allies, which reduced incentives to acquire nuclear arms; and security assurances to states renouncing nuclear weapons that they would not be used against them.

Why did these developments evince the character and lustre of an enlightenment project? They were underpinned by assumptions about the basic rationality and reasonableness of state actors, and about the attainable alignment of reasoned interpretations of problems and solutions.¹³ In addition, they placed stress on the pursuit of balances of power, interest and obligation; and they highlighted the roles of diplomacy and coordinated governance in preference to, or in conjunction with, the exercise of coercive power (preventive war being set aside). Above all, recognition was given to the project's intrinsic universalism. Emphasis was placed on the dangers and opportunities with which nuclear technology confronted *all* humankind, the rights and responsibilities that fell upon *all* institutions and peoples, and the consequent need for the engagement of *all* states in the task of providing a secure foundation for order.

For this pretension to universalism to attain credibility, a hydra-headed problem of reconciliation had to be addressed. How could assertions that the possession of nuclear weapons by certain states served the avoidance of war be reconciled with assertions that their possession by others increased the likelihood of war? Why was nuclear deterrence not a universal good? How could states that renounced nuclear weapons be confident that a non-proliferation regime would not simply entrench the advantages and privileges of states that had already armed themselves 'legally'?

The answer to this conundrum had two strands. One was that nuclear proliferation, according to the Irish Resolution, 'threatens to extend and intensify the arms race and to increase the difficulties of avoiding war'. The other strand was that the possession of nuclear weapons by the acknowledged nuclear weapon states was a temporary trust, and a trust which could not be extended to other states. Nuclear disarmament remained the eternal norm, which would eventually displace the provisional norm of non-proliferation. Although the injunction to engage in arms control and disarmament in the NPT's Article VI was vaguely expressed, the expectation attached to it was unambiguous.

¹² William Walker, *Weapons of mass destruction and international order*, Adelphi Paper 370 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2004).

¹³ This alignment seems fundamental to the convergence of expectations around principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures that characterize international regimes in Krasner's famous definition. See Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 2.

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There was another question. How could the diffusion of nuclear materials and technologies for civil purposes be reconciled with the avoidance of nuclear proliferation? How could there be confidence that states would not seek nuclear weapons under the cover of civil intentions, or that nuclear weapon states would not seek commercial dominion under the cover of security interests? The answer, albeit a problematic one, lay in Article IV of the NPT, which affirmed 'the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes', subject to their accepting international safeguards and honouring the Treaty's other articles.

While infected with idealism, this emergent security order was firmly grounded in political strategy. Three points should be highlighted. First, there was a consistency of US strategy underlying NSC-68 and non-proliferation policy. Both rested on *containment* as a prelude to transformation. In the strategic context, vigorous deterrence would bring gradual accommodation and pave the way for change. In the non-proliferation context, the acquisition of nuclear weapons would be frustrated through a mixture of sticks and carrots and by discouraging regional competitors from following a similar track. A policy of patient containment would buy time in which to shift proliferating states' behaviour through domestic or regional changes, as happened with Argentina, Brazil and South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Second, the balance-of-power, hegemonic and constitutional approaches to order (in Ikenberry's terminology) were allowed to develop symbiotically from the 1960s onwards.¹⁴ The US and USSR used their respective hegemonic powers to draw states into a constitutionalism which helped to stabilize the balance of power between them, while themselves accepting legal constraints. The NPT's constitutionalism also facilitated reconciliation of the contrasting rights and obligations of the nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots', provided a framework for reconciling norms of sovereignty with the intrusive verification of renunciation, and offered a means of sustaining hopes of an eventual release from the threat of nuclear war. It embodied the conviction that the nuclear order was the property and responsibility of all states, and that they should together strive to make it a just order.

Third, the NPT and associated agreements amounted to a grand political settlement and contract among states great and small. Yet it was incomplete. Many states, including China, France and India, initially refused to join the Treaty. Drawing the 'rejectionists' into the settlement, and establishing means by which the Treaty's goals could be achieved, became the expressed ambition of NPT parties and of the epistemic communities which developed among them. That the NPT was progressive and cooperative was of the essence. Furthermore, it was of the essence that it represented and was believed to represent enlightenment: it offered the possibility of greater mastery of the political sphere and of reining in forces which, if states were left to their brutish ways, could result in a lethal nuclear anarchy. Although the NPT served great powers' interests and coercive diplomacy was involved in

¹⁴ John Ikenberry, *After victory: institutions, strategic restraint and the rebuilding of order after major wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

bringing states into the fold, it was this quality and prospect that gave the settlement magnetic authority and legitimacy.

The early post-Cold War period: realizing the enlightenment project

This international order was briefly shaken by two major disturbances. One, affecting the system of abstinence, arose from the coincidence of the energy crisis and the Indian test explosion in the mid-1970s.¹⁵ The other, affecting the system of deterrence, involved the radicalization of US political and military strategy under President Reagan.¹⁶ They will be sidestepped here for reasons of space.

The nuclear Cold War effectively ended in October 1986 when Gorbachev and Reagan met at Reykjavik and pledged to end the confrontation. The ensuing decade was a golden age of arms control, bringing substantial arms reductions and a flurry of bilateral and multilateral treaties restricting the development and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. Three developments were central to the period's progressive dynamic.

First, while the Gulf War of 1991 revealed Iraq's duplicity and deficiencies in the safeguards and export control systems, in the war's aftermath the nuclear order initially appeared to be strengthened. The UN Security Council acted to disarm Iraq through the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) and the IAEA, and the safeguards system was strengthened through negotiations of the Additional Protocol in the mid-1990s. For a few years, there appeared to be some prospect of establishing collective political and regulatory means for detecting and responding to acts of non-compliance.

