

Russia and the Global Nuclear Order

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine has prompted a fundamental recalibration in Russia's approach to the global nuclear order, raising questions about its commitment to established regimes and principles governing nuclear technology. Contrary to expectations of disengagement, Russia has reinforced its role in these nuclear frameworks while challenging Western norms and interpretations. The evolution of Russia's involvement in the global nuclear order highlights its preexisting divergences with the West on the approaches to nuclear safety, International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, and nonproliferation. The salience of these divergences rose to prominence following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which has resulted in Russian contestation of nuclear norms. Among the major repercussions of the war in Ukraine is Moscow's departure from its previous policy that often compartmentalized nonproliferation from broader schisms with the West toward one that actively seeks to link these problems to the deep tensions in Russia-West relations. As part of these efforts, Russia has strategically mimicked Western actions and exploited claims of double standards to emulate policies of other nuclear powers, as seen in its policies toward the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and NATO nuclear sharing. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated Russia's ability to challenge the global nuclear order from within—a challenge that will likely persist for the coming decades.

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RUSSIA IN THE GLOBAL NUCLEAR ORDER

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine illuminated the long profound shadow of nuclear weapons over international security. Russia's nuclear threats have rightfully garnered significant attention because of the unfathomable lethality of nuclear weapons. However, the use of such weapons in Ukraine is only one way—albeit the gravest—that Russia could challenge the global nuclear order. Russia's influence extends deep into the very fabric of this order—a system to which it is inextricably bound by Moscow's position in cornerstone institutions such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). From withdrawing from key treaties to stymieing resolutions critical of misconduct, Moscow has demonstrated its ability to challenge the legitimacy, relevance, and interpretations of numerous standards and principles espoused by the West.

This paper scrutinizes Russia's global nuclear approach in the context of the war in Ukraine. The first part examines Russia's engagement in the global nuclear order, emphasizing Moscow's empowerment through institutional privileges within the fundamental regimes and its domestic perceptions. The paper highlights how Russia's engagement in the global nuclear order reflects

broader foreign policy themes of great power status, sovereignty, opposition to Western double standards, and selective adherence to treaties. The second part of this paper examines the evolution of

Russia's interpretations of nuclear security, IAEA safeguards, and nonproliferation and highlights how Russia's engagement with the global nuclear order has been characterized by alternating phases of cooperation and contention, often rooted in differing interpretations of the order's rules from the West. The third part of this paper focuses on repercussions of the war in Ukraine on Russia's actions in the global nuclear order. It assesses (a) Russia's role in the growing disunity among the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council

(UNSC) and the linkage of nuclear issues with broader geopolitics; (b) Russia's contestation of established nuclear norms, presenting alternative interpretations that signal a strategic shift in international nuclear governance; and (c) Russia's strategic use of mimicry and the exploitation of double standards to emulate the policies of other nuclear powers in regard to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nuclear sharing. Through these strategies, Russia questions and contests established nuclear norms.



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Russia and the institutions of the global nuclear order

The global nuclear order is defined as the “system of national and international practices, policies, institutions, rules, and common understandings that govern the acquisition, possession, and use of nuclear weapons.”¹ The global nuclear order can be understood through two main components: (a) regimes and formal practices, such as the NPT, IAEA, and CTBT; and (b) norms and principles associated with the use of nuclear technologies.² The distinction between these two components is central to understanding Russia’s approach to the global nuclear order. Although Russia holds a vested interest in the maintenance of the regimes of the global nuclear order, Moscow has sought to challenge aspects of the normative framework.

As one of the five officially recognized nuclear-weapon states under the NPT, Russia has enjoyed certain privileges within the global nuclear order beyond the mere legal recognition of its nuclear arsenal. Procedurally, Moscow holds significant sway over the global nuclear order through the ability to both challenge and recalibrate the entrenched norms and protocols that underpin the status quo. As a result of a grand bargain between the US and the Soviet Union, Moscow has been empowered by the institutionalization of privileges throughout the various regimes that govern nuclear technology, verification, and disarmament. Moscow has also benefited from its technical knowledge as a civilian nuclear energy supplier.³ Such a status gives

Russia a significant degree of influence on the nuclear governance and evolution of its normative framework.

The global nuclear order remains bound by the legacy of superpower cooperation during the Cold War. The NPT, the cornerstone of the global nuclear order, was designed by the US and the Soviet Union with the “explicit purpose...[of keeping]...nuclear material and knowledge from diffusing rapidly to potential nuclear powers.”⁴ Best described as a “control-oriented regime,” the NPT was crafted to enable the most powerful states to exert influence over weaker members.⁵ The NPT creates a significant differentiation between nuclear-weapon states and nonnuclear-weapon states, which are required to renounce nuclear weapons and are subject to stringent monitoring by the IAEA to ensure compliance. In return, they are promised access to peaceful nuclear technology and a commitment from nuclear-weapon states to move toward disarmament, a promise that has largely remained unfulfilled. The treaty’s bifurcation of states into nuclear- and nonnuclear-weapon states was a deliberate construct to perpetuate the nuclear preeminence of the US and the Soviet Union.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited not only its nuclear arsenal but also its position in the global nuclear order’s hierarchy as a key player in shaping the norms and policies related to nuclear proliferation, disarmament, and civil nuclear cooperation. Russia—alongside the US, China, the United Kingdom (UK), and France—is

¹ Mariana Budjeryn, “Distressing a System in Distress: Global Nuclear Order and Russia’s War Against Ukraine,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Nov. 9, 2022.

² Alexander K. Bollfrass and Stephen Herzog, “The War in Ukraine and Global Nuclear Order,” *Survival* 64, no. 4 (July 4, 2022), pp. 7–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2103255>.

³ Mlada Bukovansky et al., *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ Robert O. Keohane, “The Demand for International Regimes,” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982), pp. 325–355.

⁵ Andrew J. Coe and Jane Vaynman, “Collusion and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime,” *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (Oct. 2015), pp. 983–997, <https://doi.org/10.1086/682080>.

recognized as having had nuclear weapons at the time of the NPT's inception in 1968, which effectively legitimizes the country's possession of nuclear weapons while prohibiting other signatory states from developing or acquiring nuclear arsenals. The NPT's structure inherently reflects the asymmetrical obligations between nuclear-weapon states and nonnuclear-weapon states. Although disarmament remains a key pillar of the global nuclear order, this paper focuses on nonproliferation and civilian nuclear cooperation.

The NPT establishes the framework for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and the IAEA acts as a monitoring and verification body to ensure compliance with the treaty's obligations. As a member of the IAEA Board of Governors, which is composed of representatives from 35 states, Russia plays a significant role in the agency's decision-making processes and influences a wide range of policies, including nuclear safeguards, budgetary allocations, nuclear assistance approvals, and the formulation of nuclear safety standards. In

the cases of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the IAEA's verification mandate and broader nonproliferation issues have also fallen under the purview of the UNSC, where Moscow enjoys additional sway as one of the P5.



Russia's institutional privileges within the global nuclear order are bolstered by its position as a supplier of nuclear technology and fuel through Rosatom, the state nuclear energy corporation.

Russia's institutional privileges within the global nuclear order are bolstered by its position as a supplier of nuclear technology and fuel through Rosatom, the state nuclear energy corporation.⁶ Rosatom has a broad scope of responsibilities encompassing the country's nuclear power sector, including civilian nuclear activities, Russia's nuclear arsenal, and nuclear research institutions.⁷ Rosatom is integral to Russia's nuclear diplomacy, advancing the country's global presence through comprehensive deals that include building, operating, and financing nuclear plants along with training international workforces.⁸ Russia is also responsible for more than 75 percent of global nuclear technology, with almost all countries that use nuclear power relying on Russia for at least part of the nuclear fuel cycle.⁹ Rosatom's civilian nuclear cooperation with a wide

⁶ Ingard Shul'ga, *Rosatom: istoriya uspekha [Rosatom: A Success Story]* (Moscow: BSG Press, 2017), p. 31.

⁷ Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF no. 537, Aug. 25, 2005, *O funktsiyakh federal'nykh organov ispolnitel'noi vlasti, Gosudarstvennoi korporatsii po atomnoi energii 'Rosatom' i Rossiiskoi akademii nauk po realizatsii Dogovora o vseob'emlyushchem zapreshchenii yadernykh ispytaniy [On the Functions of Federal Executive Bodies, the State Atomic Energy Corporation 'Rosatom,' and the Russian Academy of Sciences in the Implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty]*, <http://ivo.garant.ru/#/document/12141742/paragraph/9596:0>.

⁸ Prezident Rossii, "Federal'nyy zakon no. 317-FZ, 'O Gosudarstvennoy korporatsii po atomnoy energetike "Rosatom"" ["Federal Law of Dec. 1, 2007, No. 317-FZ, 'On the State Corporation for Atomic Energy "Rosatom"'], Dec. 1, 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26621>.

⁹ Matt Bowen and Paul M. Dabbar, *Reducing Russian Involvement in Western Nuclear Power Markets*, Columbia University, Center on Global Energy Policy, May 23, 2022, https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/RussiaNuclearMarkets_CGEP_Commentary_051822-2.pdf.

range of countries increases dependence on Russia and gives Moscow an important tool to reward partners through lucrative contracts with flexible payment schemes.

In addition, the NPT's mandate to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy inherently positions nuclear suppliers, including Russia, as key controllers of nuclear technology. Article IV of the NPT acknowledges the right of all signatories to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. However, this access is contingent on compliance with nonproliferation obligations. Nuclear suppliers, such as Russia, can exert considerable influence over which countries receive nuclear technology, the conditions under which they receive it, and what types of technologies are permissible. Russia's involvement in various export-control groups provides broad control over both nuclear and dual-use technologies that are critical to the development of nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Since becoming a founding member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 1974, Moscow has been committed to controlling the export of materials and technology pertinent

to nuclear weapons manufacturing.¹¹ Russia has also influenced NSG guidelines by carving out exemptions and offering broad interpretations of existing provisions. For example, Russia began constructing two reactors at Kudankulam in 2002 based on a 1988 agreement between the Soviet Union and India. Despite the NSG's 1992 nuclear safeguards barring sales to India, Russia argued that nuclear cooperation with India was grandfathered under a prior supply arrangement and went ahead despite opposition from other NSG members.

Under the NPT, the recognized nuclear-weapon states operate much like an exclusive club: the benefits of membership are closely guarded.¹² However, within this group, there is a divergence in the approach to and interpretation of norms and rules governing nuclear weapons and disarmament reflecting the varied strategic, political, and security interests of each state. Although Russia, for instance, may diverge

from the US in its interpretation of and approach to these norms, it nevertheless retains a vested interest in the continued relevance of the global nuclear order's institutions, recognizing that its status and



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¹⁰ Vladimir Orlov, ed., "Mezhdunarodnaya Sistema Eksportnogo Kontrolya v Tseliakh Yadernogo Nerazprostraneniya" ["International System of Export Control for the Purpose of Nuclear Nonproliferation"], in *Yadernoe Nerazprostranenie*, vol. 1 (Moscow: PIR Center, 2002), p. 339; Anatoly Antonov, *Kontrol' nad vooruzheniyami: istoriya, sostanyie, perspektivy* [Arms Control: History, Status, Perspectives] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2012), pp. 182–183.

¹¹ It also joined the Zangger Committee in the early 1970s, interpreting obligations under the NPT regarding nuclear-related exports. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia joined the Wassenaar Arrangement, the successor to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls system of dual-use export controls. See Mariya Roskoshnaya, "Analiz Podkhodov k Kontrolyu Brokerskoy i Tranzitnoy Deyatel'nosti Yadernykh Postavshchikov v Sisteme Mezhdunarodnykh Ekonomicheskikh Otnosheniy" ["Analysis of Approaches to the Control of Brokerage and Transit Activities of Nuclear Suppliers in the System of International Economic Relations"], *Vestnik Adygeyskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 3, no. 185 (2016), pp. 20–27.

¹² Coe and Vaynman, "Collusion and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime."

influence are significantly linked to its privileges as a nuclear-weapon state.

Russia and the global nuclear order: the view from inside

Russia's engagement with the global nuclear order intricately intertwines with its broader foreign policy objectives. Russia's nuclear arsenal is not merely a security asset but also a symbol of its global stature and a tool for shaping international institutions governing nuclear technology, such as the IAEA and the NPT. Moscow's dual approach to sovereignty—exemplified by its illegal actions within its so-called near abroad contrasted with a staunch defense of sovereignty on the global stage—also permeates its stance on nuclear issues. Russian positions on safeguards, nonproliferation, and nuclear safety underscore a delicate balance between respecting state sovereignty and addressing concerns about



For Russia, the possession of nuclear weapons and its position in the global nuclear order have been inextricably tied to its perception of its “great power-ness” (*derzhavnost*).

intrusive policies that might compromise national security. Russia's leveraging of its position in global nuclear institutions reflects an astute recognition of its relative influence in shaping procedural norms and agenda-setting within these forums. However, its resistance to certain normative frameworks often stems from a perception of Western encroachment and a historical narrative of victimhood, particularly under President Vladimir Putin. Over time, Russia's divergent positions became more acute—expressed through a concerted effort to challenge positions that it previously opposed although seldom acted upon.

For Russia, the possession of nuclear weapons and its position in the global nuclear order have been inextricably tied to its perception of its “great power-ness” (*derzhavnost*). Official concepts and statements often emphasize Russia's “responsibility” as one of the major nuclear powers in upholding the nonproliferation regime.^{13,14} Statements frequently underscore Russia's recognition of its privileges and

¹³ G. M. Pshakin et al., *Yadernoe nerasprostranenie: uchebnoe posobie* [Nuclear Nonproliferation: A Textbook], 2nd ed. (Moscow: Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (State University), 2006), pp. 302–303.

