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NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION

The upcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May next year provides the international community with a good opportunity to relook the issues of disarmament and non-proliferation. When the proposal for the NPT was mooted more than 40 years ago, the world was in a different place. The political landscape was also rather distinct from what it is now. The NPT and the existing non-proliferation regime do not envisage the kind of world we live in now.

2 According to the US Census Bureau, the world population was slightly over 3 billion in the 1960s. Today, 50 years later, that figure has doubled. With more people, increasing needs, depleting resources, rising costs in traditional sources of fuel, and the threat of climate change, more countries are going to explore the option of nuclear energy as part of their energy mix.

3 Singapore, together with the international community, supports the sovereign right of every country to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. However, the risk of nuclear materials falling into wrong hands will grow as the number of nuclear power plants (NPPs) increases. This is a real concern as the international security environment has changed significantly since the NPT entered into force in 1970. Then, we were preoccupied mainly with state actors. Now, we also have to take into serious consideration the threat posed by non-state actors. It may not be easy for them to gain access to nuclear devices. However, the illicit trafficking of nuclear materials out of the increasing number of NPPs constructed around the world and the possible deployment of “dirty bombs” by terrorists groups are of growing concern to the international community. Singapore takes this threat seriously. For any country, a nuclear terrorist attack would already be a tragedy. For Singapore, it is an existential threat.

The Catch-22 Situation

4 The NPT was mainly aimed at preventing more countries from acquiring nuclear weapons and technology to reduce the threat of the spread of nuclear weapons around the world. This objective appears noble as it seeks a safer world for everyone. However, right from the start, the Treaty itself comes with its inherent contradictions.

5 First, its very creation leads to an unequal playing field, that is, a group of haves and have nots. The have nots are asking: Why should the group of countries which happened to develop the technology first be the only ones that are allowed to have the internationally recognised status of Nuclear Weapons States? Second, many countries continue to feel insecure and to feel threatened by others. They believe that the possession of nuclear weapons and technology is the best security insurance and bargaining chip, similar to the reason why the Nuclear Weapons States had decided to go nuclear in the first place. Third, unless the Nuclear Weapons States are assured that the rest of the world is not developing nuclear technology, the goal towards complete disarmament cannot be achieved. This assurance will be difficult to come by as it is almost impossible to verify clandestine activities, which we know have taken place in many countries; and as the political climate remains tense in many parts of the world.

6 Hence, the international community has been caught in a bind for many years, unable to make much progress in all directions. Furthermore, the promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear energy has led to more technology transfer across the globe, in particular, on uranium enrichment and plutonium separation, which unfortunately facilitates “rogue” countries to easily venture into a military nuclear programme.

Strengthening the Non-Proliferation Regime

7 Given the new political landscape and the contradictions created by the NPT itself, how do we strengthen the non-proliferation regime?

8 Dialogue is key rather than an isolationist approach - - as isolation almost invariably leads to a siege mentality. When a country has nothing to lose, and believes that the world is against it, it would try to procure the best bargaining chip it could find. The possession of nuclear weapons and technology is unfortunately perceived as the most preferred option. Over many years, however, some countries had been left to their own devices. With no contact with them, no one knew what went on in that country until it is too late - - when they are already developing some form of nuclear weapons programme or trafficking in nuclear materials with countries of concern. Hence, it is of

utmost importance that we guard against an isolationist approach especially towards countries teetering on the brink of becoming failing states and try to reach out to them.

9 Having said that, the harsh reality is that there will continue to be, for a long time to come, countries which continue to feel insecure and which believe that having a nuclear arsenal is their best insurance policy. For this group of countries, dialogue is still important to convince them that the benefits of cooperation and to give up its nuclear weapons programme far exceeds the benefits of not doing so. However, at the same time, we should put in place at the national, regional and international level a robust counter-proliferation regime for those which continue to flout the rules and play for time.

10 First, the international community should do more to encourage countries to sign on to the NPT, especially those which are believed to possess nuclear weapons and technology or planning to do so. There are too many instances, unfortunately, where agreements were made for technology transfer without the condition of being party to the NPT.