Second, the Soviet Union's political reconstruction into 15 sovereign states, 14 of which joined the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states, was a remarkable achievement. It would have been impossible (no exaggeration) without the framing authority of existing arms control norms and treaties and of the NPT and its safeguards system. In important ways, the need to manage this transition bound the emergent hegemon, the United States, into maintaining its support for international constitutionalism in the early post-Cold War period.

Third, the central diplomatic event of the period was the NPT Extension Conference in April–May 1995.¹⁷ Many states worried that indefinite extension would give the states that already possessed nuclear weapons eternal licence to hold them while locking others into permanent renunciation. The compromise consisted of four 'decision documents', announcing the Treaty's indefinite extension; strengthening its review process; adopting the 'principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament' which elaborated on the Treaty's

¹⁵ See Michael Brenner, *Nuclear power and non-proliferation: the remaking of US policy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); William Walker and Måns Lönnroth, *Nuclear power struggles: industrial competition and proliferation control* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

¹⁶ See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way out there in the blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the end of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

¹⁷ The Treaty entered into force in 1970. Various proposals were put forward for extension for a period or periods as Article X.2 allows. However, no consensus formed around them. Indefinite extension won the day.

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norms, rules and aspirations; and expressing determination to bring all Middle Eastern states, including Israel, into conformity with the Treaty.

By these actions, the NPT's centrality was reaffirmed. Most state parties had by now come to regard the NPT conference as a quasi-legislative assembly with authority to set the broad agenda. From this viewpoint, the Extension Conference's decisions amounted to an assertion of the sovereign will and interest of the collective of NPT member states, which now comprised the near-entirety of states, over the will and interest of individual states. Although the Conference's authority had already been punctured by India's and Pakistan's tests in 1998, and by the US Senate's rejection of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999, it went further in 2000 by identifying 'thirteen steps' that must be taken towards nuclear disarmament and by securing from the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states an 'unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States parties are committed under Article VI'.

While the outcomes of the 1995 and 2000 Conferences implied the collective hegemony of NPT parties, developments in the NPT ironically opened the way for the exercise of hegemony of another kind. The NPT's very success in enlisting members (only five states remained outside by 1996) created conditions in which a hegemonic power could change the nature of its interaction with the Treaty. The primary objective of non-proliferation policy shifted naturally—especially after India, Pakistan and Israel came to be viewed as lost causes—from the recruitment of new members to the compliance of existing members. A hegemonic power might henceforth be tempted to regard the NPT as a static instrument of disciplinary confinement, rather than a dynamic instrument of cooperative engagement and innovation in arms control and disarmament. As it turned out, this is exactly what happened, encouraged in no small measure by the behaviour of Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

The counter-enlightenment

The nuclear ordering strategy discussed above was rooted in a belief that security and stability lay—and transcendence might eventually lie—in regulative action, directed in particular through the institutions of deterrence, arms control and the non-proliferation regime. By progressively constraining one another, states would gradually deprive nuclear weapons of their danger and political potency. There was, however, another tradition in American political and strategic thought that regarded this approach with disdain: as placing the United States in shackles when others would slip them, as assuming there was similarity of cooperative purpose when states were bound to compete and deceive, and as exposing the United States to a stultifying, ineffective and ultimately self-defeating institutionalism. Instead, these dissenters maintained, the United States should rely on its own power, give full rein to its innovative genius and not hesitate to exploit its superiority.

Adherents of this view briefly occupied the high ground in the early 1980s under Reagan. At the beginning of his second presidency, the United States nevertheless embraced the cooperative, constitutional route with even greater enthusiasm. From the mid-1990s, however, an increasingly vigorous movement against arms control developed. For this movement to achieve its goals, a belief that change was rendered inescapable by a deepening crisis had to take hold.

It should be recognized here that the manner in which crises are depicted has a strong bearing on the credibility and legitimacy of strategies proposed for overcoming them. A crisis *of* a system implies a need for radical change, whereas a crisis *in* a system can be addressed through reform and incremental innovation. The exaggeration (or downplaying) of crisis becomes characteristic behaviour of groups seeking to overturn (or uphold) established orthodoxies. In our context, groups in Washington insisted that the United States was confronted by a crisis *of* the system which was revealing itself as setback followed setback. However, radical changes in policy could not be achieved just by citing evidence of deterioration in the security environment. The basic presumptions underpinning the reigning policy orthodoxy had to be discredited. Inevitably, that entailed attacks on particular enlightenment beliefs and the ideals informing them, including the notion that progress could be achieved through cooperation. Belief in progress had to be supplanted by a stronger fear of regress; and if progress were to be sustained, which American political culture always demands, the established ordering strategy needed replacement by another.

In contrast, those inside and outside the United States who continued to support and believe in the orthodoxy were predisposed to downplay the crisis, depicting it as a crisis *in* the system which should properly be addressed through instrumental adjustment, reform and conflict resolution. A common view in Europe and elsewhere was that it was the radicalism of the US government's response which was turning a crisis *in* the system into a crisis *of* the system. This accusation only sparked the counteraccusation in Washington that its critics were hiding their heads in the sand.¹⁸ Indeed, for influential neo-conservatives the orthodoxy and its enlightenment ideals *were* the crisis.¹⁹

The phrase 'cultural turn' is sometimes used to denote a fundamental shift in the meanings that people ascribe to phenomena, events and trends in the world.²⁰ Stimulated by perceptions of increasing vulnerability and ubiquitous threat, such a turn happened in the United States in the late 1990s, subsequently to be reinforced

¹⁸ See e.g. Robert Kagan's famous distinction between the American Mars and European Venus in 'Power and weakness: why the United States and Europe see the world differently', *Policy Review*, no. 113, June–July 2002.