¹⁴ For example, Vladimir Putin's 2006 speech to the federal assembly stated that “the key responsibility” in countering nuclear, chemical, and biological threats and “for ensuring global stability will be borne by the world's leading powers—powers possessing nuclear weapons, powerful levers of military and political influence.” Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii” [“Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation”], *Kremlin.ru*, May 10, 2006, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577>. Likewise, Russia's 2008 Foreign Policy Concept highlighted Russia's “unfailing policy of developing multilateral foundations of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and means of their delivery.” “Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii” [“Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”], *Kremlin.ru*, June 15, 2008, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/785>. The 2013 and 2016 concepts adopt a similar language, noting Russia's “unwavering commitment to strengthening the political and legal foundations of the nuclear nonproliferation regime” to inhibit the spread of “weapons of mass destruction...given the risk that elements of such weapons could fall into the hands of non-State actors, primarily terrorist organizations.” “Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii” [“Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Mar. 4, 2013, https://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2013-03-04/9_concept.html; “Ob utverzhdenii Kontseptsii vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii” [“On the Approval of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”], *Kremlin.ru*, Nov. 30, 2016, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41451>.

responsibilities in the global nuclear order despite its relatively weak economic stature and influence in the broader international order.¹⁵ For example, *Diplomaticheskaya Sluzhba*, the main textbook for future Russian diplomats, explains that Russia's great power status is determined by its geostrategic position, nuclear potential, and status on the UNSC rather than by metrics such as economics—Moscow's diplomacy must ensure the country's position as an authoritative and influential member of the international community.¹⁶

Moscow's statements about its importance in the global nuclear order have been accompanied by condemnations of what it sees as Washington's double standards in adhering to the order—a trend in Russian foreign policy thinking that followed the trajectory of Russia's broader discontent with US foreign policy.¹⁷ Washington's invocation for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq as a pretext for intervention established a precedent for the “legalization of the principle of ‘illegitimacy of authoritarian regimes’” through the arbitrary policy of the preemptive use of force for the sake of regime change.¹⁸ Moreover, Washington's efforts to unilaterally pursue punitive counterproliferation policies outside of the purview of the IAEA or UNSC have threatened Russia's influence over the global

nuclear order. Concerns about such threats have been reflected in Russian opposition to unilateral, as opposed to multilateral, sanctions. In general, Moscow's preference for the UNSC or IAEA reflects the understanding of its relative influence in the deliberative processes.

Russia's positions on the global nuclear order also reflect some of its broader concerns about the defense of sovereignty and its fixation with interference. Russia's emphasis on national sovereignty and the right to peaceful nuclear energy was highlighted in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, which noted the imperative to respect “the right of States to determine their national policy on their own...The State itself bears responsibility for ensuring that the national nuclear safety system is efficient and reliable and determining its optimal parameters at its discretion.”¹⁹ Russia's discourses expanded to align with the aspirations of many developing nations for technological and energy independence. The 2023 Foreign Policy Concept expresses Russia's opposition to using export controls as “a tool of unilateral restrictions that impede the implementation of legitimate international cooperation.”²⁰ The narrative is instrumentally directed to a wider audience because it echoes the long-standing concern of the Global South and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

¹⁵ For example, Andrei Kokoshin, recognizing Russian economic limitations, stressed that Russia's nuclear arsenal far surpasses that of Great Britain, France, and China despite these countries' relative economic strength. For Kokoshin, maintaining Russian influence required not only the possession of nuclear weapons but also economic growth. Andrei Kokoshin, *Politiko-voennye i voenno-strategicheskie problemy natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii i mezhdunarodnoi bezopasnosti* [Politico-Military and Military-Strategic Problems of Russia's National Security and International Security] (Moscow: Natsional'nyi issledovatel'skii universitet “Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki,” 2013), pp. 66–67.

¹⁶ Anatoly Torkunov and Alexander Panov, eds., *Diplomaticheskaya Sluzhba* [Diplomatic Service] (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2017), pp. 10–15.

¹⁷ Vitaly Denisov, “V Rusle Dvoinykh Standartov” [“In Line with Double Standards”], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Oct. 1, 2008; Stanislav Gyandzhinskii, “Kapkany ‘Dvoinykh Standartov’” [“The Trap of ‘Double Standards’”], *Rossiiskie Vesti*, Apr. 2007.

¹⁸ Aleksei Bogaturov, “Kontrevolyutsiya Tsennoceti I Mezhdunarodnaya Bezopasnost” [“Counter-Revolutionary Values and International Security”], *Mezhdunarodnye Protssesy* 17, no. 6 (2008): p. 6.

¹⁹ “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (Approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on Nov. 30, 2016)—Committee on International Affairs,” Dec. 2016, <https://interkomitet.com/foreign-policy/basic-documents/foreign-policy-concept-of-the-russian-federation-approved-by-president-of-the-russian-federation-vladimir-putin-on-november-30-2016/>.

²⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, “Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii” [“Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation”], Mar. 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?lang=ru.

countries regarding the dominance of Western powers in international decision-making processes.²¹

Over the years, Russia's foreign policy discourse has constructed an image of Russia as a responsible nuclear power—evident in the repeated affirmation of commitments to nonproliferation treaties and international law, calls for cooperation and legal mechanisms to ensure safety and prevent terrorism, and advocacy for multilateral solutions. Even when flagrantly violating the very positions espoused

in such rhetoric, Russia has framed its actions as justified responses to Western hypocrisy. Moreover,

Moscow's foreign policy discourse serves various purposes: it legitimizes Russia's own nuclear arsenal, counters narratives of Russia as an aggressive state, and positions the country as an essential player in international efforts to manage nuclear proliferation.

Russia's use of rhetoric that aligns with calls for great powers to move toward disarmament illustrates a superficial effort to portray itself as a responsible actor in line with the NPT. Moscow's foreign policy discourse serves various purposes: it legitimizes Russia's own nuclear arsenal, counters narratives of Russia as an aggressive state, and positions the country as

an essential player in international efforts to manage nuclear proliferation.

²¹ Established during the Cold War as a group of states seeking to avoid entanglement with the US-Soviet rivalry, the NAM is an international organization of states that consider themselves not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. Within the NPT, NAM members have been vocal in advocating for nuclear disarmament, the right to peaceful use of nuclear technology, and a balanced approach to nuclear nonproliferation, often positioning themselves as a significant bloc to promote equity and balance in the interpretation and implementation of the treaty.

PAST AS PROLOGUE

The post–Cold War era marked a profound shift in Russia’s role in the global nuclear order. Although Russia inherited the Soviet Union’s nuclear arsenal, it lost its predecessor’s superpower status and faced a diminished role on the global stage. As Russia grappled with a precarious transition characterized by economic instability and political upheaval, it faced the challenge of ensuring the safety and security of nuclear materials spread across the vast expanse of the former Soviet territories. The period saw the initiation of significant, albeit complex, cooperation with the US, epitomized by the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, aimed at mitigating the threat of securing fissile materials and enhancing security measures. Similarly, the post–Cold War environment paved way for US-Russia cooperation within the IAEA, leading to successes such as the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 and the 1997 Additional Protocol. However, this collaboration was not without its tensions; issues of sovereignty and perceptions of dependency on the West permeated the relationship. The sense of Western encroachment and disregard for Russian security concerns intensified under Vladimir Putin, who has frequently rearticulated these paranoid sentiments throughout his nearly three-decade tenure at the helm of Russian domestic politics.



With the resignation of President Boris Yeltsin in December 1999, Vladimir Putin assumed office with the desire to restore authority through state power that could maintain internal order and assert the country’s interests abroad. Early in Putin’s tenure, Russia attempted to recalibrate its policies toward the global nuclear order and establish itself as an equal partner with the US. The rising threat of WMD terrorism opened doors to new forms of cooperation and deepened the bilateral dialogue. However, this era also witnessed a significant erosion of trust, marked by a perceivable shift in US nonproliferation policy toward unilateralism. US initiatives, although aimed at preventing proliferation, were increasingly viewed as vehicles for promoting US dominance. Still, Russia actively engaged in shaping responses to nuclear proliferation crises, particularly in Iran and North Korea, but it diverged over the methods to resolve these crises.

The period following the 2008 Russia-Georgia War saw an attempt to “reset” the strained relations under the Obama Administration. Russia’s support for sanctions against Iran in 2010 and progress during the 2010 NPT Review Conference were greeted with optimism. Yet this optimism was short-lived. Following the brief interregnum under Dmitry Medvedev, Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012

was characterized by an even greater effort to contest and challenge the West. The discontinuation of cooperation within the CTR program was tied to Russia's perception of the failure to establish a more equitable partnership with the US. Within the IAEA, Russia contested US support for state-level safeguards and refused to support additional sanctions against Iran. Bilateral nonproliferation dialogue, once a field of mutual interest and cooperation, evolved into a more complex and often contentious aspect of US-Russia relations.

Russian involvement in the global nuclear order has been characterized by periods of overlapping cooperation and contention, at least partly because Russia and the US have historically differed in their interpretations of the various rules of the global nuclear order. The following sections focus on this evolution of Russia's positions within the global nuclear order through three key areas: nuclear safety and security, IAEA safeguards, and the resolution of nonproliferation crises.

Nuclear safety and security

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia faced the challenge of ensuring the nuclear safety and security of nuclear weapons and weapons-related materials at dozens of sites across the country.²² Some 30,000 nuclear weapons and a vast weapons production complex were spread over four newly sovereign states.²³ The government had difficulties



paying salaries at its nuclear facilities, and it could not fund security upgrades, scrap nuclear delivery systems, or undertake new accounting measures. In response to the pervasive threats of unsecured nuclear materials, the US launched the CTR program, which facilitated US-Russia collaboration to secure and dismantle the dispersed nuclear arsenal and infrastructure. It consolidated weapons at secure sites, maintained comprehensive inventories, ensured safe handling and disposition, and found employment for thousands of former Soviet scientists with expert knowledge of WMD or their delivery systems.²⁴ Simultaneously, Russia began improving its domestic nuclear governance, enacting legislation and policy frameworks to enhance nuclear and radiation safety.²⁵ Although CTR was viewed as a success in the US, many in Russia viewed the cooperation as an indicator of their country's diminished status and a sign of reliance on American help and expertise. This perception bred a degree of resentment and a lack of ownership among Russian

²² For an overview of US-Russia cooperation in nonproliferation, see Vladimir Orlov, Roland Timerbayev, and Anton Khlopkov, *Problemy yadernogo neraskprostraneniya v rossiysko-amerikanskikh otnosheniyakh: Istoriya, vozmozhnosti i perspektivy dal'neyshego vzaimodeystviya* [Problems of Nuclear Non-Proliferation in Russian-American Relations: History, Opportunities, and Prospects for Further Interaction] (Moscow: PIR Center, 2001), p. 327.

²³ Nikolai Ponomarev-Stepnoy, "Neraskprostranenie i atomnaya energetika" ["Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Power"] (Moscow: Izdat, 2008), pp. 74–86.

²⁴ National Research Council, *Overcoming Impediments to U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Nuclear Nonproliferation: Report of a Joint Workshop* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2004).

²⁵ Anton Khlopkov, *Russia's Nuclear Security Policy: Priorities and Potential Areas for Cooperation*, Stanley Foundation, May 2015, <https://stanleycenter.org/publications/pab/KhlopkovPAB515.pdf>.

stakeholders, occasionally impeding collaborative efforts and fostering a sense of dependency rather than partnership.²⁶

The 1997–1998 Russian financial crisis precipitated a significant reliance on Washington for funds as Russia grappled with the dual challenges of ensuring security at its nuclear facilities and coping with the economic fallout.²⁷ The period was marked by a heightened risk of nuclear materials being compromised, with reports of highly enriched uranium and plutonium being smuggled from across the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.²⁸ The illicit trafficking catalyzed the IAEA to significantly enhance its nuclear surveillance and security measures, including the establishment of specialized databases. Meanwhile, the situation within Russia was further exacerbated by the Chechen wars, raising the specter of “loose nukes,” a term denoting poorly secured nuclear materials vulnerable to acquisition by terrorists or hostile entities.²⁹ The fears surrounding

In response to these escalating threats, Russia sought to establish an international framework to address nuclear terrorism.

nuclear security were not unfounded, especially after reports of Chechen insurgents burying a container of radioactive cesium-137 in Moscow’s Izmailovsky Park in 1995 and of Chechen factions engaging in reconnaissance and plotting assaults on Russian nuclear installations.³⁰

In response to these escalating threats, Russia sought to establish an international framework to address nuclear terrorism.³¹ This effort aimed to fortify global nuclear security, but it also provided the veneer of legitimacy to Russia’s extraordinary domestic measures against the Chechen insurgency, which faced mounting criticism from the West. In 1996, at the meeting of the foreign

ministers of the Group of Seven countries and Russia in Paris, Russia proposed an international convention against nuclear terrorism. The proposal addressed gaps in the 1980 Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM), aiming to extend the definition of “nuclear material” and cover new threats, such as terrorist attacks against nuclear

²⁶ Matthew Bunn, “US-Russian Cooperation to Improve Security for Nuclear Weapons and Materials,” in *End of an Era: The United States, Russia, and Nuclear Nonproliferation*, ed. Sarah Bidgood and William C. Potter (Raleigh, NC: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, 2021), pp. 1–36.

²⁷ Aleksei Arbatov, Aleksandr Alekseevich Pikaev, and Vladimir Dvorkin, “Yadernyy Terrorizm: Politicheskiye, Pravovyye, Strategicheskiye i Tekhnicheskiye Aspekty” [“Nuclear Terrorism: Political, Legal, Strategic and Technical Aspects”], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya*, no. 11 (2006), pp. 3–16.

²⁸ Bunn, “US-Russian Cooperation to Improve Security for Nuclear Weapons and Materials.”

²⁹ Kurt M. Campbell et al., *Soviet Nuclear Fission: Control of the Nuclear Arsenal in a Disintegrating Soviet Union* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1991).

³⁰ Simon Saradzhyan, “Russia: Grasping the Reality of Nuclear Terror,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 607 (2006), pp. 64–77; Alexander Kondrashov, “Atomnye Bomby Iz Kradenogo Urana?” [“Atomic Bombs from Stolen Uranium?”], *Argumenty i Fakty Moskva*, Apr. 18, 1996; Ella Ivanova, “Poyavitsya Li Atomnaya Bomba Na ‘Chernom Rynke?’” [“Will an Atom Bomb Appear on the Black Market?”], *Tribuna*, Nov. 1, 1995.