11 Second, the IAEA continues to play an important role. We should give the agency our fullest support in carrying out its work particularly in verification and safeguards but also in promoting nuclear safety, security and technical cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. However, over the last few years, we see the IAEA becoming more politicised. The issue of non-proliferation, nuclear safety and security concerns all countries, developed or developing, big or small. IAEA's work is too important to be held hostage by the imaginary North-South divide over these issues.

12 Third, promoting more regional and international cooperation in export control. However, any international non-proliferation regime is only as strong as its weakest link. Imagine a fishing net. Even if it is made of the best material and held together at various key nodes by extremely firm knots, it would still be ineffective if it is full of holes here, there and everywhere. We should therefore encourage more national efforts. We have to find ways for countries to opt in. We understand, however, that some countries lack the expertise and resources to put in place an effective system. We should try to give them a helping hand by assisting them in capacity-building.

13 Let me share with you what we try to do in Singapore. As I have mentioned earlier, Singapore is committed to supporting efforts towards non-proliferation as we face an existential threat if there is any Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) attack

against our island-state. However, we started from a low base. First and foremost, we are not a Nuclear Weapons State. Second, we do not have a Nuclear Power Plant. Yes, we would like to establish a robust export control regime against WMD. However, it is more than just amending our legislation. We have to train up relevant officers and expertise, especially those dealing with customs and shipment matters, on even simple things like how to identify equipments and materials relating to WMD, especially those with dual use. We also had to conduct regular briefings to those in the industry to create awareness before we could implement the measures. All these take time.

14 But we are pleased that since we announced on 1 January 2003 that Singapore had put in place a system to regulate trade in strategic goods and strategic goods technology, we have within five years managed to expand our strategic goods control list for export, transshipment and transit to take in the full lists of controlled items by the four multilateral export control regimes, namely, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Australia Group, and the Missile Technology Control Regime. It is part of our continuous efforts to review and enhance our strategic goods control system, and in line with Singapore's commitment to our international obligations to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their delivery systems. But we could not have done it all alone within such a short span of time if it was not through the sharing of experience with other countries which have established a similar regime.

15 The provision of assistance in capacity-building is only one aspect. We need to convince those countries who are yet to be on board why it is important to work on this together. For example, there are incidents now of suspected vessels bypassing stricter jurisdiction to looser ones to avoid getting caught. We need to sew up the rest of the fishing net. We need to work on an incentive scheme for countries to opt in. Another area of particular concern when we talk about non-proliferation is the establishment of a robust regional and international nuclear safety and security regime. In this regard, it is timely that the US is convening a Summit on this matter next Spring.

16 Given the world's rising energy needs, we are seeing something of a nuclear energy revival. According to a March 2009 report by the World Nuclear Association, over 40 reactors are now under construction in 12 countries. Most of these reactors on order or planned are in the Asian region. In total, there are about 439 nuclear power reactors operating in 30 countries plus Taiwan, accounting for 15% of the world's electricity. As we see a growth in nuclear power plants installations, the risk of nuclear materials falling into the wrong hands has increased significantly. Hence, there is an urgent need to look into the issues of nuclear safety and security. For example, how do we assist those newcomers in setting up an effective system whereby the chances of

nuclear materials being smuggled out are reduced to almost nil? Ensuring a good physical infrastructure and putting in place a robust export control system is one aspect. More important considerations include the promotion of good governance and an effective implementation and enforcement culture.

17 In Southeast Asia, the Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) decided at a Summit in Cebu, the Philippines, in 2007, that as ASEAN countries diversify its energy supply by developing alternative energy sources such as bio-fuels and civilian nuclear power, they should also look into a regional nuclear safety regime. The thinking behind the proposal is simple. Any nuclear accidents will have economic and social ramifications that extend beyond a country's border. To achieve the support of local populations as well as the confidence of the international community, it is critical that regional countries work together to establish stringent international standards to ensure the safe and sustainable use of nuclear energy and that any nuclear power development is transparent. A Nuclear Energy Cooperation Sub-Sector Network (NEC-SSN) has since been established but it is still a work in progress. ASEAN is still discussing its Terms of Reference, including the development of a nuclear safety regime that builds on and supplements existing IAEA guidelines and standards.

18 On the issue of disarmament, we are pleased that there appears to be fresh impetus for more concrete action by countries such as the US and Russia. However, it would be difficult to achieve complete disarmament until we are able to have an effective non-proliferation regime.

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