¹⁹ Irving Kristol is often identified as the father of neo-conservatism. In 1994 he wrote that 'over the past 30 years, all the major philosophical as well as cultural trends began to repudiate secular rationalism and secular humanism in favor of an intellectual and moral relativism and/or nihilism'. He identified this repudiation of rationalism (which he generally welcomed) and the consequent nihilism (which he abhorred) as central to the 'crisis of modernity we are now experiencing', placing himself in an intellectual tradition extending via Leo Strauss back to Nietzsche. See Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: the autobiography of an idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

²⁰ Fredric Jameson has been influential in the development of this idea. See his *The cultural turn: selected writings on the postmodern 1983–1998* (London: Verso, 1998).

and embedded by 9/11. It had particularly dramatic effect internationally because it was accompanied by a *structural* turn as the United States accreted relative power after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Japanese and German economies stagnated, and US firms asserted leadership across a swathe of new information technologies. Besides being deemed essential to meet new security challenges, a radical change of strategy now appeared feasible as a result of America's attainment of unchallengeable power and authority. The turn to unilateralism therefore appeared justified by both the need to displace a dysfunctional orthodoxy and the new-found ability to apply other solutions in the national and international interest.

Rogue states and the radicalization of US policy

During the second half of the 1990s, many events and developments contributed to perceptions of cumulative deterioration, amounting to crisis, in the existing system of nuclear weapons control. They included the demise of the Middle East peace process, India's and Pakistan's explosive testing of nuclear warheads in 1998, and the increasingly frayed relations between Washington and Moscow brought about by, among other things, NATO's expansion. Most corrosive was the behaviour of the 'rogue states', Iraq, Iran and North Korea, which exposed serious deficiencies in the security order and the strategies underpinning it.²¹ All three had violated international law, were located in unstable regions, and harboured a vigorous animosity towards the United States and its close allies, Israel uppermost where Iran and Iraq were concerned.

The problem of rogue states, soon to be widened to a more populous cast that included terrorist groups, lay at the heart of the counter-enlightenment. It had radical potential because it highlighted the presence of a cunning, lethally armed and apparently merciless unreason, directed towards the United States and its allies, which had the potential to destabilize, and could be used to justify the destabilization of, both the system of deterrence and the system of abstinence. It cast doubt over the US policy of containment, opening the way for a more impatient and imperious policy.

The radicalization of US policy occurred in two stages, before and after 2001. Before 2001, it drew energy from four observations in particular.

(1) *As irrationality is rife, nuclear deterrence is unreliable.* 'Confidence in deterrence is based on the demonstrably false assumption that "rogue" leaders will consistently be reasonable as defined in Washington, and thus predictable and controllable.'²² Contrary to Brodie's claims, such actors could not be reliably deterred or contained by extreme threat, nor should it be assumed that the threat of retaliation would engender rationality. To make matters worse, Iraq's and especially Iran's possession of nuclear arms conjured for Israel, whose protection was paramount for the United States, the nightmare of final destruction or blackmail by a remorseless

²¹ See Robert Litwak, *Rogue states and US foreign policy: containment after the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

²² Keith Payne, *The fallacies of Cold War deterrence and a new direction* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), p. 87.

enemy. There could be no deterrence-based coexistence with such actors.

These lines of argument led policy in two directions: towards counterproliferation and preventive war, a trend to which I shall return, and towards the development and construction of missile defences. Bent on reviving plans developed under Reagan, a coalition of scientists, industrialists and politicians now strongly advocated missile defence, with the purposes of reasserting US strategic superiority, protecting allies and (for some) undercutting arms control, since the ABM Treaty would have to be swept away to enable development and deployment. In August 1998, North Korea's launch of a multi-stage rocket appeared to corroborate the Rumsfeld Commission's report of July 1998 which warned that rogue states would soon be able to threaten the US with ballistic missiles. It began an escalating chain of events. Development of a national missile defence (NMD) became unstoppable, the ABM Treaty was abrogated, and the START and other arms control processes fell into abeyance.²³

(2) *Verification is unreliable.* The legal order developed from the 1960s onwards rested upon the presumption that instrumental means could be found to verify states' compliance with obligations. Confidence in this presumption was progressively undermined by evidence that Iraq, North Korea and Iran were perpetrating organized deception of the IAEA. This encouraged the contrary claim, which had a long history, that verification could never be sufficiently reliable. Arms control of all kinds became increasingly vulnerable to the argument that verification is essential, yet cannot be reliable, therefore arms control is pointless. This argument played its part in the sinking in Washington of three multilateral treaties or treaty negotiations (the CTBT, the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and the Verification Protocol of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention) and of START III, which anticipated an increasingly verified reduction and dismantlement of nuclear weapons.²⁴ Instead, the United States drew Russia into the Moscow Treaty of 2002, which contained no verification provisions and was thus worthless by the standards that had previously applied.²⁵

(3) *The UN Security Council is unreliable.* For a few years after the end of the Cold War, it appeared that the UNSC could at last carry out its appointed role as guardian of the security order. However, it became divided by disputes over humanitarian intervention in the Balkans and strategies towards Iraq, especially as China and Russia became concerned over the effects on their interests of incursions on sovereignty. Increasingly, the United States concluded that there could not be a reliable collective response to NPT non-compliance.²⁶ Referral to the

²³ This chain of events is well described by Greg Thielmann in 'Rumsfeld reprise? The missile report that foretold the Iraq intelligence controversy', *Arms Control Today*, 33:6, July/August 2003.

²⁴ START III was also doomed by disputes over START II's ratification.

²⁵ The Strategic Offensive Reductions or Moscow Treaty requires the US and Russia to lower the numbers of operationally deployed strategic warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200 each by the end of 2012, when the Treaty expires. The Treaty has also been criticized for not requiring the destruction of decommissioned warheads, permitting multiple warheads on ICBMs, and allowing withdrawal without explanation after just three months' notice in writing.