³¹ Informatsionnye Agentstva, “Press-Konferentsiya Amerikanskikh Ekspertov Po Politicheskim I Tekhnicheskim Problemam Rossiysko-Amerikanskogo Sotrudnichestva V Yadernoy Oblasti” [“Press Conference of American Experts on Political and Technical Problems of Russian-American Cooperation in the Nuclear Field”], Apr. 12, 1996.

power plants and the illicit acquisition of nuclear materials for terrorist purposes.³² Russia and the US worked to redefine “nuclear safety” at the 1996 summit on nuclear security, expanding its scope to include the safety of civil nuclear reactors and liability for nuclear damages.³³ During this time, Russia first proposed a mechanism within the United Nations for managing nuclear terrorism, which eventually culminated in the 2005 International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. This convention provided a legal definition of nuclear terrorism and mandated the criminalization of specific offenses.³⁴

The US and Russia’s dialogue on nuclear security culminated in several pivotal agreements aimed at



reducing nuclear terrorism and proliferation risks.³⁵ In contrast to its stance in the 1990s, Moscow sought to be perceived as an equal with the US, which would persist as a goal in Russia’s collaboration with the US on nonproliferation throughout the Putin era. In May 2002, a meeting between President George W. Bush and Putin resulted in several declarations on the adoption of immediate measures to prevent the proliferation of WMD and reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism.³⁶ At the 2002 Group of Eight (G8) summit in Canada, the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction committed significant funds to help nations dismantle their WMD arsenals.³⁷ Building on the momentum of the Global Partnership, the George W. Bush Administration introduced the

³² Arkady Orlov, “Problema Bor’by S Yadernoi Kontrabandoi Zaimet Vazhnoe Mesto Na Aprel’skoi Vstreche ‘Vos’merki’ V Moskve, Zayavil Predstavitel’ Soveta Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti Ssha” [“The Problem of Combating Nuclear Smuggling Will Occupy an Important Place at the April ‘G8’ Meeting in Moscow, Announced a Representative of the U.S. National Security Council”], *RIA Novosti*, Apr. 12, 1996.

³³ Mariya Sergeeva, “K Sammitu Po Yadernoi Bezopasnosti” [“Toward the Nuclear Security Summit”], *Kommersant 1991-1999*, Apr. 10, 1996; “Nekotorye Polozheniya Prinyatoi Na Sammite Deklaratsii Po Voprosam Yadernoi Bezopasnosti” [“Some Provisions of the Summit’s Declaration on Nuclear Security Issues”], *Kommersant*, Apr. 23, 1996; “Deklaratsiya Moskovskoi Vstrechi Na Vysshem Urovne Po Voprosam Yadernoi Bezopasnosti” [“Declaration of the Moscow High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Security Issues”], *Yadernyi Kontrol*, June 1996.

³⁴ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “V svyazi s predstoyashchim vstupleniem v silu Mezhdunarodnoy konventsii o bor’be s aktami yadernogo terrorizma 2005 goda” [“In Connection with the Upcoming Entry into Force of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism 2005”], June 20, 2007.

³⁵ One of the means to achieve these goals is Russian-American cooperation in the removal of nuclear materials suitable for the production of nuclear weapons from potential conflict zones. Russia removed fuel from Yugoslavia (see Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “O Vyvoze Minatomom Rossii 817 Kg Yadernogo Topliva Iz Yugoslavii” [“On the Removal of 817 kg of Nuclear Fuel from Yugoslavia by the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy”], Aug. 27, 2002, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/yadernoe_nerasprostranenie/1686047/).

³⁶ “Sovmestnaya Press-Konferentsiya Prezidenta Rf Vladimira Putina I Prezidenta Ssha Dzhordzha Busha” [“Joint Press Conference of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the President of the US George Bush”], *Kremlin.ru*, May 24, 2002, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21606>.

³⁷ It focused on decommissioning nuclear assets, destroying chemical weapons, and managing fissile materials, with adherence to international and domestic laws. Guided by 10 principles, the initiative emphasized effective monitoring, transparency, safety, peaceful use of resources, and protection of personnel and intellectual property, reflecting a collaborative international effort to enhance global security. It also envisaged the allocation of about \$20 billion over 10 years to countries wishing to liquidate their WMD stockpiles.

Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) in 2004, further expanding the scope of efforts to secure nuclear materials. The GTRI was specifically designed to address the risks posed by weapon-usable nuclear materials located at potentially vulnerable sites worldwide.³⁸ Consistent with Russia's desire to cooperate as an equal with Washington, Russia and the US launched the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism in 2006, which brought together 89 partner states and 6 international organizations participating as observers to foster a common understanding of the challenges posed by the threat of nuclear terrorism.³⁹

Russia's concern for sovereignty and secrecy—a legacy of its experience in the 1990s—manifested in its policies. During international negotiations and amendments to nuclear security conventions, Russia sought to ensure that agreements recognized that the primary responsibility for securing nuclear materials, protecting facilities, and combating nuclear terrorism rests with individual states. Russia promoted such a position during negotiations on the Amendment to the CPPNM in 2005, which strengthened standards for the protection, storage, and transportation of nuclear materials within participating states. Russia pushed to include “respect for the sovereignty of the state, its full responsibility for ensuring the physical protection of nuclear materials and installations on its territory.”⁴⁰ Despite Russia's emphasis on the role of national governments in ensuring the security of

nuclear materials and facilities within their territories, Moscow supported the US call for excluding military actions from the Amendment, including the stipulation that the CPPNM did not apply to the actions of foreign military forces, even if they caused damage to nuclear installations of another country.⁴¹

Moscow and Washington's cooperation on nuclear security also eroded because of broader political issues. In 2012, the Kremlin rejected a US proposal to renew the CTR agreement, citing Russia's increasing financial contributions to the dismantlement of nuclear and chemical weapons in accordance with its international obligations. It noted a disagreement with “American partners” on “the form and the basis for further cooperation,” including the need to develop “other, more modern legal frameworks.”⁴² Presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin reached an agreement to continue US-Russian nuclear security efforts, which operated under the 2003 Framework Agreement on a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation and a related protocol signed on June 14, 2013. Under the new framework, the US continued most of its nuclear security-related work but ceased joint efforts with Russia pertaining to the dismantling of missiles, bombers, and chemical weapons.

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the political situation grew tense, and Moscow announced that it would no longer accept

³⁸ Bunn, “US-Russian Cooperation to Improve Security for Nuclear Weapons and Materials.”

³⁹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “O pervoi vstreche pervonachal'nykh uchastnikov Global'noi initsiativy po bor'be s aktami yadernogo terrorizma” [“About the First Meeting of the Initial Participants of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism”], Nov. 1, 2006, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/yadernoe_nerasprostranenie/1633434/.

⁴⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “O novoy redaktsii Konventsii o fizicheskoy zashchite yadernogo materiala” [“On the New Edition of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material”], July 25, 2005, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/yadernoe_nerasprostranenie/1686165/.

⁴¹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “O novoy redaktsii Konventsii o fizicheskoy zashchite yadernogo materiala” [“On the New Edition of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material”].

⁴² Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “Kommentarii Departamenta informatsii i pechati MID Rossii po voprosu o sroke deistviya ‘Programmy Nanna-Lugara’” [“Commentary of the Department of Information and Print of the Russian MFA on the Question Regarding the Expiration Date of the Nunn-Lugar Program”], Oct. 10, 2012, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1634528/?lang=ru.

Washington's assistance to secure stockpiles of nuclear material on Russian territory. In 2016, Russia announced its withdrawal from the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement, a bilateral arrangement aimed at reducing surplus weapons-grade plutonium. The decision was attributed to what Russia perceived as hostile actions by the US. As discussed later in this paper, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine introduced a complex layer to Russia's approach toward nuclear safety and security, particularly highlighted by its forceful occupation of a Ukrainian nuclear power plant and related military operations.

Peaceful nuclear energy and safeguards

The pattern of Russia using its privileged position in the nuclear order to advance its interests on nuclear security issues is also evident in its approach to peaceful nuclear energy and safeguards. Moscow and Washington have disagreed over interpretations of IAEA safeguards, which are a set of technical measures designed to verify that states are fulfilling legal obligations to use nuclear material and technology solely for peaceful purposes. Although Russia has generally supported the IAEA safeguards as a tool for promoting nuclear nonproliferation, it has opposed Western-backed efforts to pursue more intrusive verification measures, seeing them as a means of interference. Russia has employed

a more flexible approach to international legal obligations, potentially leveraging ambiguities in treaty language or asserting unique interpretations to support its policy positions or those of its allies.

The evolution of IAEA safeguards in the 1990s, notably the introduction of the Additional Protocol, was significantly influenced by Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapons program, which underscored the need for more robust measures to detect and prevent such covert operations.⁴³ Adopted in 1997, the Additional Protocol enhances existing agreements by granting the IAEA broader access to member states' nuclear and related facilities, requiring more detailed state declarations of nuclear activities, and implementing advanced environmental sampling techniques. Russia supported these measures to fill the gaps in previous safeguards and deter future clandestine nuclear activities.⁴⁴ For example, Moscow applied pressure on Iran to ratify the Additional Protocol in 2003 and even applied for it for its own enrichment conversion facilities.

Russia and the US have exhibited starkly divergent perspectives on the best methods to encourage other countries to adopt the Additional Protocol and on the protocol's role in relation to a state's right to peaceful nuclear energy. Although US policy typically conditions nuclear cooperation with states on the ratification of the Additional Protocol, Russia

Russia and the US have exhibited starkly divergent perspectives on the best methods to encourage other countries to adopt the Additional Protocol and on the protocol's role in relation to a state's right to peaceful nuclear energy.

⁴³ Ivanov Pavel, "Rezhim nerasprostraneniya yadernogo oruzhiya: istoriya voprosa" ["The Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime: History of the Issue"], *Svobodnaya Mysl* 8 (2007), pp. 77–92.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Mikhailovich Kulagin, "Novaya Format Rezhima Nerasprostraneniya" ["The New Shape of the Nonproliferation Regime"], *Mezhdunarodnye Protsessy* 5, no. 3 (15) (2007), pp. 137–140.

does not mandate its commercial partners to adopt the protocol as a prerequisite for cooperation. Russia staunchly opposed President George W. Bush's proposition to limit access to nuclear technology among countries that had not ratified the Additional Protocol and to exclude consistent violators of the NPT from the IAEA. Russian experts criticized the notion of denying nations the right to access peaceful nuclear energy cooperation under the NPT.⁴⁵ Moreover, Moscow harbored concerns about potential conflicts between the US and "problematic" states unwilling to relinquish their nuclear capabilities to international oversight.⁴⁶

With the Additional Protocol, Russia often emphasizes the need to balance the IAEA's verification rights with respect for state sovereignty and confidentiality of sensitive information. Russia's position is that the Additional Protocol constitutes "the highest standard of verification of compliance" with the NPT but that it "is strictly voluntary, and any coercion as to the signing of an additional protocol is completely inappropriate."⁴⁷ In an outgrowth of

Russia's concern about Western efforts to undermine the sovereignty of the West's adversaries, Moscow has said that the US push for stricter controls and oversight mechanisms impinges on national sovereignty.⁴⁸ Moscow's opposition to conditioning civilian nuclear cooperation on the ratification of the Additional Protocol manifested in practice through Rosatom; Russia has been more willing to take risks by pursuing contracts with states that had dubious records in terms of the implementation of IAEA safeguards and ratification of the Additional Protocol. This willingness is partly because Russia's state apparatus has often supported Rosatom as a form of diplomacy but also because autocratic states are less prone to domestic opposition over contracts with potential proliferation risks.⁴⁹ For example, Moscow was willing to pursue Egypt's El Dabaa project even though Cairo neglected to sign the IAEA's Additional Protocol and faced IAEA scrutiny in the past for violating its safeguards agreement.⁵⁰ Part of Russia's willingness to cooperate with states such as Egypt and Bangladesh reflects commercial interests through Rosatom.

⁴⁵ Aleksei Fenenko, "Rossiisko-Amerikanskii Otnosheniya v Sfere Nerasprostraneniya Yadernogo Oruzhiya" ["Russian-American Relations in the Field of Nuclear Non-Proliferation"], *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 9 (2008), pp. 16–30.

⁴⁶ Russia has expressed support for dialogue to address these concerns: "It is necessary to involve all countries, including 'problem' ones, in the dialogue on nuclear nonproliferation issues as much as possible in order to identify and expand the sphere of coinciding interests for subsequent joint work. And here we have examples of positive results—Iran's signing of the Additional Protocol to the Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA, Libya's statement of its readiness to abandon WMD development programs, [and] six-party negotiations on the DPRK's nuclear program." Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, "Rossiya i Voprosy Nerasprostraneniya Yadernogo Oruzhiya" ["Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation Issues"], Feb. 10, 2004, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/yadernoe_nerasprostranenie/1724754/.

⁴⁷ Russian Federation, "2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons National Report of the Russian Federation," NPT/CONF.2020/17/Rev.1, Mar. 19, 2021, p. 10, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/documents/NR17.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Russia has also emphasized states' right to sovereignty when acceding to the Additional Protocol, noting its support for the universalization of the protocol. But it "stresses the voluntary nature and inadmissibility of imposing it as a mandatory measure." See Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, "Vystuplenie delegatsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii na pervoi sessii Podgotovitel'nogo komiteta 11-i Konferentsii po rassmotreniyu deistviya Dogovora o nerasprostraneni yadernogo oruzhiya (klaster 1, yadernoe razoruzhenie)" ["Speech by the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Cluster 1, Nuclear Disarmament)"], Aug. 3, 2023.

⁴⁹ Nicholas L. Miller and Tristan A. Volpe, "The Rise of the Autocratic Nuclear Marketplace," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (Apr. 3, 2022), pp. 1–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2022.2052725>.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Davis Gibbons and Stephen Herzog, "Durable Institution Under Fire? The NPT Confronts Emerging Multipolarity," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 1 (Jan. 2, 2022), pp. 50–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1998294>.

