

Discussion of NAPSNet Forum #20- Think Again: Nonproliferation



The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

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Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network

DISCUSSION OF "THINK AGAIN: NONPROLIFERATION"

#19B -- September 24, 1998

The is intended to provide expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia, and an opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis. The Forum is open to all participants of the [Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network \(NAPSNet\)](#) . As always, NAPSNet invites your responses to this report. Please see "[NAPSNet Invites Your Responses,](#)" below, and send your responses to the NAPSNet Coordinator at: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org .

DISCUSSION OF "THINK AGAIN: NONPROLIFERATION"

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I. Comments by Stephanie Mills

Response to Policy Forum Online #20, by Stephanie Mills, Greenpeace International.

I'm not sure that George Perkovich hasn't over-simplified the issue of the relationship between democracy and nuclear weapons. As most democracies on the planet do NOT have nuclear weapons, you could equally argue that democracy has been an important factor in proliferation not being more widespread. He is certainly right to suggest that the creation of vested interests and a technological elite around the weapons complex has contributed to its survival. But such elites occur in both democracies and non-democracies. Wresting power from them requires a more active citizenship than merely voting every few years, along with leadership which has the political/moral will to do so, whether democratically elected or not (e.g., Gorbachev? Reagan when less than 30 percent of the US population voted for him?)

Recent opinion polls tend to show that ordinary punters have a slightly more progressive view of disarmament than their politicians. On the other hand, most people do not vote on single issues so, for example, I think it would be fallacious to argue that the current complexions of the Duma and Senate and their views on nuclear weapons were directly or significantly correlated with public opinion on nuclear weapons. Rather, nuclear disarmament has become a "ball" in a larger political domestic context between political parties -- and the traction public pressure had on the disarmament issue in the 1980s has faded because, with the political conflict of the Cold War over, the nukes themselves seem to have lost some of their urgency.

I think you can make the case, on the other hand, that a key driver of disarmament in the 1980s/early 1990s (i.e., the INF treaty, CTBT) were the public movements in both East and West that sprang up when people realized the real threat that nuclear weapons posed. The LACK of democracy and transparency around the "nuclear state" has certainly contributed to the paucity of public debate about the real costs and benefits of nuclear weapons. The nuclear debate, for the most part, is still shrouded in secrecy and willful obscurantism from the part of the authorities. Most people, for example, wouldn't know whether the truck rolling down the highway near them was carrying nuclear warheads or not; how much the US DOE is spending on stockpile "stewardship"; they certainly didn't know that their government was knowingly poisoning them with radioactive fallout. If there was rather more democracy than less, the costs and benefits would be clearer and perhaps "rollback" would occur more swiftly.

NAPSNet Invites Your Responses

The Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this essay. Please send responses to: napsnet-reply@nautilus.org . Responses will be considered for redistribution to the network only if they include the author's name, affiliation, and explicit consent.

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