²⁶ On debates about non-compliance, see Harald Müller, 'Compliance politics: a critical analysis of multilateral arms control treaty enforcement', *Nonproliferation Review* 7: 2, Summer 2000.

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Security Council would simply lead to procrastination and inaction. It was therefore increasingly drawn towards conferring upon itself and its allies the authority to decide when and how punishment should be inflicted, compounding anxieties elsewhere that restraint was being forfeited.

(4) *The danger comes from weapons of mass destruction, not just nuclear weapons.* Fears that Iraq would use missiles armed with chemical or biological agents during the Gulf War of 1991 began the political fusing of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons into the single category 'weapons of mass destruction' (WMD).²⁷ This trend was confirmed by the equal priority given to eliminating Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological and missile capabilities in UNSC Resolution 687 of April 1991. 'WMD' was replacing the nuclear weapon as the principal rhetorical signifier of outlandish threat. The system of abstinence now had to be stretched to encompass all WMD, and fresh prestige was conferred on nuclear weapons as deterrents against any state's resort to the other weapons of mass destruction.²⁸

The consequence in the early 1990s was a push to establish universal treaties eliminating chemical and biological weapons. However, the initiatives were blunted later in the decade by growing scepticism in Washington about their feasibility, especially given the intrinsic difficulties of verifying the elimination of biological weapons. Growing anxieties over biological weapons were accompanied by a loss of belief in, and of desire to believe in, the capacities of states to regulate this burgeoning field of technology internationally. This sceptical turn of thought encouraged the view that myriad threats were emerging which required a basic reconsideration of security policy, a view that came to dominate especially as fears of catastrophic terrorism took hold.

The new US outlook and strategy

During the second half of the 1990s, supporters in Washington of the established ordering strategy found themselves on the defensive. Their claims that deterrence was demonstrably reliable, that the safeguard system had been reformed, that the Security Council-led disarmament of Iraq had reduced the threat to acceptable levels, and that START, the NPT and other treaty processes still offered the best security, fell on deaf ears. The political turn was confirmed by George W. Bush's election to the presidency, and rapidly given domestic legitimacy—and urgency—by the events of 9/11, which suggested that the United States did indeed confront a crisis of the system which no one could afford to ignore.

In 1999 Ashton Carter and William Perry had presciently written that 'An incident of catastrophic terrorism would abruptly and irrevocably undermine the fundamental sense of security of Americans ... Like the attack on Pearl Harbor,

²⁷ Levels of concern were also raised by Iraq's use of chemical weapons for internal repression and in the war with Iran, revelations about the Soviet Union's undeclared biological weapon programme, and Aum Shinrikyo's sarin attack in a Tokyo subway in 1995.

²⁸ On the citing of chemical and biological threats to hinder more extensive reductions in US nuclear arsenals during the nuclear posture review in the mid-1990s, see Janne Nolan, *An elusive consensus: nuclear weapons and American security after the Cold War* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999).

[it] would divide our past and future into “before” and “after”.²⁹ Although the attack on the Twin Towers did not use weapons of mass destruction, its political impact was immediately magnified by suggestions that terrorist groups might soon resort to them.

At a deep level, these developments seemed to represent a radical extension of the problems accompanying scientific and technological progress. It had delivered the means by which various irredeemable forces of darkness could now pursue their destructive ends. ‘The gravest danger our Nation faces lies at the cross-roads of radicalism and technology.’³⁰ A lethally armed unreason made difference and dissent harder to live with, apparently undermining the possibility of cooperative political mastery through regulative action and the cosmopolitan hope that had accompanied the liberal promotion of modernity. Concerns would soon be magnified by revelation of A. Q. Khan’s criminal supply network. The threat was inherently transnational: it involved actors burrowing into and across states, exploiting weaknesses wherever they might be found. Taken together, these trends appeared to create a new security logic and imperative. Given their reliance on surprise attack, terrorist groups of the new kind had to be found and destroyed *everywhere* if a dramatic loss of confidence in the security afforded by states was to be avoided.

These new perceptions further dramatized the role of rogue states. As the threat would be greatly increased if terrorists were given shelter and access to technological resources, such states and their regimes stood to forfeit their customary rights to recognition and survival. ‘The allies of terror are the enemies of civilization.’³¹ Henceforth, *counterterrorism* and *counterproliferation* would have to take centre stage, as would intelligence services and defence ministries. Containment could not suffice: regime change and other solutions had to be pursued *now*, and by all available means, including war.

The United States’ new-found activism was given cogent expression in the National Security Strategy of September 2002 (NSS-2002). In it, President Bush held out another promise. ‘We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.’³² NSS-2002 placed the promotion of democratization and market liberalization at the centre of US security strategy.³³ It also expressed the hope that great powers could ‘compete in peace instead of continually [preparing] for war’, and that the economic transformations occurring in China, India and Russia, their integration into the world trade system and their common interest in combating terrorism would encourage convergence of outlooks and

²⁹ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive defense: a new security strategy for America* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), pp. 150, 152.

³⁰ Statement by President Bush accompanying publication of the Sept. 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS-2002).

³¹ Statement by President Bush accompanying publication of NSS-2002.

³² Statement by President Bush accompanying publication of NSS-2002.

³³ On the shift from ‘exemplarism’ to ‘vindicationism’, the former giving priority to the internal perfection of democracy and the latter to its active promotion abroad, see Jonathan Monten, ‘The roots of the Bush Doctrine: power, nationalism, and democracy promotion in US strategy’, *International Security* 29: 4, Spring 2005.

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interests. However, this did not imply equality. It was assumed that other great powers, especially China and Russia, would choose to bandwagon when faced with unquestionable supremacy. The security dilemma would be nullified by hegemony. Arms control was thus an unnecessary encumbrance. All states, great powers included, would have the choice of either volunteering for friendship with the United States or incurring a costly animosity.