In the early 2010s, the State-Level Concept in IAEA safeguards was introduced as an evolution in the approach to nuclear verification aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of safeguards implementation. Under this concept, the IAEA assesses the entirety of a state's nuclear activities and related capabilities, considering its nuclear fuel cycle, the specific nature of its nuclear facilities, and its overall nuclear history and compliance record. This holistic assessment allows a more tailored application of safeguards that reflects the unique characteristics and risks associated with each state's nuclear program. From 2011 onward, there was a noticeable shift in Russia's approach to IAEA safeguards—a change that could be attributed to broader trends in Russian foreign policy objectives and priorities. Moscow was increasingly vocal about the politicization of the IAEA, condemning the perceived use of the nuclear nonproliferation regime to justify largely unrelated policies, such as the war with Iraq in 2003.⁵¹ Russia's objections to the state-level safeguards concept concerned the transparency of the IAEA Secretariat with respect to third-party information provided by states, which could lead to safeguards-specific decisions.⁵² Russia's concern has been that the IAEA's use of information from Western intelligence agencies will make the agency basically an arm of Western intelligence.⁵³ Moscow has even accused Washington of calling for a more

comprehensive safeguards regime as a pretext to violate the sovereignty of US adversaries.

The State-Level Concept first became a topic of debate among the member states at the 56th General Conference, held in September 2012. During the conference, Russia stated that "technical parameters" should dictate the IAEA's approach to safeguards. In criticizing the concept, Russia said, "the notion of a State-level approach to safeguards appeared to be increasingly infused with political considerations."⁵⁴ At the same conference, the Russian delegation accused the Secretariat of "taking a selective approach to the implementation of General Conference resolutions" and of making decisions about safeguards approaches "behind closed doors."⁵⁵ Russia perceived discrimination in the application of safeguards and was concerned that the "selective approach" could unfairly target certain nations while overlooking others. Russia's concerns about the use of third-party intelligence in the IAEA's assessments was heightened after the IAEA's report on Iran's nuclear program in November 2011. The Russians interpreted the November 2011 report as an indication that the safeguards system was increasingly influenced by political biases for political pressure because it relied in part on intelligence provided by third-party states to assert that Iran had carried out activities related to nuclear weapons.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Nikolai Sokov, "IAEA Safeguards: Patterns of Interaction and Their Applicability Beyond the Cold War," *Adelphi Series* 56, no. 464–465 (Nov. 1, 2016), pp. 163–186, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2016.1494254>.

⁵² Mark Hibbs, "The Plan for IAEA Safeguards," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Nov. 20, 2012, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/11/20/plan-for-iaea-safeguards-pub-50075>.

⁵³ Robert Einhorn, *US Nonproliferation Cooperation with Russia and China: A Call for Finding Common Ground with Great Power Rivals*, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Oct. 2020, <https://nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/US-Nonproliferation-Cooperation-with-Russia-and-China-1.pdf>.

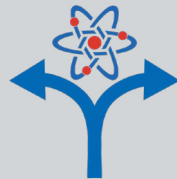
⁵⁴ International Atomic Energy Agency, Document GC (56)/COM.5/OR.2, Sept. 18, 2012, https://www.iaea.org/About/Policy/GC/GC56/GC56Com5Records/English/gc56com5or-2_en.pdf.

⁵⁵ International Atomic Energy Agency, "Committee of the Whole, Record of the Fourth Meeting Strengthening the Effectiveness and Improving the Efficiency of the Safeguards System and Application of the Model Additional Protocol," GC(56)/COM.5/OR.4, Sept. 12, 2012, https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gc/gc56com5or-4_en.pdf.

⁵⁶ Mark Hibbs, "Iran and the Evolution of Safeguards," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dec. 16, 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/16/iran-and-evolution-of-safeguards-pub-62333>.

Russia repeatedly emphasized the need to ensure that changes in verification activities were based on technical analysis and not influenced by external political factors. Over time, Russian discourse about the politicization of IAEA safeguards grew progressively more prominent. Russia began underscoring the primary role of IAEA safeguards as verifying states' nonproliferation commitments under the NPT, stressing that these safeguards should be implemented with full respect for state sovereignty. Moreover, Russia invoked the need to "ensure its impartial, depoliticized and technically sound application" of safeguards, stating that "safeguards should not be a pretext for discrimination against certain countries with regard to the exercise of the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes."⁵⁷ Likewise, a recent report from the PIR Center highlighted the politicization of, and unfair approach to, safeguards issues, contrasting the IAEA's reactions to Iran with its reactions to Japan.⁵⁸ As discussed in the next section, although

Russia publicly condemns the politicization of IAEA safeguards, its actions in Ukraine indicate a willingness to use nuclear safety and security issues as instruments in its political objectives, undermining the credibility of its advocacy for a depoliticized and impartial application of international nuclear safeguards.



Even when working toward the common goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Moscow and Washington have diverged over approaches to resolving proliferation crises.

Proliferation and counterproliferation

Even when working toward the common goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Moscow and Washington have diverged over approaches to resolving proliferation crises.⁵⁹ In contrast to US policy to curtail civilian nuclear cooperation with potential proliferators, Russia has often defended a state's right to nuclear energy—contingent on IAEA oversight. Similarly, Moscow has exhibited caution toward forceful measures for noncompliance, preferring

diplomatic solutions, as exemplified by its advocacy for dialogue and negotiation rather than sanctions or the use of force. When endorsing coercive actions,

⁵⁷ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, "Vystuplenie rukovoditelya delegatsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii na pervoi sessii Podgotovitel'nogo komiteta 11-i Konferentsii po rassmotreniyu deistviya Dogovora o nerasprostraneni yadernogo oruzhiya (obshchie preniya)" ["Speech by the Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (General Debate)"], Aug. 1, 2023.

⁵⁸ Savva Nikulin, *Sistema garantii MAGATE na sovremennom etape i otsenka riskov ee politizatsii* [The System of Guarantees of the IAEA at the Present Stage and the Assessment of the Risks of Its Politicization] (Moscow: PIR Tsentr, 2022).

⁵⁹ Russia's concerns escalated after the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya, with Moscow fearing that the US might resort to military means to address Iran's nuclear program. In his article before the 2012 elections, Vladimir Putin highlighted the link between foreign interventions and the desire of authoritarian regimes to acquire nuclear weapons. He argued that the more external forces meddle in sovereign affairs, the greater the incentive for such regimes to develop nuclear capabilities as a deterrent. Putin wrote, "The fervor surrounding nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea brings up the question of how the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation has emerged and who is aggravating it. It appears that the more frequent crude and even armed interference by outside forces in the domestic affairs of other nations, the more likely it is that hard authoritarian (and other) regimes wish to possess nuclear weapons. If I have an A-Bomb in my pocket, no one will touch me, because to do so would be more trouble than it is worth. And those who don't have the bomb might have to sit and wait for 'humanitarian intervention.'" Vladimir Putin, "Rossiya i Menyayushchiysya Mir" ["Russia and the Changing World"], *Moskovskie Novosti*, Feb. 27, 2012, <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>.

Russia has stressed the role of the UNSC as the sole legitimate authority to mandate force. This stance was firmly articulated in the 2005 Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Means of Delivery, which states that the UNSC is the “only international body authorized, if necessary, to take decisions on the implementation of coercive measures against states in order to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.”⁶⁰

During the Bush Administration, Russia exhibited concern that US counterproliferation strategy allowed various sanctions, including preventive measures, and even the use of force against countries suspected of illegally acquiring or proliferating WMD technologies. Russia was particularly averse to the notion of “rogue states” (*gosudarstva-izgoi*), popularized during the George W. Bush Administration, which Moscow considered an effort to impose “standards of legitimacy” on states and justify the use of force.⁶¹ The issue of rogue states was connected to Russia’s broader grievances about strategic stability after the

US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 under the pretext of enabling the deployment of missile defense systems to target rogue states such as Iran and North Korea.⁶² Russia frequently dismissed US concerns about nonproliferation as overstated and embodying Washington’s double standards that concealed political, military, and commercial interests. Yet, until recently, Russian disagreements about the veracity of US concerns did not preclude cooperation. Instead, as a means of providing alternative solutions, Russia contributed to nuclear nonproliferation initiatives, proposing the establishment of international uranium enrichment centers within its borders, like its facility in Angarsk, and offering to repatriate spent nuclear fuel (SNF) from Soviet-era reactors in other countries.⁶³ These efforts not only elevated Russia’s status as a key nuclear supplier but also addressed the issue of oversight for countries’ fuel cycles and fissile materials.⁶⁴

Even while expressing opposition to Washington’s policy on proliferation, Russia cooperated with the George W. Bush Administration on WMD policy.

⁶⁰ “Osnovy gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v oblasti nerasprostraneniya oruzhiya massovogo unichtozheniya i sredstv ego dostavki” [“Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Means of Delivery”], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 17, 2005, https://media.nti.org/pdfs/9_2.pdf.

⁶¹ Nataliya Romashkina, “Yadernyye programmy KNDR i Irana v kontekste sovremennoy sistemy mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy” [“Nuclear Programs of North Korea and Iran in the Context of the Contemporary International Relations System”], *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 1 (2006), <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=9187753>; Ilya Fabrichnikov and Andrey Frolov, “Kontrrasprostranenie: khorosho zabytoe staroe” [“Counterproliferation: Well-Forgotten Old”], *Yadernyy Kontrol* 4 (2003), p. 137.

⁶² As argued by Duma member Alexei Pushkov, missile defense deployments in Eastern Europe for containing rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea demonstrated “the existing limits of rapprochement” between Russia and the US. See Alexei Pushkov, “Rossiya i SShA: Predely Sblizheniya” [“Russia and the USA: Limits of Convergence”], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Dec. 27, 2001. Similarly, military expert Ruslan Pukhov considered US plans to deploy a missile defense system in Eastern Europe to counter Iran and North Korea as an extension of Washington’s goals to “weaken any centers of power beyond the control of the US as much as possible.” Pukhov contended that American policy toward Iran and North Korea was part of a campaign against Russia, suggesting that Iran and North Korea were opportunities to neutralize Russia’s nuclear forces by deploying a full-scale missile defense system. Ruslan Pukhov, “Tsena Voprosa” [“The Price of the Issue”], *Kommersant*, Oct. 4, 2007.

⁶³ In 2001, Russia enacted legislation allowing the import of SNF, serving dual purposes: first, to alleviate US concerns about proliferation by repatriating SNF from the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, and second, to set up a legal foundation for constructing an international SNF storage facility under IAEA oversight. This facility, part of Russia’s broader strategy, aimed to position the country in a potentially lucrative market while addressing global nonproliferation issues. Pavel Shevtsov, “Gosduma Prinyala V Tret'em, Okonchatel'nom Chtenii Paket Zakonoproektov, Razreshayushchii Vvoz V Rossiyu Dlya Pererabotki Obluchennogo Yadernogo Topliva” [“The State Duma Has Approved the Package of Bills Allowing the Import of Irradiated Nuclear Fuel for Processing in Russia”], *RIA Novosti* (Arkhiv Do 31.12.2013), June 6, 2001.

⁶⁴ Vladimir Orlov, “Rossiiskii Yadernyi Krug” [“Russian Nuclear Circle”], *Rossiya v Global'noi Politike* 6 (Dec. 31, 2011), pp. 43–56.

In 2003, Moscow expressed reservations about the legality of the US-proposed Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which advocated forceful measures to prevent WMD from reaching hostile regimes, including forced searches of suspect vessels. Moscow eventually relented and joined the PSI in 2004.⁶⁵ However, Russia sought to ensure that the US did not include the PSI in UNSC resolutions related to nonproliferation issues because Russian diplomats considered references to terms such as “interdictions” as a pretext for the use of force. For example, Russia produced the first draft of UNSC Resolution (UNSCR) 1540, which mandated states to establish legislative frameworks for WMD nonproliferation and create a monitoring committee. During the deliberations over UNSCR 1540, Russia blocked US efforts to include references to “interdiction” for noncompliance, diminishing the direct authority for PSI activities that the resolution might have provided.⁶⁶ Moscow exhibited more restraint on the interpretations of UNSCR 1540’s mandate to pursue punitive actions. Russia

remained cautious about empowering the 1540 committee’s more proactive and intrusive measures, such as visits to evaluate the domestic needs of a state to prevent the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Russia instead advocated that seeking assistance should be a sovereign decision of each state.

Russia, like most of the international community, does not recognize North Korea as a nuclear-weapon state. This position aligns with Russia’s commitment to the NPT and its broader goal of maintaining the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. In the 1990s, Russian diplomacy played a marginal role in issues in the Korean Peninsula. In response to North Korea’s declaration of withdrawal from the NPT in 1993, Russia suspended ongoing

cooperation with North Korea in the nuclear field and supported international efforts to resolve the issue.⁶⁷ Under the 1994 Agreed Framework between the US and North Korea, North Korea’s Soviet-type graphite reactors were to be replaced with American light-water reactors. Russian experts expressed concerns



Russia, like most of the international community, does not recognize North Korea as a nuclear-weapon state. This position aligns with Russia’s commitment to the NPT and its broader goal of maintaining the international nuclear nonproliferation regime.

⁶⁵ The G8 summit in Sea Island, US, in June 2004, reinforced these initiatives with an action plan, seeking tighter NSG standards and supporting the IAEA’s reactor conversion program. However, despite these efforts between 2002 and 2004, the G8 did not establish a comprehensive code against nuclear terrorism. Concurrently, the G8 developed strategies to secure fissile material storage at the Evian Summit, establishing new priorities: developing legal frameworks for fissile material circulation, assisting vulnerable states, exchanging information among suppliers, funding the IAEA Nuclear Safety Fund, and reporting nuclear emergencies to the IAEA. These strategies formed the basis for the IAEA’s Code of Measures for Fissile Material Security. Adopted in September 2003, this code enhances protection standards and helps financially constrained states transition to safer nuclear practices.

⁶⁶ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, “V svyazi s predstavleniem Rossiei doklada o vypolnenii rezolyutsii 1540 Soveta bezopasnosti OON po nerasprostraneniyu” [“In Connection with Russia’s Presentation of a Report on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 on Non-Proliferation”], Oct. 29, 2004, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/yadernoe_nerasprostranenie/1654101/?lang=ru.

⁶⁷ Valeriy Denisov, *Rossiyskaya politika i situatsiya na Koreyskom poluostrove: nastoyashchee i budushchee* [Russian Policy and the Situation on the Korean Peninsula: Present and Future] (Moscow: Gorbachev Foundation, 2002).

that the true reason behind US and Japanese pressure on North Korea was competition for the atomic technology market. Moscow began playing a larger role in North Korea in the early 2000s. Russia was a key participant in the six-party talks (2003–2009), aimed at dismantling North Korea’s nuclear program through negotiations involving North Korea, South Korea, Japan, China, and the US.⁶⁸ Russia consistently pushed for a step-by-step approach, advocating for a combination of incentives, such as economic aid and security guarantees, and gradual denuclearization, emphasizing the importance of dialogue over isolation.

