

NPT Review Conference: Plagued by differences

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The much hyped up Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was held at the UN Headquarters in New York during May 7-28, 2010. After much huffing and puffing, a voluminous final document emerged at the last moment on May 27, indicative of the severe differences that had plagued the Conference.

The NPT was born out of a desire by five states which had nuclear weapons (the US, the USSR, the UK, France and China) to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of other countries. In the Treaty, only states that had made and exploded a nuclear weapon or explosive device before January 1, 1967 were considered nuclear weapons states.

The numerous provisions in the NPT which apply to non-nuclear weapons states are in marked contrast to the very few that apply to the nuclear weapons states, thereby confirming the suspicion that the NPT was basically an instrument to perpetuate the nuclear dominance of these states, under an unequal treaty. These flaws in the NPT persist despite numerous review conferences over the years, and the Treaty was extended indefinitely in 1995.

The 2010 Review Conference endorsed a 64-point action plan. It

did not make headway over the thorny issue of the nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, a subject of great concern to Arab states.

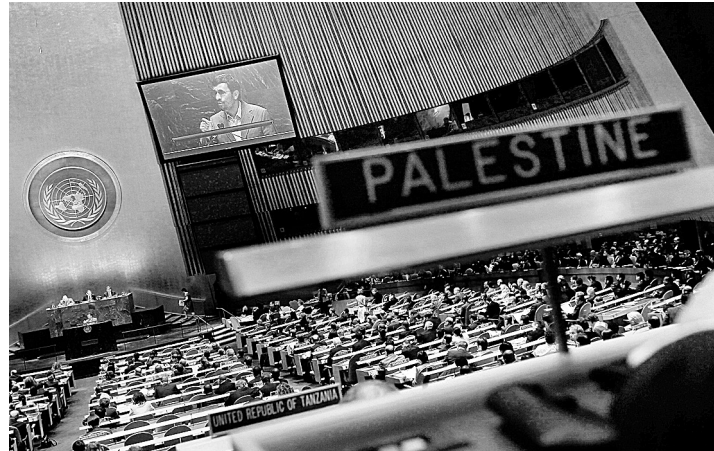
Israel is believed to have 200-400 nuclear warheads, including thermonuclear weapons, and Jericho ICBM missiles with a range of 11,000 km. The Obama administration, which has closed its eyes to this capability, is finding it difficult to maintain US diplomatic support for Israel while fending off challenges to its Middle East policy.

It urged North Korea to return to the NPT and abandon all nuclear weapons and nuclear programmes. In Para 108 of the final document on South Asia, it urged India and Pakistan to accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states, and strengthen export controls.

STRONG LOBBYING

This remarkable piece of drafting puts India and Pakistan on an equal footing — so much for the A. Q. Khan operation. However, the Conference warned against granting waivers to non-parties, despite strong lobbying by Pakistan for treatment similar to India.

The Conference did not mention Iran in the final document, perhaps due to the strong diplomatic offensive launched by Iran which, as a member of the NPT, participated effectively and forcefully in the



Iran's President, Mr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, accused the US of leading a skewed international system that seeks to deny peaceful nuclear power to developing nations. — AFP

proceedings. After hosting its own version of a nuclear security summit, Iran launched an early offensive, and was the only country which sent a head of State to attend the Conference.

President Ahmadinejad accused the US of leading a skewed international system that seeks to deny peaceful nuclear power to developing nations while allowing allies such as Israel to stockpile nuclear weapons.

He called for guarantees against the use of nuclear weapons, a halt to research on nuclear weapons, a halt to cooperation with states op-

erating outside of the Treaty, the establishment of a nuclear free zone in the Middle East, the dismantling of nuclear weapons in Europe, and a legally binding framework for nuclear disarmament.

STRENGTHENING THE TREATY

Is it not possible for the NPT to be strengthened by allowing for additional nuclear weapons states to come on board? This would be a rational approach. The NPT can be amended by deleting or modifying the phrase “January 1, 1967” in Article 9.3. This may seem drastic and

unacceptable to NPT member-states, but there are definite advantages.

India, Pakistan, and Israel could join the Treaty, making it stronger. The risk of more nuclear weapons states appearing could be minimised by stronger measures on disarmament and security guarantees to non-nuclear states. The NPT could also be amended to cover some of its shortcomings, notably the absence of an explicit ban on the threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.

After all, the basic reason for states to pursue the nuclear option is security against threats. This includes declarations such as “axis of evil” and “pre-emptive strikes” in the case of Iran and North Korea. Whether nuclear weapons actually increases security or not is a matter of debate, but states seem to believe they do by providing a form of deterrence.

The NPT is in this sense dealing with the symptoms, not the underlying disease, and if the route to nuclear weapons is blocked, other WMD options are available. In sum, the NPT Review Conference failed to pursue some innovative approaches to making the Treaty truly more universal and stronger.

(The author is a former Ambassador to Cuba and Greece.)