The US proposals therefore immediately became confused internationally with the emergence of a project to maximize hegemony. Rather than exercising self-restraint to win greater cooperation, as had happened in the early post-Cold War period, the United States appeared intent on embarking on an expansionist project and on freeing itself from constraint.

Although NSS-2002 rehearsed familiar American themes, it marked a radical change in US security strategy, the culmination of shifts which began in the mid- to late 1990s. This change involved a long list of departures, including the following:

- relegation of containment and deterrence as the primary means of dealing with opponents;
- downplaying of multilateralism and international law, except insofar as they bound other states to behave in predictable ways without imposing restraint on the United States, in favour of problem-solving through unilateral action and through tailored US-led agreements and coalitions;
- abrogation of the ABM Treaty, cessation of the START process, and denial of support for multilateral arms control measures that impinged on US freedom;³⁴
- rebalancing (towards the former) of offence and defence, and of intervention and patient diplomacy, along with the refocusing of political and military action on overcoming opponents through active counterterrorism and counterproliferation policies, and through the 'war on terror' and regime change, exemplified by the wars with Afghanistan and Iraq;
- elevation of political and economic freedom to primacy among US strategies for attaining international peace and predictability, encapsulated in the assertion that the US should aim for universal adoption of the 'single sustainable model of national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise';³⁵
- reaffirmation that the United States, the possessor of power made formidable by its superior capabilities, reason and righteousness, was the central actor in the international system, and that its national interest could justifiably be equated with the international interest.³⁶

There was widespread international recognition that grave new threats had emerged, especially with regard to terrorism, and that remedial action was

³⁴ This included confirmation that the US would not join the CTBT, announcement that it would not support a verified Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, and obstruction of the process designed to provide the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention with an instrument of verification.

³⁵ Statement by President Bush accompanying publication of NSS-2002.

³⁶ See Michael C. Williams, 'What is the national interest? The neoconservative challenge in IR theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 13: 3, 2005.

required. It received expression in the UN Security Council's unanimous adoption in April 2004 of Resolution 1540, which prohibited states from helping non-state actors to acquire weapons of mass destruction and obliged them to strengthen internal laws and regulations to inhibit access, allied to efforts to raise standards of physical security at nuclear sites. However, few governments accepted that the United States was making the right choices. Most regarded its actions as breaches of contract and betrayals of commitments solemnly made. The Bush administration appeared from outside the country, and to many distraught observers inside it, determined to detach the United States from the conception of order that it had passionately advocated over a long period.

Furthermore, the United States' nonchalant behaviour at the 2005 NPT Review Conference seemed to indicate that it no longer respected the NPT's bargains and processes.³⁷ On article IV, it openly denied that states other than a favoured few had rights to develop civil fuel-cycles. Simultaneously it proposed a new classification of states: fuel-cycle and, by implication, non-fuel-cycle states, the latter having to accept dependence on the former if they were to invest in nuclear power.³⁸ On article VI, it took steps at the Review Conference, in alliance with France, to detach itself from collective decisions on disarmament taken in 1995 and 2000. To cap it all, on US insistence reference to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament was removed from the document issuing from the UN's world summit in September 2005.

Undermining the universal legitimacy of the non-proliferation norm

After 9/11 it was self-evident that problems in the international system would have to be addressed, more urgently than at any time in modern history, along and at the intersection of two dimensions. The horizontal dimension involved the convention-bound relations between sovereign states, including their conduct and avoidance of regular war. The vertical dimension involved the interaction among states and non-state actors in a globalizing and technology-drenched environment. This was the domain of irregular warfare, in which non-state actors could injure and frighten their opponents by drawing on an ever-increasing inventory of methods and targets.

In order to strengthen order simultaneously in *both* dimensions and at their interface, a natural move would have been to redramatize the *existence* of nuclear weapons, so as to invigorate their *global* restriction and elimination while responding to the particular instances of proliferation. If 9/11 had occurred in 1995 rather than 2001, this might have happened.

Instead, the United States chose to dramatize the presence of certain actors in the world whose possession of nuclear weapons or weapon-related technologies would be intolerable. The problem of nuclear order was narrowed to the problem

³⁷ On the conference, see John Simpson and Jenny Nielsen, 'The 2005 NPT review conference: mission impossible?', *Nonproliferation Review* 12: 2, July 2005.

³⁸ See US Department of Energy, Fact Sheet on Global Energy Partnership, Washington DC, Feb. 2005.

of proliferation, and further narrowed to 'non-compliance with treaty obligations and preventing weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists'.³⁹ The hegemon's Dionysian energy was then focused on perpetrators. The Iraq war of 2003, and the vicious insurgency, terrorism and civil war that followed, left the deficiencies of the new grand strategy brutally exposed. The actions of Iran and North Korea also revealed that a non- or counterproliferation policy resting on the threat of preventive war contained an inherent trap. It risked inciting the very behaviour that everyone was keen to avoid—the embedding of efforts to acquire nuclear deterrents in self-defence, and the nationalistic closing of ranks around that objective. North Korea withdrew from the NPT and announced that it was pressing ahead with the development of its nuclear armament.⁴⁰ Although Iran's response was less precipitous (its capabilities being less advanced), the government in Tehran dug its heels in. Moreover, the external threats levelled against it appeared to play a part in the defeat of internal efforts to establish a more liberal polity in Iran, negating the pursuit of democratization.⁴¹

Not only was preventive war discredited as a general policy by its pursuit in Iraq, but its usage against either Iran or North Korea was shown to be untenable given the still more destructive wars and instabilities that would thereby be unleashed in either region. The United States was therefore drawn reluctantly back towards a policy of containment, now reliant on the cooperation of other powers. Over Iran it became involved with the E3 (France, Germany and the UK), Russia and other parties in a difficult and contentious game to impede Iran's assembly of weapon capabilities; and it had to concede a central role in information-gathering, policy formulation and political mediation to the IAEA and its Board of Governors. Over North Korea it was likewise driven to cooperate through the six-party talks, now relying heavily on China to find solutions.