Before North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006, Russia was hesitant to endorse sanctions, preferring diplomatic engagement and often acting as a counterbalance to the more stringent measures proposed by the US and its allies.⁶⁹ However, the 2006 nuclear test marked a significant shift. Russia supported UNSCR 1718, which imposed sanctions on North Korea. Russia continued to back further rounds of sanctions following subsequent nuclear tests and missile launches by North Korea in 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2017. These sanctions included arms embargoes, trade restrictions, and financial sanctions.⁷⁰ The war

in Ukraine prompted a major change in Russia’s relationship with North Korea.

Russia played a much larger role in the Iranian nuclear program than in the situation on the Korean Peninsula. Russian diplomatic sway over the Iran nuclear program was strengthened by its technical ability and willingness to support cooperative measures on ensuring the civilian nature of Iran’s nuclear program.⁷¹ Starting in the early 1990s, Russia pursued civilian nuclear cooperation with Iran through the construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant, which reflected Moscow’s wider understanding of the right to civilian nuclear energy, the importance of safeguards, and efforts to strengthen export control laws. During this time, Russia rebuffed US concerns

about Iran’s clandestine activities, which Russian diplomats considered overstated. Even after the 2002 revelations of Iran’s covert nuclear program, including uranium enrichment facilities in Natanz and weapons-grade plutonium production facilities in Arak, Russia consistently defended Iran’s right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. During the George W. Bush Administration, to protect its business interests, Moscow pressured Tehran to

Before North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006, Russia was hesitant to endorse sanctions, preferring diplomatic engagement and often acting as a counterbalance to the more stringent measures proposed by the US and its allies.

⁶⁸ Konstantin Strigunov, Andrei Viktorovich Manoilo, and Elena Georgievna Ponomareva, “Perspektivy Denuklearizatsii KNDR” [“Prospects for Denuclearization of the DPRK”], *Mezhdunarodnye Protsessy* 17, no. 3 (58) (2019), <https://doi.org/10.17994/IT.2019.17.3.58.7>.

⁶⁹ Vasilii Mikheev and Sergei Ignat’ev, “Rossiisko-kitaiskoe strategicheskoe partnerstvo i raketno-yadernaya problema KNDR” [“The Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership and the North Korean Missile-Nuclear Issue”], *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 63, no. 1 (Feb. 20, 2019), pp. 18–24, <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2019-63-1-18-24>.

⁷⁰ Aleksandr Panov, “Ob aktual’nom issledovanii sovremennykh problem Koreiskogo poluostrova” [“On the Current Study of Contemporary Issues of the Korean Peninsula”], *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 65, no. 5 (2021), <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=46196636>.

⁷¹ Vladimir Ivanenko, “Iranskaia Iadernaia Programma i Rossiisko-Iranskie Otnosheniya” [“Iranian Nuclear Program and Russian-Iranian Relations”], *Mezhdunarodnaya Politika* 34, no. 1 (2016), pp. 109–31.

agree on the return of spent fuel to Russia to quell US concerns about Iran's ability to convert spent fuel from Bushehr into weapons-grade plutonium.⁷²

Russian cooperation was crucial to international efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue. From 2006 to 2010, Russia supported UNSC sanctions on Iran even though it sought to water down the language and shield its own economic interests.⁷³ Moscow employed a two-pronged approach, utilizing both diplomatic efforts to weaken sanctions and its nuclear cooperation with Iran as leverage to elicit concessions from the US in secondary areas.⁷⁴ Russia lobbied for the exemption of civilian nuclear energy and existing cooperation in light-water reactor technology, such as that used in Bushehr, in UN sanctions resolutions. Moscow proposed amendments to soften resolutions on Iran's nuclear program, short of wielding its veto power. Moreover, Russia's technical "delays" over the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant—its flagship civilian nuclear project in Iran—reflected a commitment to ensuring the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear program. In essence, Moscow used delays in the construction and supply of fuel for Bushehr to pressure Iranian cooperation with the IAEA. Russia used Iran as a "bargaining chip," which allowed Moscow to elicit US reciprocity on the removal of Rosoboroneksport sanctions and the ratification of a 123 agreement for closer cooperation between Moscow and Washington in the nuclear sphere.

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia exhibited a strategic compartmentalization of its foreign policy that enabled progress on specific issues, such as the Iran nuclear talks.⁷⁵ Russia maintained a constructive role throughout the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiations, offering diplomatic solutions that addressed key contentious issues, such as setting the 300-kilogram threshold for low-enriched uranium stockpiles, developing the mechanism for snapback sanctions on Iran, and finding solutions for the conversion of the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant.⁷⁶ Following the Trump Administration's withdrawal from the nuclear deal, Russia continued to denounce "maximum pressure" while pressing Tehran to return to the JCPOA enrichment limits and to ensure IAEA oversight. However, after initiating the war in Ukraine, Russia's priorities for its war effort prompted a reevaluation in foreign policy priorities, with nonproliferation taking a backseat to its needs for artillery and drones from Iran.

Russia's past position served as a prologue for its more aggressive behavior following its invasion of Ukraine. In many areas in which divergences existed, Russia shifted to actively opposing and blocking efforts using its procedural power to obstruct processes. On nonproliferation issues, Moscow has shown a notable shift from cooperating—albeit with different approaches—to vacillating between acquiescence and obstruction.

⁷² Anton Khlopkov and Anna Lutkova, "Pochemu tak dolgo stroilas' Busherskaya AES?" ["Why Did the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant Take So Long to Build?"], *Tsentri energetiki i bezopasnosti*, Sept. 8, 2011, p. 14.

⁷³ Aleksandr Kalyadin, "Yadernyi Vyzov Irana V Rukose Soveta Bezopasnosti OON" ["Iran Nuclear Challenge from the Perspective of the UN Security Council"], *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 12 (2008), <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=11634252&>.

⁷⁴ Alexei Arbatov, "Yadernoe Soglasenie S Iranom: Fenomen Ili Pretsedent?" ["The Nuclear Agreement with Iran: Phenomenon or Precedent?"], *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya* 60, no. 3 (2016), pp. 5–15.

⁷⁵ "Zamglavy MIDa Sergei Ryabkov: 'Rossiya protiv "igry na povyshenie stavok" na peregovorakh po Iranu'" ["Deputy Head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Ryabkov, Said: 'Russia Is Against "Playing for Higher Stakes" in Negotiations on Iran'"], *Interfax.ru*, Mar. 20, 2014, <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/366039>.

⁷⁶ Adlan Margoev, "Dialogue on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Lessons Learned and Ignored (1992–2020)," in *Russian–American Nuclear Nonproliferation Dialogue: Lessons Learned and Road Ahead*, ed. Vladimir A. Orlov and Sergey D. Semenov (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 77–114.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE: THE GLOBAL NUCLEAR ORDER AT AN IMPASSE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine poses a unique dilemma for the nonproliferation regime because of Ukraine's past as a nuclear state. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine found itself in possession of a significant portion of the former Soviet Union's nuclear weapons, ranking third globally in terms of nuclear arsenal size.⁷⁷ A period of prolonged negotiations ultimately led to the transfer of Ukrainian nuclear weapons to Russia in exchange for negative security assurances from three nuclear-weapon states—the US, the UK, and Russia—in an agreement known as the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. Under this agreement, signed in 1994, the signatories offered assurances against the threat or use of force against Ukraine's territorial integrity and political independence to incentivize Ukraine's accession into the NPT as a nonnuclear-weapon state. In 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine were in contravention to the promises of the Budapest Memorandum. Subsequently, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and its occupation of the Zaporizhzhia

Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) further challenged the promises set out in 1994. Meanwhile, throughout the war in Ukraine, Russia's implicit and explicit nuclear threats appear to have greatly undermined the principles of the global nuclear order.



Russia's fundamental challenge to this order has prompted serious questions about its commitment to the regimes and principles that have governed nuclear technology. Leveraging its status as a nuclear power, Russia has exerted pressure to shape the policies and actions of the IAEA, thereby altering the course of international nuclear oversight and governance.⁷⁸ Moscow's infringement of

Ukrainian sovereignty has had implications for nuclear latency and the resolution of proliferation crises. Disunity among the P5 means that a solution to pressing nonproliferation challenges is unlikely, especially because Russia's war effort requires military supplies from Iran and North Korea. Despite the shift in foreign policy priorities, Russia continues to assert its role within the framework of the NPT while simultaneously challenging the validity, applicability, and interpretations of several key facets of the

⁷⁷ See Mariana Budjeryn, *Inheriting the Bomb: The Collapse of the USSR and the Nuclear Disarmament of Ukraine* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022). Although direct operational control was not in Ukraine's hands, Kyiv had the necessary technological capabilities to potentially convert its legacy into a functional nuclear armament.

⁷⁸ See, for example, William C. Potter, "Behind the Scenes: How Not to Negotiate an Enhanced NPT Review Process," Arms Control Association, Oct. 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/behind-scenes-not-negotiate-enhanced-npt-review-process>.

global nuclear order. Its normative contestation is characterized by efforts to cast doubt upon, or offer alternative interpretations to, the foundational principles and agreements that underpin the global nuclear order. This approach is not merely a matter of differing perspectives; it signifies a calculated attempt to redefine the norms and standards of nuclear governance. By doing so, Russia seeks to create an environment in which international nuclear norms are subject to exceptions based on one's status as a nuclear-weapon state rather than being upheld as universal and inviolable standards.

Weaponizing the nuclear order

Russia's incursion into Ukraine represents a blatant violation of the commitments enshrined in the Budapest Memorandum, undermining the foundational tenets of nuclear security and safety. The occupation and subsequent unilateral annexation of Ukrainian nuclear facilities raise critical concerns regarding the stewardship, ownership, and operational responsibility of these facilities. Since the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has persistently disregarded the principles and norms of nuclear safety and security,

including the safe operation of Ukrainian nuclear power plants. In the first hours of the invasion, Russia seized and subsequently looted the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, using the site as a staging ground for its attempt to capture Kyiv.⁷⁹ That same month, a Russian missile struck a radioactive source

facility outside of Kyiv. Despite being aware of the nuclear risks in Ukraine stemming from its military activity, Russia also conducted repeated strikes against a radiological storage facility near Kharkiv in June 2022 and against the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant in September 2022.⁸⁰

In March 2022, Russian military forces attacked and successfully seized the ZNPP—an act unprecedented in the history of warfare.⁸¹ The armed seizure of the plant and

the fighting that took place around it for months afterward caused episodic losses of off-site power, which is critical to the safe operation of the plant. Repeated shelling in the vicinity of the ZNPP has not only endangered the physical integrity of its reactors and associated infrastructure but also led to several instances of power disruptions, critically threatening the essential cooling systems for both the reactors and the spent fuel pools. The operation of the plant under military occupation poses unique safety



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⁷⁹ Yuriy Godovan, "V Ofise prezidenta podtverdili zakhvat rossiyanami Chernobyl'skoy AES" ["The President's Office Confirmed the Capture of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant by Russians"], UNIAN.net, Feb. 24, 2022, <https://www.unian.net/war/rossiyskie-voyska-zahvatili-chernobylskuyu-aes-ofis-prezidenta-novosti-vtorzheniya-rossii-na-ukrainu-11716741.html>. Russia subsequently relinquished control back to the Ukrainians. See Aleksandra Vishnevskaya, "MAGATE utverzhdает, chto Rossiya peredala kontrol' nad Chernobyl'skoy AES Ukrainye" ["IAEA Claims That Russia Has Transferred Control of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant to Ukraine"], Gazeta.ru, Mar. 31, 2022, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2022/03/31/17505073.shtml>.

⁸⁰ "Ukraine: Current Status of Nuclear Power Installations," Nuclear Energy Agency, 2024, https://www.oecd-nea.org/jcms/pl_66130/ukraine-current-status-of-nuclear-power-installations#:~:text=19%20September%2C%202022%3A%20Shelling%20caused,three%20reactors%20remained%20in%20operation.

⁸¹ International Atomic Energy Agency, *Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards in Ukraine: 2nd Summary Report by the Director General*, Sept. 2022, https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/22/09/ukraine-2ndsummaryreport_sept2022.pdf.

challenges because Ukrainian personnel managed the facility under duress, potentially compromising operational safety standards and increasing the risk of human error.⁸² In addition, Russian personnel systematically mistreated the Ukrainian staff at the ZNPP, sometimes through unwarranted detention and other times by subjecting them to mental and physical abuse, which degraded their ability to safely operate the facilities.

Russian shelling at Zaporizhzhia also runs counter to Moscow's repeated claims that it is committed to nuclear safety, including past statements that attacks on nuclear power plants are illegal.⁸³ The situation at the ZNPP starkly highlights the difference between traditional nuclear security measures, which are primarily aimed at preventing acts of sabotage and terrorism, and the actual requirements for defending nuclear facilities against military assaults in a conflict situation.⁸⁴ Historically, the focus of nuclear security has been on enhancing the physical protection of facilities, safeguarding sensitive materials, and preventing unauthorized access or theft. Russia, as discussed previously, endorsed these measures, which are typically designed to counter threats from non-state actors or insiders, not organized military forces.⁸⁵

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Moscow has unilaterally subsumed the ZNPP into a Russian state enterprise, which brings into question who is responsible for the plant's safety and how international norms can be enforced when a state forcibly takes control of a nuclear facility in another sovereign nation. The CPPNM, ratified by Russia, obliges parties to ensure the safe management of nuclear installations and criminalizes the sabotage of nuclear facilities by non-state actors. According to the CPPNM, the responsibility for nuclear safety rests entirely with the holder of the relevant license and ultimately with the state that has jurisdiction over the nuclear installation. With the plant now under Russian control, there is a disturbing dissonance between legal obligation and the on-ground reality of forced occupation as Moscow has asserted its role in the responsibility for safety.

Russia's stance and actions concerning the ZNPP and its interactions with the IAEA are aimed at consolidating control over annexed territories, legitimizing its jurisdiction over the ZNPP, and countering international scrutiny. Russia has taken a critical stance toward IAEA's Board of Governors and its General Conference, accusing these bodies of overstepping the IAEA's mandate through their

⁸² Darya Dolzikova and Jack Watling, *Dangerous Targets: Civilian Nuclear Infrastructure and the War in Ukraine: Preliminary Lessons for Safety and Security in War Zones*, RUSI, Apr. 2023, <https://static.rusi.org/398-SR-Dangerous-Targets-web-final.pdf>.

⁸³ "Ukaz Ob osobennostyakh pravovogo regulirovaniya v oblasti ispolzovaniya atomnoy energii na territorii Zaporozhskoy oblasti" ["Decree on the Features of Legal Regulation in the Field of Atomic Energy Use in the Territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast"], Kremlin.ru, Oct. 5, 2022, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/69522>.

⁸⁴ Joanna Przybylak, "Nuclear Power Plants in War Zones: Lessons Learned from the War in Ukraine," *Security and Defence Quarterly* (Nov. 27, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.35467/sdq/174810>.

⁸⁵ Dolzikova and Watling, *Dangerous Targets*.

resolutions concerning Ukraine. Moscow has repeatedly proclaimed that the ZNPP resides on “Russian territory and under Russian jurisdiction,” a claim that directly contradicts international recognition of Ukrainian sovereignty.⁸⁶ Moscow has also asserted that it “ensures the safety and security of all its nuclear facilities, including the ZNPP, in accordance with national legislation and international obligations” and described “attempts to dictate to US the safety parameters of the functioning of Russian nuclear facilities as interference in internal affairs and actions hostile to [Russia].”⁸⁷ By insisting on its jurisdiction over the ZNPP and framing international concern as an intrusion, Russia is seeking to consolidate its annexation efforts and counteract international condemnation. Moreover, Russia has deflected the blame onto the Ukrainian military.⁸⁸ Via information circulars to the IAEA, Russia has consistently emphasized the perceived threats to nuclear security posed by Ukrainian military actions around the ZNPP and its neighboring

city, Enerhodar.⁸⁹ In August 2022, Moscow used its presidency of the UNSC to hold a debate that accused Ukraine of endangering the security of the ZNPP through its military actions.⁹⁰

Russia has also complicated the IAEA Support and Assistance Mission to Zaporizhzhia (ISAMZ), established in September 2022 to assess physical damage to the ZNPP, the functionality of the plant’s safety and security systems, and the working conditions of the ZNPP’s staff. On numerous occasions, Russia has obstructed ISAMZ access to the ZNPP and repeatedly denied it permission to inspect specific reactors and turbine halls. For example, in July 2023, the ISAMZ effort to inspect for explosives at the ZNPP was hindered as Russian authorities denied the inspectors entry to Units 3 and 4, potential sites for these materials.⁹¹ Russia has also frequently opposed calls for the demilitarization of the ZNPP, claiming that only security personnel were present at the ZNPP and that demilitarization

⁸⁶ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “Vystupleniye zamestityelya rukovoditelya delegatsii Rossiyskoy Federatsii, zamestityelya direktora Departamenta po voprosam nerasprostraneniya i kontrolya nad vooruzheniyami MID Rossii K.V.Vorontsova v poradke prava na otvet v khote tematicheskoy diskussii po razdelu ‘Yadernyye vooruzheniya’ v Pervom komitete 77-y sessii GA OON, Nyu-York” [“Statement by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation, Deputy Director of the Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, K.V. Vorontsov, in the Right of Reply During the Thematic Discussion on the Topic of ‘Nuclear Weapons’ in the First Committee of the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York”], Oct. 17, 2022, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_organizations/magate/1834289/.

⁸⁷ Russian Federation, Letter dated 26 May 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, S/2023/384, May 26, 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4013931?ln=en>.

⁸⁸ Aleksandr Bushev, “Zakharova poobeshchala zhestkiy otvet v sluchae ataki Ukrainy na Zaporozhskuyu AES” [“Zakharova Promised a Tough Response in Case of Ukraine’s Attack on the Zaporizhzhia NPP”], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, June 7, 2023, <https://rg.ru/2023/06/07/zaharova-poobeshchala-zhestkij-otvet-v-sluchae-ataki-ukrainy-na-zaporozhskuiu-aes.html>.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Russian Federation, Communication dated 15 June 2023 received from the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the Agency, INFIRC/1100, International Atomic Energy Agency, June 15, 2023, <https://www.iaea.org/publications/documents/infircs/communication-dated-15-june-2023-received-from-the-permanent-mission-of-the-russian-federation-to-the-agency>.

⁹⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii, “Kommentariy ofitsial’nogo predstavitelya MID Rossii M.V.Zakharovoy v svyazi s sostoyavshimsya 11 avgusta 2022 g. zasedaniem SB OON po situatsii na Zaporozhskoy AES (ZAES)” [“Commentary by the Official Spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M.V. Zakharova, Regarding the UN Security Council Meeting Held on August 11, 2022, Regarding the Situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP)”], Aug. 12, 2022, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_organizations/magate/1826000/.

⁹¹ Laurence Norman, “Russia Blocks UN Inspectors at Occupied Nuclear Plant,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-blocks-u-n-inspectors-at-occupied-nuclear-plant-52dc607d>.

would lead to Ukraine's forceful occupation.⁹²

Russia's actions in Ukraine have not only destabilized the region but also had far-reaching implications for the global nuclear order. The undermining of established norms and the manipulation of international mechanisms for national gain pose a profound challenge to the future of nuclear security and safety.

Nuclear proliferation

The war in Ukraine has illustrated the stark dichotomy in the privileges between nuclear- and nonnuclear-weapon states. For nonnuclear-weapon states, the erosion of trust in security assurances could potentially recalibrate their security calculus toward the acquisition of nuclear weapons as a sovereign safeguard. Russian aggression against Ukraine, a nonnuclear state that gave up its nuclear arsenal under the Budapest Memorandum, has raised questions about the effectiveness of such security assurances. In addition, some have argued that the war in Ukraine serves as a cautionary tale about the potential risks associated with forgoing nuclear capabilities in exchange for security assurances from other powers. In Asia, countries such as Japan and South Korea, which heavily rely on US negative security commitments,

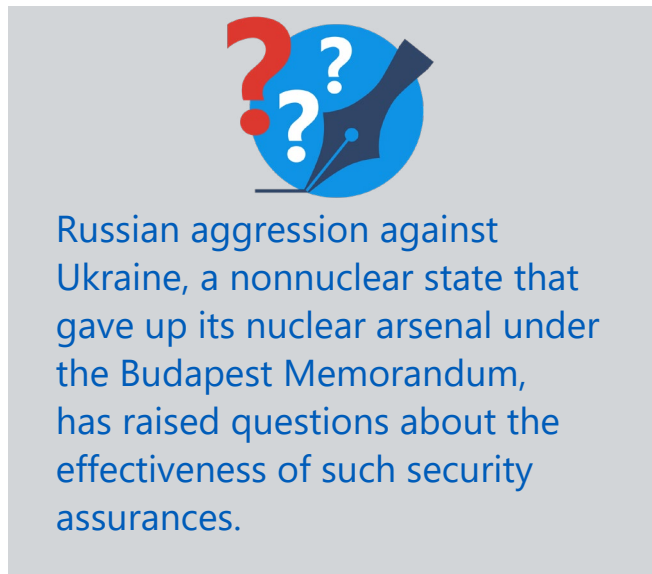
have heightened concerns about their security in the face of nuclear threats.⁹³ For South Korea, discussions about enhancing the country's own nuclear deterrence capabilities or seeking more robust nuclear deterrence arrangements with the US eventually culminated in the Washington

Declaration. Meanwhile, Iran has shown a greater tendency to leverage its nuclear developments with little concern about collective efforts at multilateral sanctions.

At the same time, the ability to resolve future nuclear proliferation challenges is fraught with challenges among the nuclear powers themselves. Russia's actions and the ensuing polarization have

fractured the erstwhile semblance of unity among nuclear-weapon states. Beyond specific state aspirations, the growing disunity within the P5 makes resolving future nuclear proliferation crises much more challenging. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Russia has vetoed UNSC resolutions on North Korea and has shielded Iran from international scrutiny. The current disunity may potentially embolden other states, either proliferators or those considering proliferation, by demonstrating the limitations of international mechanisms in enforcing compliance and resolution.

Within the IAEA, Russia has strategically utilized



⁹² "Vlasti Zaporozhskoy oblasti otrekli ideyu demilitarizatsii zony vokrug AES" ["The Authorities of Zaporizhzhia Region Rejected the Idea of Demilitarizing the Zone around the Nuclear Power Plant"], TASS, Aug. 12, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220812/zaes-1809044903.html>; "MID RF: demilitarizatsiya zony vokrug ZAES sdelat stantsiyu bolee uyazvimoy" ["Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Demilitarization of the Zone around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant Will Make the Station More Vulnerable"], *Vedomosti*, Aug. 18, 2022, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2022/08/18/936582-demilitarizatsiya-zaes-sdelat-stantsiyu-bolee-uyazvimoi>.

⁹³ Toby Dalton, "Nuclear Nonproliferation After the Russia-Ukraine War," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs (blog)*, Apr. 8, 2022, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2022/04/08/nuclear-nonproliferation-after-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

the Board of Governors as a platform to rationalize and defend its actions in Ukraine while breaking consensus with China on major resolutions on Iran's nuclear program.⁹⁴ After invading Ukraine, however, Russia acquiesced to Iran's nuclear activities and spoiled Western efforts to roll back Iran's nuclear program.⁹⁵ In June and November 2022, Russia voted against Board of Governors resolutions about Iran's intransigence over past nuclear activities and inspections. Iran subsequently escalated the situation by disconnecting IAEA cameras at nuclear sites, facing no protest or expressions of concern from Russia, which instead blamed the IAEA for provoking Tehran.⁹⁶

The NPT review process was also victim to the polarization. The Tenth Review Conference of the NPT concluded without achieving consensus on a final comprehensive document, primarily because of dissent from Russia. This impasse stemmed from Russia's opposition to the draft summary prepared by the conference presidency, a document that needed unanimous approval for adoption. The outcome echoed the precedent set by the 2015 Review Conference, marking it as the second consecutive instance in which the conference failed to yield a substantive outcome document. Speaking in Main Committee III, Russia argued that any paragraph on Ukraine, however "nominally neutral," would "destroy

any chance for consensus" and, therefore, the best solution would be to delete all such paragraphs.⁹⁷ Subsequently, during the preparatory process for the Next Review Conference, Russia aligned with Iran and China on impeding progress on Western initiatives.

Russia's lessons from the war seem not to be about the implications of nuclear latency but rather about the effect of latency on weakening US power. Dmitri Trenin, a member of Russia's influential Foreign and Defense Policy Council, explained that "the weakening of the NPT is an important factor undermining American hegemony...the states upon which the US exerts pressure for nonproliferation—North Korea and Iran—are political adversaries of the US and increasingly close partners of Russia." Trenin dismissed the idea of "collaborating with Washington" on Iran and North Korea as "unthinkable," especially because of Washington's support for Ukraine. He argued that rather than providing "direct support" for Iran's and North Korea's nuclear or missile programs, Moscow will refuse to join international pressure on Iran and North Korea.⁹⁸ The broader decline in nonproliferation within Russian foreign policy is apparent in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, which departs from its previous iterations by watering down language on the nonproliferation regime, replacing it with discussions about strategic

⁹⁴ Elena Chernenko, "Upali Sovsem Do DNYAO" ["They've Fallen All the Way to the NPT"], *Kommersant*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5481816>.

⁹⁵ Ellie Geranmayeh and Nicole Grajewski, "Alone Together: How the War in Ukraine Shapes the Russian-Iranian Relationship," European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief, Sept. 6, 2023.

⁹⁶ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, "Vystupleniye Upravlyayushchego ot Rossiyskoy Federatsii, Postoyannogo Predstavatelya Rossiyskoy Federatsii pri mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiyakh v Vene M.I. Ulyanova po punktu povestki dnya sessii Soveta upravlyayushchikh MAGATE 'Soglasheniye o garantiikh' v svyazi s DNRO s Islamskoy Respublikoy Iran" ["Statement by the Governor from the Russian Federation, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to International Organizations in Vienna, M.I. Ulyanov, on the Agenda Item of the Session of the Board of Governors of the IAEA 'Agreement on Guarantees' in Connection with the NPT with the Islamic Republic of Iran"], June 9, 2022, <https://www.mid.ru/tv/?id=1816936&lang=ru>.

⁹⁷ Gabriela Rosa Hernández and Daryl G. Kimball, "Russia Blocks NPT Conference Consensus over Ukraine," Arms Control Association, 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-09/news/russia-blocks-npt-conference-consensus-over-ukraine>.

⁹⁸ "Delo v Izmnenii Dislokatsii Rossiiskikh [Strategicheskikh] Sredstv, Vnesenii Ikh Vpered, Chto Signaliziruet Protivniku o Gotovnosti Moskvyy k Aktivnym I Reshitel'nyim Deistviyam," Vyderzhki iz Interv'yua s D.V. Treninym" ["The Point Is to Change the Deployment of Russian [Strategic] Assets, Bringing Them Forward, Which Signals to the Enemy That Moscow Is Ready for Active and Decisive Action," Excerpts from an Interview with D.V. Trenin"], PIR Center, Mar. 27, 2023.

stability and deterrence.⁹⁹

Speculation about Russia's technical assistance to North Korea since the war, alongside allegations that Russia is supplying fissile material for nuclear weapons to China, has prompted concerns about Rosatom's technical assistance as a catalyst for proliferation. The most direct way Russia could spark proliferation is by providing technological assistance to states aspiring to develop nuclear capabilities, which could include sharing nuclear technology, expertise, or materials. Such actions would not only contravene nonproliferation norms but also significantly undermine global efforts to prevent the

spread of nuclear weapons. The premise that Russia is seeking to deliberately enable nuclear proliferation does not align with Moscow's broader interests or its historical approach to nuclear cooperation, which has sought to maintain influence and leverage through a country's dependence on Russia. Even though Russia has been willing to pursue civilian cooperation with states that had imperfect safety records, Moscow has been reluctant to directly transfer enrichment technologies. Despite its noncooperative stance on nuclear nonproliferation, Russia is unlikely to be seeking to be a patron to future proliferators.