Despite international unanimity on the need to rein in Iran and North Korea, there has been little progress towards this end. The North Korean government backpedalled after declaring its intention in September 2005 to disarm and return to the NPT, and conducted a nuclear test in October 2006. The crisis over Iran intensified after the election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2005, his inflammatory statements about destroying Israel and his insistence on pressing ahead with Iran's enrichment programme. In February 2006 the IAEA referred Iran to the UN Security Council, leading in December 2006 to the Council's agreement in Resolution 1737 to impose specified sanctions on Iran if it failed to suspend all enrichment and reprocessing activity. So far, Iran has defied the Resolution.

Another serious injury was inflicted on the international nuclear order. By centring their justification of the war on the threat represented by Iraq's acquisition

³⁹ Statement to the UN General Assembly's Disarmament Committee by Stephen Rademaker, US Assistant Secretary of State, 8 Oct. 2003.

⁴⁰ On North Korea, see David Albright and Corey Hinderstein, *Dismantling the DPRK's nuclear weapons program: a practicable, verifiable plan of action*, Peaceworks 54 (Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace, Jan. 2006); Selig Harrison, 'Did North Korea cheat?', *Foreign Affairs* 84:1, Jan.–Feb. 2005.

⁴¹ In a large literature, see 'Implementation of the NPT safeguards agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran', International Atomic Energy Agency, GOV/2006/27, Vienna, 28 April 2006; Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran* (London: Hurst, 2006).

of WMD—a threat subsequently shown to have been exaggerated—the United States and United Kingdom placed in question the sincerity of the focus on the problem of proliferation. Trust was seriously undermined by the deception involved in using the constraint of WMD and defence of the rule-based order as Trojan horses serving special or revisionist interests. Furthermore, there was a sharp contrast between America's belligerence towards Iraq and Iran and its subsequent conferral of legitimacy on India's nuclear weapon programme. Although the Indo-US Joint Statement of June 2005 contained some pledges to support non-proliferation goals, the United States neither secured nor even sought constraints on India's military ambitions.

While further delegitimizing and stigmatizing, often with good reason, the acquisition of nuclear weapons by selected actors, the United States therefore appeared to emphasize simultaneously the legitimacy of the general existence of nuclear weapons and their possession by the primary holders of nuclear technology. This was a dagger that sank deep into the NPT, given its basic principle that nuclear weapons are intrinsically illegitimate everywhere and for all time, notwithstanding the temporary legality of possession granted to five nuclear weapon states. Without this principle, the non-proliferation norm could itself possess no intrinsic legitimacy.

By this turn, the Bush administration was now tacitly declaring that the hydra-headed problem of reconciliation should be stripped of its former prominence—indeed, that it no longer existed. It is only slightly overstating the case to say that the now eight haves (North Korea remaining a special case) could continue to have, the have-nots must continue to have not, and the haves (now including India) no longer owed a formal duty to the have-nots to rein in their armament programmes. The have-nots had increased obligations (notably to implement the Additional Protocol) but no rights, while the haves had rights and few obligations other than to ensure that capabilities did not fall into the hands of rogue actors. It followed that issues of justice and the principle of reciprocal obligation had lost their relevance and could be drained out of discourses about ordering strategy. Not only could the problem of reconciliation be set aside, the Bush administration arrogated to itself the right to set it aside. The hegemonic elimination of the long tradition of discourse and negotiation relating to this problem was the ultimate manifestation of the administration's rejection of the universalism and commitment to public reason that had informed the prior US conduct of nuclear relations.

The policies pursued by the Bush administration have thus contained a basic inconsistency. The administration focused the problem of international nuclear order on the problem of proliferation. It relied on the NPT and its rules to mobilize domestic and international action against non-compliant states. Yet by adopting this exclusive focus, by the manner in which it prosecuted its counterproliferation policies, and by seeking to release itself from constitutional restraint, it provoked resistance, weakened the non-proliferation norm and the NPT, and hindered the coordination of responses to non-compliance. Furthermore, the administration

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began to send signals that it regarded 'proliferation as inevitable and not necessarily a bad thing' if it involved friendly states such as India.⁴²

Thus, in just a few years, the United States had veered from one vigorous ordering strategy to another, only to find that the latter was ineffective or worse. It then appeared tempted to throw in the towel. After its long struggle to establish international order, Washington appeared to indicate that the national interest might now best be served by reducing its ambitions to the optimization of the US's competitive position in a disorderly international system in which nuclear proliferation would accelerate.

Following the 2006 congressional elections and faced with the intense review of the strategies that led to the debacle in Iraq, the resignation of key personnel and the evidence of widespread failure of its foreign policy, the US government has come under strong internal pressure to shift its ground. How and when this will affect stances on the international nuclear order remains to be seen. For the time being, confusion appears to reign. On the one hand, the need for international cooperation and diplomatic solutions is again being highlighted. On the other hand, increasing belligerence is being displayed by the Bush administration in its relations with Iran and there is little sign of change in its attitude towards arms control.

Beyond a tipping point?

In despair over the dangers arising from nuclear weapons, Hans Morgenthau, a father of realism, wrote in 1964 that

Instead of trying in vain to assimilate nuclear power to the purposes and instrumentalities of the nation-state, we ought to have tried to adapt these purposes and instrumentalities to the potentialities of nuclear power. We have refrained from doing so in earnest, because to do so successfully requires a radical transformation—psychologically painful and politically risky—of traditional moral values, modes of thought, and habits of action. But short of such a transformation, there will be no escape from the paradoxes of nuclear strategy and the dangers attending them.⁴³

Elsewhere Morgenthau mused, as did Reinhold Niebuhr, about escaping future catastrophe by establishing world government and 'putting an end to international politics'.⁴⁴ He did not anticipate that a way could be found, albeit without guaranteeing survival, to reconcile the existence of nuclear weapons and the existence of the anarchic system of sovereign states. It involved constructing an international order by pursuing a politics that combined a restrained power play with an inclusive quest for solutions allied to a strong commitment to mutual coexistence and obligation.