Although Russia may refrain from sharing enrichment

⁹⁹ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, "Kontseptsiya vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii" ["Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation"], Mar. 31, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?lang=ru.

¹⁰⁰ "SShA otkryli 'yashchik Pandory' na rynke atomnykh podlodok" ["The United States Has Opened a 'Pandora's Box' in the Nuclear Submarine Market"], *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, Sept. 17, 2021, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2021/09/17/ssha-otkryli-yashchik-pandory-na-rynke-atomnykh-podlodok.html>.

technology, Moscow may be inclined to follow the lead of the US and the UK by selling nuclear propulsion

technology. Russia could also see the AUKUS submarine deal as setting a precedent, allowing it to promote its own nuclear submarine technology to interested parties in the region. Since the 1980s, Russia has been leasing nuclear-powered attack submarines to India and engaged in the transfer of expertise. Russian military expert Ruslan Pukhov even suggested that Vietnam or Algeria are potential markets:

Literally before our eyes, a new market for nuclear powered submarines is being created....Over the past

30 years, Americans have tried to prevent the spread of these technologies....But now that the Americans have announced that they are selling such technologies, this is actually creating a new arms market—the market for nuclear-powered submarines.¹⁰⁰

Whether or not Russia actively pursues the export of nuclear propulsion technology, Russia's greater willingness to explore sensitive technology transfers should also be viewed in the context of its tendency to mirror US policy; increasingly, it is invoking Washington's actions as a precedent for misconduct.



Speculation about Russia's technical assistance to North Korea since the war, alongside allegations that Russia is supplying fissile material for nuclear weapons to China, has prompted concerns about Rosatom's technical assistance as a catalyst for proliferation.

Mimicry and exploiting double standards

Russia's decisions to deploy nonstrategic nuclear weapons to Belarus and to revoke its ratification of the CTBT have been extensions of Moscow's broader intransigence, which has shifted from critiquing US policy to actively mirroring it. Before the war in Ukraine, US nuclear cooperation with NATO and its stalled ratification of the CTBT were among the litany of grievances invoked by Russia about Washington's contravention of the NPT. Russia's mimicry has aimed to draw attention to instances in which norms are enforced selectively or inconsistently, thereby deflecting international scrutiny from its own actions.

Nuclear sharing

In March 2023, Russia's move to deploy nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Belarus mirrored NATO's long-standing practice of nuclear sharing. The US has deployed nonstrategic nuclear weapons in various European countries, including Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey, as part of NATO's collective defense strategy. The decision to deploy nonstrategic weapons to Belarus should be seen as an effort to mimic US policy.

Russia's intensified criticism of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements in relation to Article I of the NPT belies Moscow's role in US and Soviet negotiations that

allowed such nuclear sharing arrangements under certain conditions. During the NPT negotiations, the Soviet Union feared the establishment of a NATO multilateral force that would potentially enable nonnuclear countries to access nuclear capabilities.¹⁰¹ The US and Soviet Union sought to find mutually acceptable language to mollify Soviet demands that the NPT contain explicit prohibitions on the transfer of nuclear weapons to nonnuclear countries not just directly but through a military alliance, namely, NATO, remembering previous US attempts to nuclearize NATO through the Multilateral Force.¹⁰²

The US and the Soviet Union reached a compromise, with the US agreeing to abandon its Multilateral Force plans in exchange for Soviet acquiescence to existing NATO nuclear sharing arrangements under the stipulation of US control over nuclear arms on allied territory.¹⁰³

The end of the Cold War led to unilateral decisions by Russia and the US to withdraw and dismantle many of their nonstrategic nuclear weapons, including many of those stationed in Europe under NATO's nuclear sharing. At the 1996 Moscow Nuclear Safety and Security Summit, Russia explicitly connected NATO's expansion to the deployment of US nuclear weapons in Europe and broader nuclear nonproliferation issues.¹⁰⁴ Russian Minister of Atomic Energy Viktor Mikhailov made it clear that placing nuclear weapons in new NATO member states would

¹⁰¹ Thomas L. Hughes, Research Memorandum RSB-115 to the Secretary, Subject: Soviet Views of Nuclear Sharing and Nonproliferation, Oct. 13, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134063>. Another US State Department memo from 1965 states that "Moscow appears to attach higher priority to using the nonproliferation issue as an instrument in attacking potential NATO sharing arrangement than to concluding an agreement." See, for example, Thomas L. Hughes, Research Memorandum RSB-106 to the Secretary, Subject: Soviet Conditions About Western Nuclear Arrangements for a Nondissemination Treaty, Sept. 29, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134062>.

¹⁰² "The Issue of Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Conversations of Comrade Gromyko with US Government Officials During the 21st Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)," Oct. 28, 1966, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/issue-non-proliferation-nuclear-weapons-conversations-comrade-gromyko-us-government>; *Sokhraniia nasledie: Initsiativa gosudarstv-depozitarii v sviazi s 50-letiem vstupleniia DNIAO v silu* [Preserving the Legacy: A Depository-Hosted Initiative on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the NPT's Entry into Force], Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, pp. 111–126.

¹⁰³ Roland Timerbayev, *Rossiya i yadernoe nerasprostranenie* [Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation] (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), pp. 259–273.

¹⁰⁴ Vladimir Orlov, "'Yadernyi Sammit' V Moskve: Podvodya Itogi" ["'Nuclear Summit' in Moscow: Summing Up"], *Yadernyi Kontrol*, June 1996.

provoke corresponding countermeasures from Russia. Russian warnings elicited a response from the US, with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright articulating the “three no’s” policy: no intentions, no plans, and no reasons to deploy nuclear weapons in new NATO members during peacetime.¹⁰⁵ The vow to refrain from deploying nuclear weapons to new members contributed to a softening of Russia’s position, which made it possible to agree on and adopt the Russia-NATO Founding Act.¹⁰⁶ Despite the grand bargain over NPT negotiations and assurances after the collapse of the Soviet Union, elites and policy-makers in Russia have continued to criticize nuclear sharing. For example, in 2004, the PIR Center published a report chastising Russian officials for neglecting to question the issue of NATO nuclear sharing and its violation of the NPT.¹⁰⁷

Russia’s critique of NATO’s nuclear sharing emerged

after 2015, amid deteriorating relations over the annexation of Crimea, over NATO discussions around the modernization of its nonstrategic nuclear capabilities.¹⁰⁸ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov condemned these actions as violations of the NPT, highlighting the involvement of nonnuclear NATO members in nuclear missions as a significant risk to the treaty’s integrity.¹⁰⁹ At the 2020 NPT Review Conference, Russia reiterated its stance, emphasizing the need for nuclear weapons to remain within national territories to foster global security and discourage disarmament.¹¹⁰

Russia’s March 2023 announcement that it would station nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Belarus was preceded by various hints at a potential nuclear sharing arrangement.¹¹¹ Notably, two months before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko expressed readiness to host

¹⁰⁵ NATO Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the statement in the Founding Act. As such, the statement is a matter of NATO policy, not a legal commitment. Moreover, NATO will retain its existing, much-reduced nuclear capabilities and retain its right to modify its nuclear posture or policy should circumstances warrant that. United States Senate, Committee on Appropriations, *North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] Enlargement Costs*, Special Hearings, 105th Cong., 1st sess., Oct. 21, 1997, S. Hrg. 105-451, Washington, DC: US Government Publishing Office, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-105shrg46492/html/CHRG-105shrg46492.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ Vyacheslav Kruglov and Mikhail Sosnovskiy, “Politika NATO v otnoshenii,” *Obozrevatel*, Aug. 1, 2008; Aleksei Arbatov, “Takticheskoe Yadernoe Oruzhie—Problemy i Resheniya” [“Tactical Nuclear Weapons—Problems and Solutions”], *Voenno-Promyshlennogo Kompleksa*, May 5, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Anatolii Anin, “DNYaO I Kontseptsiya NATO po ‘Sovmestnomu Upravleniyu’ Yadernym Oruzhiem” [“NPT and NATO’s Concept for ‘Joint Management’ of Nuclear Weapons”], *Yadernyi Kontrol*, Jan. 15, 2004.

¹⁰⁸ “MID RF: Razmeshchenie Bomby V61-12 Na Territorii Evropeiskikh Stran Narushaet DNYaO” [“Russian Foreign Ministry: Placing the B61-12 Bomb on the Territory of European Countries Violates the NPT”], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aug. 29, 2017; M. Sarychev, “Takticheskoe Yadernoe Oruzhie Ssha—Destabiliziruyushchii Faktor Obstanovki V Evrope” [“US Tactical Nuclear Weapons—a Destabilizing Factor in the Situation in Europe”], *Zarubezhnoe Voennoe Obozrenie* 11 (2015), pp. 60–66.

¹⁰⁹ During a radio interview, Sergei Lavrov said that “the Americans are violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty because they have tactical nuclear weapons located on the territory of five European countries. Moreover, within NATO there is a program according to which citizens of these five states—other NATO countries, in addition to the United States—are involved in servicing and possessing skills in handling tactical nuclear-weapons systems. This is a very serious risk for the NPT.” Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, “Interv’yu Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiiskoy Federatsii S.V.Lavrova v pryamom efire radiostantsiy ‘Sputnik,’ ‘Ekho Moskvy,’ ‘Govorit Moskva’” [“Interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov live on radio stations ‘Sputnik,’ ‘Echo of Moscow,’ ‘Moscow Speaks’”], Apr. 22, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii, “Vystuplenie zamestitya rukovoditelya delegatsii Rossiiskoy Federatsii na 10-y Konferentsii po rassmotreniyu deystviya Dogovora o neraspredelenii yadernogo oruzhiya I.S.Vishnevetskogo, II Glavnyy komitet” [“Speech by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons I.S. Vishnevetsky, Main Committee II”], Aug. 8, 2022, https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1825672/.

¹¹¹ Sergei Val’chenko, “Eksperty Otsenili Vydvizhenie Yadernykh ‘Iskanderov’ v Otvet Na Ugrozy NATO” [“Experts Evaluate the Deployment of Nuclear ‘Iskanders’ in Response to NATO Threats”], *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, Mar. 27, 2023.

Russian nuclear weapons should NATO nuclear arms be placed in Poland.¹¹² Following the invasion, Belarus swiftly amended its constitution, eliminating the prohibition on hosting nuclear arms. By June 2022, President Putin had declared plans to relocate Iskander-M missiles, capable of bearing both conventional and nuclear warheads, to Belarus and, similar to NATO's dual-capable aircraft assigned to nuclear missions, to upgrade Belarusian Su-25 aircraft for nuclear capability.¹¹³

In announcing the deployment of nonstrategic nuclear weapons to Belarus, Putin justified the action as a counterbalance to long-standing US practices in Europe, asserting that this move does not contravene international nonproliferation commitments.¹¹⁴ Putin stated that "the United States has been doing this for decades...[Russia and Belarus] agreed that we would do the same without violating our international obligations on the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons."¹¹⁵ Apparently, the storage facility in Belarus for nonstrategic nuclear weapons will be managed exclusively by Russia's 12th Main Directorate of the Defense Ministry,

not by Belarusian forces. Russian analysts argue that the approach reflects a significant departure from NATO's strategy, in which weapons vaults are typically co-located with the aircraft designated to deliver them.¹¹⁶ In contrast, the Belarusian facility will function as a centralized storage site, separate from the locations of the aircraft or missiles.¹¹⁷ Russia has suggested that this centralized system underscores a fundamental difference in operational strategy: unlike NATO's approach, in which nuclear weapons are stored alongside delivery systems for rapid deployment, the Russian model in Belarus involves storing the weapons at a discrete location. In the event of an intense crisis, these weapons would be transported from the storage facility and prepared for use, similar to the protocol followed with Russia's internal nuclear arsenal.

Russia's 2023 announcement of the deployment of nonstrategic nuclear weapons to Belarus directly relates to Article I of the NPT, which stipulates that nuclear-weapon states pledge not to transfer nuclear weapons or control over them to any nonnuclear-weapon state. It also, as argued by

¹¹² "Lukashenko Predlozhit Putinu Vernut' v Belorussiyu Yadernoe Oruzhie Iz-Za NATO" ["Lukashenko Will Propose to Putin to Return Nuclear Weapons to Belarus Because of NATO"], IA Krasnaya Vesna, Nov. 30, 2021; "Minsk Gotov Razmestit' Yadernoe Oruzhie RF, Esli Natovskoe Okazhetsya v Pol'she – Lukashenko" ["Minsk Is Ready to Deploy Russian Nuclear Weapons If NATO's Are Placed in Poland – Lukashenko"], RIA Novosti, Nov. 30, 2021; "Prezident Belorussii Zayavil o Vozmozhnosti Razmeshcheniya v Strane Yadernogo Oruzhiya RF" ["The President of Belarus Announced the Possibility of Deploying Russian Nuclear Weapons in the Country"], Pervyi Kanal: Novosti [Channel One Russia News], Nov. 30, 2021.

¹¹³ "Sozdanie v Belorussii Ob"ektov Khraneniya Yadernykh Boezaryadov Ne Planiruetsya Diplomatom RF" ["Creation of Nuclear Warhead Storage Facilities in Belarus Not Planned, Russian Diplomat"], TASS, Oct. 15, 2022; "RF i Belorussiya Ne Narushayut Dogovor o Nerasprostraneni, Reagiruya Na Ugrozy Ot NATO MID" ["Russia and Belarus Do Not Violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Responding to Threats from NATO, Foreign Ministry"], TASS, Dec. 21, 2022.

¹¹⁴ "Rossiya razmestit v Belorussii takticheskoe yadernoe oruzhie" ["Russia Will Deploy Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Belarus"], RIA Novosti, Mar. 25, 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230325/khranilische-1860641929.html>.

¹¹⁵ "Belorussiya davno prosit u Rossii yadernoe oruzhie" ["Belarus Has Long Been Asking Russia for Nuclear Weapons"], Vesti, Mar. 24, 2023, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/3268612>.

¹¹⁶ Vladimir Mukhin, "Takticheskoe Yadernoe Oruzhie Rossii v Evrope Sygraet Strategicheskuyu Rol'" ["Russia's Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Europe Will Play a Strategic Role"], Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Mar. 27, 2023; Val'chenko, "Eksperty Otsenili Vydvizhenie Yadernykh 'Iskanderov' v Otvet Na Ugrozy NATO" ["Experts Evaluate the Deployment of Nuclear 'Iskanders' in Response to NATO Threats"].

¹¹⁷ In a Telegram post, Dmitry Stefanovich wrote that "it is likely that they will be managed by the 12th Main Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Defense, and the status of these weapons will be closer to nondeployed." Vatfor | Avtostradnyi Think Tank Telegram Channel, Apr. 7, 2023, <https://t.me/vatfor/8514>.

Russia multiple times, runs counter to the Article II pledge of disarmament. By deploying nuclear weapons to Belarus, Russia is not only mirroring the very NATO policies that it previously chastised but also challenging the moral high ground often taken by NATO in criticizing Russia's military strategies. This move can be interpreted as a form of strategic reciprocity designed to underscore the perceived hypocrisy of NATO's stance.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

Like the US, Russia has been involved in the CTBT since its inception. As a crucial step toward global disarmament efforts, the CTBT prohibits all nuclear explosions, whether for civilian or military purposes, and thwarts their development through the prevention of testing vital for their advancement. Despite being a key architect of the CTBT, the US has not ratified the treaty. Russia's decision to withdraw its ratification of the CTBT should be perceived as a deliberate act of mimicking the US position aimed at highlighting the repercussions of selective adherence to nuclear treaties by the US.

Historically, Moscow viewed limits on nuclear testing as a major component of the bilateral relationship. The Soviet Union declared a moratorium on nuclear testing in 1985, and the US followed with a nine-

month moratorium after tests in September 1992. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia committed to observing the moratorium as long as the US did the same, under the provisions of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, which allowed on-site verifications. Eventually, the improved environment led to the negotiations for the CTBT.¹¹⁸ The US and Russia signed the CTBT on the day the treaty opened for signature at the United Nations in September 1996; however, both countries faced domestic opposition over its ratification. Whereas Russia's internal deliberations and assessments of the treaty's implications for Russia's national security eventually paved the way for ratification in June 2000, the US Senate declined to give its advice and consent by a vote of 48 in favor of ratification and 51 against in 1999.¹¹⁹

Despite US delays on ratification, Russia endeavored to incorporate

the CTBT into its strategic discussions with the US. This effort was evident on June 4, 2000, when Russian President Vladimir Putin and then-US President Bill Clinton signed a Joint Statement on Principles of Strategic Stability, which included the topic of ratifying the CTBT as a key point of their dialogue. However, the CTBT's entry into force has been impeded by nonratification of the US and other Annex II powers, countries whose ratification is necessary for the treaty to take effect because

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¹¹⁸ Maxim Starchak, "Russia's Withdrawal from the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Is an Own Goal," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Oct. 24, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/90831>.

¹¹⁹ Russian Federation, Federal'nyy Zakon RF "O Ratifikatsii Dogovora o Vseob'yemlyushchem Zapreshchenii Yadernykh Ispytaniy" [Federal Law "On Ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty"], no. 72-FZ, Sobranie Zakonodatel'stva RF [Collection of Legislation of the Russian Federation], Apr. 21, 2000.

they possessed enrichment and reprocessing at the time the treaty was negotiated. Russia has been vocal in its critique of the US failure to ratify the CTBT, highlighting perceived double standards in the international community's approach to nuclear nonproliferation.¹²⁰

Over the years, Russian policy-makers and elites have bemoaned the US nonratification of the CTBT.¹²¹ Moscow State University Professor Aleksei Fenenko contended that it is challenging for Russia to be the sole nuclear power fully adhering to the treaty's terms and conditions because among the nuclear-weapon states, Russia is the only one that both has a moratorium on nuclear tests and has ratified the treaty.¹²² Although Britain and France have ratified the treaty, they have not adopted a testing moratorium. In contrast, China and the US have not ratified the treaty but have voluntarily enacted testing moratoriums. Notably, India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan have neither ratified the treaty nor established any testing moratorium. Moreover, the military community remained concerned about the possibility of secret tests.¹²³

Reservations about the status of the CTBT have been echoed by Russian officials who have repeatedly called upon states to ratify or sign the CTBT. At

the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, Russia stated: "We are deeply concerned by the lack of any tangible progress in the CTBT coming into force. We recall that our country ratified the CTBT in 2000, and we are working hard to make it universal both in bilateral and multilateral formats."¹²⁴ On the 25th anniversary of the CTBT, Putin released a statement:

The document, unfortunately, has not come into force. The opposition of eight states, whose ratification of the treaty is mandatory, hinders its transformation into a fully-fledged international legal instrument. It is evident that such a situation does not contribute in any way to the cause of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.¹²⁵

Since the war in Ukraine, Russia has departed from merely critiquing nonratification of the CTBT by Annex II countries to contemplating its own measures to withdraw ratification.

In October 2023, President Vladimir Putin spoke about the possibility of withdrawing Russia's ratification of the CTBT at a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club.¹²⁶ Noting that the US signed but never ratified the treaty, he suggested that Russia

¹²⁰ Aleksandr Alekseevich Pikaev, "Parlamenty Igrayut S Bomboi" ["Parliaments Play with Bombs"], *Moskovskie Novosti*, Oct. 19, 1999.

¹²¹ Igor' Bocharov, "Zapreshchenie yadernykh ispytaniy i neraspromozhenie yadernogo oruzhiya" ["Prohibition of Nuclear Tests and Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons"], *SShA Kanada: ekonomika, politika, kul'tura* 2 (2002), pp. 20–35.

¹²² Aleksei Fenenko, "Diplomatiya yadernykh ispytaniy" ["Diplomacy of Nuclear Testing"], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 3, 2009, https://www.ng.ru/politics/2009-07-03/3_kartblansh.html.

¹²³ Vyacheslav Balakin and Aleksei Shushlebin, "Analiz Vozmozhnostei Inostrannykh Gosudarstv Po Skrytiyu Yadernykh Ispytaniy" ["Analysis of Foreign States' Capabilities to Conceal Nuclear Tests"], *Voennaya Mysl'* 2 (2018), pp. 82–89; "Washington Ne Otkazhetsya Ot Yadernykh Ispytaniy" ["Washington Will Not Give up Nuclear Tests"], *Izvestiya*, Apr. 18, 2016.

¹²⁴ Mikhail Ulianov, Statement by Acting Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Russian Federation, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations in New York, Apr. 27, 2015, http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2015/statements/pdf/RU_en.pdf.

¹²⁵ Kira Latukhina, "Putin vystupil s zayavleniem po yadernym ispytaniyam" ["Putin Made a Statement on Nuclear Testing"], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Sept. 23, 2021, <https://rg.ru/2021/09/23/putin-vystupil-s-zaiavleniem-po-iadernym-ispytaniyam.html>.

¹²⁶ "Sovet Dumy poruchil k 18 oktyabrya prarabotat' vopros ob otzyve ratifikatsii DVZYal" ["The State Duma Council Instructed to Work on the Question of Withdrawing the Ratification of the INF Treaty by October 18th"], TASS, Oct. 9, 2023, <https://tass.ru/politika/18953421>.

could “behave in a mirror manner.”¹²⁷ Several days later, the Russian State Duma, the country’s lower house of parliament, unanimously voted in favor of withdrawing the ratification of the CTBT.¹²⁸ The Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin stated:

For 23 years we have been waiting for the United States of America to ratify the Treaty...But Washington used its double standards and irresponsible approach towards global security issues and still has not done that...The Russian Federation will do everything to protect its citizens and ensure that global strategic parity is being maintained.¹²⁹

After the vote, Sergei Ryabkov, Russia’s deputy minister of foreign affairs, clarified that the Duma vote does not signify a withdrawal from the treaty or plans for future nuclear tests but that Russia will remain a signatory, “just as the United States has done for the past 23 years.” He added that Russia will continue to transmit and receive data within the framework of the international monitoring system of the CTBT. “Parity in political and legal terms with the United States will be restored in the current segment,” the diplomat noted, clarifying that this

is a “significant signal to Americans and everyone else” regarding the ratification of the treaty.¹³⁰ Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the move is being taken to reestablish strategic parity with the US. Russia has selectively repealed only Article 1 of its ratification law pertaining to the CTBT while maintaining other legislative elements. The retained provisions continue to define the Russian government’s responsibilities under the treaty, such as supporting the CTBT Organization financially, participating in the Preparatory Commission, maintaining International Monitoring System stations in Russia, and aiding in on-site inspections.

By mimicking US policies, Russia is effectively turning the mirror on the US, forcing a reevaluation of the established norms and double standards in international nuclear policy. This tactic serves to critique the prevailing narrative dominated by Western powers and proposes a counternarrative in which similar actions are taken by Russia in a comparable geopolitical context. Russia’s deployment of nonstrategic nuclear weapons to Belarus and the withdrawal of ratification from the CTBT are emblematic of a broader strategy of strategic mimicry aimed at the US.

¹²⁷ Press-Sluzhba Prezidenta RF [Presidential Press Office of the Russian Federation], “Zasedanie Diskussionnogo Kluba ‘Valdai’” [“Meeting of Discussion Club ‘Valdai’”], Oct. 5, 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72444>.

¹²⁸ Russian Federation, Federal’nyi Zakon “O vnesenii izmenenii v Federal’nyi zakon ‘O ratifikatsii Dogovora o vseob’emlyushchem zapreshchenii yadernykh ispytanii’” [Federal Law “On Amendments to the Federal Law on Ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty”], N 508-FZ, Nov. 2, 2023, <https://www.zakonrf.info/doc-38051201/>.

¹²⁹ Eleonora Rylova and Anna Shushkina, “Gosduma Otozvala Ratifikatsiyu Dogovora o Zaprete Yadernykh Ispytanii’” [“The State Duma Has Withdrawn the Ratification of the Treaty Banning Nuclear Tests”], *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, Oct. 20, 2023.

¹³⁰ Gleb Sotnikov, “Na osnove pariteta” [“On the Basis of Parity”], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Oct. 16, 2023.

CONCLUSION

The war in Ukraine has prompted serious questions about Russia's commitment to the regimes and principles that have governed nuclear technology. Rather than disengaging from the global nuclear order, Russia has continued to emphasize its role in the fundamental regimes of this order while challenging the validity, applicability, and interpretations of many of the norms and principles espoused by the West. Moscow's contestation of these norms involves casting doubt on, or offering alternative interpretations of, agreements that underpin the global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime.

Russia maintains active participation and financial commitment in these regimes, underscoring its preference to shape the nuclear order from within established structures. This engagement is not passive; Russia actively influences the staffing, funding, and programmatic direction of the IAEA. It can employ procedural tactics to challenge the status quo, such as stalling decisions in the IAEA's Board of Governors or using its veto power in the UNSC. Such actions can impede progress on crucial issues, including sanctions, inspections, and resolutions aimed at addressing nuclear proliferation concerns. Russia's tactics suggest a strategic intent to use these regimes for agenda-setting and exerting its influence, rather than withdrawing or diminishing its role. The US should remain concerned about Moscow's greater will to leverage these organizations for advancing its interests, often to the detriment of norms.

As demonstrated prominently in recent rounds of NPT Preparatory Committees, Russia's engagement with like-minded states represents a concerted effort to mobilize a collective front. The impasse in the NPT review process development is a clear signal that Russia intends to use its institutional power within these frameworks to its advantage, influencing decision-making processes and norm setting. Moreover, the US should be prepared for Russia to mimic or counter US policies, as seen in Russia's nuclear weapons deployment in Belarus and its stance on the CTBT. Russia could also see the AUKUS submarine deal as setting a precedent allowing it to promote its own nuclear submarine technology to interested parties in the region, an additional attempt to mirror US actions.

Russia has chosen to disengage selectively from Western-led initiatives while maintaining its participation in UN-led processes concerning WMD. An illustrative case is the 2022 review of Russia's foreign policy by the Foreign Ministry, which disclosed Russia's withdrawal from the PSI. Per the Foreign Ministry, Russia's decision to cease its participation in the PSI was driven by the necessity to respond to both symmetrical and asymmetrical measures amid the "hybrid war" instigated by Western nations following the launch of its "special military operation."¹³¹

Rather than pursuing a linkage with broader issues, Washington should be realistic about the realization of any bilateral nonproliferation cooperation while maintaining dialogue with Russia via UN processes

¹³¹ Elena Chernenko and Anastasiya Dombitskaya, "IBOR za vami" ["PSI Krasnaya Zvezda is Yours"], *Kommersant*, Mar. 30, 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5902823>.

such as UNSCR 1540 and organizations such as the CTBT. For example, given Russia's concerns about US subcritical nuclear tests, Washington might seek a path to address mutual apprehensions. The West should be realistic about the limitations of cooperation with Russia, especially concerning the Iranian nuclear program. Moscow's reluctance to facilitate nuclear diplomacy with Iran and North Korea indicates a deteriorating relationship with the West. This perceived deterioration is aligned with Moscow's strategy of diverting Western attention away from itself and toward other international issues, including those related to Iran and North Korea. Moscow appears to believe that easing concerns about an "Iranian nuclear threat" or "North Korean nuclear threat" would allow the West to focus more

on Russia. From Russia's view, an Iran under Western sanctions and an increasingly isolated North Korea would be more inclined to support Russian interests, including those related to Ukraine.

As Russia continues to prioritize its own interests, including in Ukraine, the downgrading of nonproliferation in its foreign policy reflects a broader trend of assertive and strategic behavior on the global stage. The implications of Russia's actions within the global nuclear order extend beyond the realm of nonproliferation. They raise concerns about Moscow's broader geopolitical objectives and its willingness to leverage international organizations to advance its interests, even when such actions run counter to established norms.

ABBREVIATIONS

CPPNM	Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
CTR	Cooperative Threat Reduction
G8	Group of Eight
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ISAMZ	IAEA Support and Assistance Mission to Zaporizhzhia
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
P5	permanent members of the United Nations Security Council
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative
SNF	spent nuclear fuel
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
ZNPP	Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant

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