⁴² See William C. Potter, 'India and the new look of US nonproliferation policy', *Nonproliferation Review* 12: 2, Spring–Summer 2005, p. 343.

⁴³ Hans Morgenthau, 'Four paradoxes of nuclear strategy', *American Political Science Review* 58:1, March 1964, p. 35.

⁴⁴ The quoted words are from Craig Campbell's *Glimmer of a new Leviathan: total war in the realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 92.

Following various mishaps and wrong turnings in a difficult security environment, Morgenthau's lament echoes again. There are warnings of a coming 'nuclear tipping point' and entry to a 'post-proliferation age'.⁴⁵ In the words of the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel, 'we are approaching a point at which the erosion of the non-proliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, there is visible rekindling of armament programmes in the nuclear weapon states as steps are taken to modernize and replace nuclear forces, and as new roles for nuclear weapons in warfare are explored. Some observers appear to be concluding that the game will soon be up. The diffusion of technology and ineluctable nature of the international system may be leading to the long-feared turning of the nuclear weapon into a common military currency.

There have already been glimpses of a future in which the non-proliferation norm has died. Rather than bringing a general Waltzian restraint, it is likely to involve a revitalized competition in arms, a return to more aggressive strategic doctrines, and a differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' proliferators as nuclear powers subjectively and divisively nominate their candidates under either heading, honouring and rewarding the former and estranging the latter.⁴⁷ Three categories of relationship between great powers and proliferating states have been observed recently: *assisted* proliferation (e.g. Iran–North Korea, China–Pakistan); *protected* proliferation, whereby the protecting and protected state act in quasi-alliance (e.g. US–Israel, US–India) or the protector shelters the proliferator against strong interventions by others (e.g. Russia–Iran, China–North Korea); and *combated* proliferation, whereby a state or states set out to enforce change by military or other means. If the dynamics behind these categorizations were allowed to become firmly established, nuclear-armed states would become agents as well as opposers of proliferation, a situation that Article I of the NPT was designed to prevent. Furthermore, such dynamics would inevitably be accompanied by a general decline in regulative and problem-solving capacities and by increased anxiety about the acquisition of weapon capabilities by non-state actors.

Can any state afford not to oppose these trends? Perhaps there is hope in recognition of the common dangers that they present. It should be recalled, looking back over nuclear history, that fear of an encompassing crisis has periodically invigorated searches for collective solutions and has encouraged states to avoid actions which would deepen it. The early 1960s, which gave birth to the international nuclear order, represented such a moment. There are important similarities between the situation then and that which prevails today: the need to re-establish control after a period of great danger and policy failure; the pressures to expand civil nuclear commerce without jeopardizing security; and the urgency of drawing

⁴⁵ Kurt M. Campbell, Robert Einhorn and Mitchell Reiss, eds, *The nuclear tipping point: why states reconsider their nuclear choices* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Stephen Peter Rosen, 'After proliferation', *Foreign Affairs* 85: 5, Sept.–Oct. 2006.

⁴⁶ 'A more secure world: our shared responsibility', Report of the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, Dec. 2004, para. 111.

⁴⁷ See George Perkovich, 'Bush's nuclear revolution: a regime change in non-proliferation', *Foreign Affairs* 82: 2, March/April 2003.

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a line around the states which may possess nuclear arms and discouraging others (now, perhaps, especially Japan, Egypt and Brazil) from crossing it.

It is in this last respect that a particular difficulty now lies. Drawing a clear line, and defining the legitimate behaviour, rights and responsibilities of states on either side of it, were essential steps in the formation of the international nuclear order and its subsequent development. *Pace* India, placing the now nine nuclear-armed states inside the line drawn by the NPT is not an acceptable option, because it would finally explode the non-proliferation norm. Governments may join the Bush administration in concluding that the problem of reconciliation no longer has a potential solution and that the political settlement represented by the NPT no longer has salience—unless the line's movement *inwards* is given fresh emphasis by reinvigorating the arms control and disarmament norms and agendas so that the problem of nuclear weapons is again addressed at both its centre (the primary nuclear weapon states) and its periphery where proliferation is threatened. The line's location would then lose some significance and the NPT would recover prestige as *all* states were expected to join in tightening constraints on the development and deployment of nuclear arms.

This returns us squarely to the issue of disarmament. Given the many dangers of nuclear catastrophe arising from the behaviour of states and non-state actors in a globalizing environment, the pursuit of nuclear disarmament has a security logic that is stronger than ever. As so often in history, however, the more desirable it appears, the more elusive it becomes as order fragments and states look to their own defences. It is a mistake, however, to regard nuclear disarmament as an ideal serving a utopian aim. According to Immanuel Kant, the pre-eminent philosopher of the enlightenment, ideals should be 'construed as regulative principles, which guide us down the path to amelioration'.⁴⁸ The commitment to disarmament represents a direction of travel—towards an increased political and instrumental restraint, now serving the avoidance of both nuclear war and catastrophic terrorism. It neither requires nor necessarily welcomes a precipitous abandonment of deterrence.

The political tenacity and value of the disarmament norm have a deeper significance which takes us back to Horkheimer and Adorno. It signifies that nuclear weapons are *intrinsically* illegitimate, and that any legitimacy or legality afforded to them has to be contingent and temporary. They are intrinsically illegitimate because they confer the capacity to commit acts involving the indiscriminate annihilation of lives and worlds. Every holder of nuclear weapons, whether a democracy or tyranny, a state or non-state actor, is capable of this annihilation by accident or design. The great dilemma and incipient tragedy of the nuclear age is that this latent 'radical evil', as it may justifiably be called, gives substance to nuclear deterrence and is thereby ascribed value in international relations.⁴⁹ If

⁴⁸ This is Kant as interpreted by Roger Scruton in *Kant: a very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 127.

⁴⁹ 'Radical evil is making human beings superfluous as human beings.' See Richard J. Bernstein discussing Hannah Arendt in *The abuse of evil: the corruption of politics and religion since 9/11* (London: Polity, 2005), p. 5.

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an international order without nuclear deterrence is beyond achievement, then the possessors of nuclear weapons have an exceptional responsibility to exercise restraint, act reasonably, pursue an inclusive politics resting on public reason, and honour the universal desire for protection against annihilation.

This grave duty now falls on nine nuclear-armed states. The greatest danger—and opportunity—lies in their infectious disregard—and regard—for the responsibilities that fall upon them.

Recovery of an exceptional politics and statecraft

In conclusion, nuclear history has been shaped from the outset by awareness of the dangers of conceding normality. The nuclear weapon was acknowledged to be capable of doing exceptional harm, requiring an exceptional restraint of possession and usage and thus an exceptional kind of politics and statecraft. Bound up with this politics and statecraft was an exceptional problem of reconciliation—how to reconcile the possession of nuclear weapons by the few with the renunciation yet perceived safety of the many, and how to reconcile the diffusion of nuclear materials and technologies for peaceful purposes with the avoidance of weapon proliferation.

For survival and for the legitimacy of the non-proliferation norm, nuclear weapons therefore had to be lifted out of the usual run of politics despite their inescapably being creatures of the competitive international system. This was the essential purpose of the enlightenment project discussed in these pages. Nuclear weapons existed and might serve a common good by preventing catastrophic wars among great powers. However, their use would be strictly limited to deterrence, and the problems of control and reconciliation would be addressed through a politics that emphasized the possibility of achieving security, justice and progress for all and that sought common solutions through the exercise of public reason, informed by a powerful sense of reciprocal obligation and commitment to mutual restraint.⁵⁰ Central to this politics was the NPT, the grand political and normative settlement of the nuclear age.

As became clear in the 1990s, what the NPT lacked was agreement on how states should respond to non-compliance. This was a serious failing that the United States was correct to highlight, especially after 9/11 had exposed the threats emanating from an increasingly virulent terrorism and the anti-secular movements feeding it. However, the US government's fundamental mistake was to bring punishment, regime change and counter-proliferation into the foreground of nuclear politics without simultaneously deepening its own and everyone else's commitment to the norms and rules that underpinned the *whole* international nuclear order, of which the non-proliferation regime was only part. Instead of pressing at the height of American power for the further marginalization of nuclear weapons through

⁵⁰ Since I completed this article, Daniel Deudney's fine book *Bounding power: republican security theory from the polis to the global village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) has come to my notice. Suffice to say that my notion of international nuclear order seems consistent with his republican security theory which illuminates the inadequacies of both realist and liberal institutionalist approaches to international security.

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cooperative measures, it sought greater freedom for itself while expecting others to accept and display greater restraint. It thereby wasted the opportunity to use its hegemonic power and authority to build a stronger political and constitutional platform from which to respond effectively to the new challenges.

In the coming period, Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programmes seem likely to remain thorns in everyone's side, probably beyond early remedy and leaving little palatable alternative to containment. However, the problem of nuclear order extends far beyond the challenges posed by these states or other 'rogue actors'. It is multifaceted, reaches across the state system, and requires attention by various means at global, regional and local levels. This complexity reinforces my contention that there can be no international nuclear order worthy of the title without the NPT or an NPT-like vessel of central principles, norms and rules. Without it, there can be little trust among states or predictability of behaviour, no reliable coordination of problem-solving, prospects for institutional innovation will be limited, and policy will be prone to militarization.

Henry Kissinger observed in *A world restored* that a robust international order 'achieves its transformations through acceptance, and this presupposes a consensus on the nature of a just arrangement. But a revolutionary order having destroyed the existing structure of obligations, must impose its measures by force ... The health of a social structure is its ability to translate transformation into acceptance, to relate the forces of change to those of conservation.'⁵¹ The strategies associated in these pages with counter-enlightenment have shown themselves to be incapable of delivering acceptance, let alone achieving their ends. Rather than give way to *anomie*, governments need now to return to the question of how to institutionalize restraint, addressing the whole presence of nuclear weapons in the international arena, in a manner that upholds 'the existing structure of obligations' and can 'translate transformation into acceptance'. The NPT's demise can be overplayed: its prospects would look very different if leading states parties, now with India's tacit support, pledged to re-honour its bargains and if the various proposals for strengthening the Treaty and its associated instruments were given a chance of realization.⁵²

Whatever the Treaty's prospects, the key to revival rests above all else on recovering the cooperative sensibility and capacity for good judgement that gave life and shape to the international nuclear order. Some will say that little of this kind is now achievable given the facts of proliferation and the increasingly febrile condition of international politics. They need to tell us where else there is to go, and how to go there, together. If they believe that trust can be placed in muddling through, or in further exercises of military might, they are surely deluding themselves.

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⁵¹ Henry Kissinger, *A world restored* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pp. 172–3.

⁵² Various policy proposals ranging from the CTBT and FMCT to the alert status of deployed weapons, from the strengthening of compliance measures to novel arrangements in the civil fuel-cycle and much else besides, are reviewed in George Perkovich, Jessica Mathews, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller and Jon Wolfsthal, *Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2005); and *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Stockholm, June 2006.