

Addressing the threat of nuclear proliferation should be on top of the foreign policy agenda of the United States. Challenges range from non-state actors, such as Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, to states that already possess nuclear weapons or seek to acquire them. Moreover, the current lack of accountability for fissile material and the wide variety of available delivery systems make this threat particularly dangerous. Establishing vision, credibility, and trust is integral to US policy in garnering support for effective international nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

Vision

The vision of a world free of nuclear threats should be the driving force behind US policy. The advantage of having a vision includes further defining US goals, providing transparency to the international community, focusing on nuclear nonproliferation efforts, and promoting consistency while reducing hypocrisy. To achieve this vision, the following plan of action, which is both comprehensive and flexible, should be pursued. The US should work multilaterally to strengthen existing institutions and frameworks for nonproliferation, such as the IAEA and NPT. Also, the US must initiate a process of gradual nuclear arms reduction, which may lead to a world free of nuclear weapons. The process should include a program of strict fissile material accountability and methods to make all states internalize the goal of reducing nuclear threats. This plan of action will establish the credibility of the United States in the international community, which will serve as a foundation for the continual growth of trust and cooperation in order to achieve a world free of nuclear threats.

Credibility

In the post-9/11 era, American credibility has fallen due to lackluster implementation of our foreign policy agenda. As a result, its image abroad suffers. In our pursuit of non-proliferation, the credibility of the US abroad must be rebuilt with the ultimate goal of regaining moral authority. The following plan of action will address issues of human rights, unilateralism, and inconsistent execution of policy.

Violations of human rights have greatly tarnished the image of the US abroad. One response that will improve our moral standing in the international community is the closure of Guantanamo Bay. Another example is the public condemnation of torture, specifically water-boarding and the mistreatment of enemy combatants.

The US should reestablish its commitment to multilateralism. Institutions such as the UN and IAEA require our support for effective sanctions and the prevention of state acquisition of dangerous proliferation technology. Also, effective negotiation of non-proliferation requires the cooperation of the whole community of states. The US must pursue its foreign policy goals in this way, with the use of unilateral force as a last resort. One way of communicating this commitment is through the ratification of multilateral treaties, such as the CTBT.

The US should also strive to be more consistent with non-proliferation policy. In the past, non-proliferation efforts have been aimed at states which the US deemed threatening to its interests. However, policy should be enforced across the board in support of a posture that promotes policy, not solely political agendas. Double standards should be prevented as much as possible.

Trust

Trust achieved over time, built upon a foundation of credibility, establishes relationships that drive positive policy outcomes. A genuine level of trust is based on a myriad of measures. First, neutral and fair mediators can open constructive channels of communication by fostering an environment advantageous to progressive discussion between parties. Additionally, the US should internally commit to a degree of active listening on the international stage. Continuations of this dialogue will further enhance mutual understanding, and appreciating cultural norms and motives of international actors will lead to increased predictability between states.

The US needs to be willing to deviate from former policy if pragmatism is the better option. Eliminating overt hostility and being receptive to responsible criticism is essential to the overall goal of increasing cooperative action. The US must work with those who view the world differently because trust built on credibility founded through action is essential for effective international nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

Application

The model of establishing vision, credibility, and trust for the purpose of a world free of nuclear threats can be applied to a multitude of scenarios. The nuclear build-up in the Islamic Republic of Iran deserves immediate attention. Through the utilization of our model, the US can work towards the vision of preventing the weaponization of Iran's nuclear technology. To recognize this ultimate goal, the US must develop a consistent policy and vision, including establishing credibility and trust with both Iran and the international community.

Open dialogue is imperative to fostering credibility. First, the US must engage in diplomatic discussion with both the international community and Iran. Working with both Russia and China will enable more efficient consensus regarding international policy towards Iran because both of these states hold veto power on the UN Security Council, as well as vested interests in the region. Cooperation among these states will inherently strengthen the international institutions established to regulate the proliferation of nuclear weapons. With Iran, establishing talks to further the option of an effective diplomatic structure will also increase US credibility as regards nonproliferation efforts. By engaging in open dialogue, credibility will be established via mechanisms of transparency and furthered relationships.

Only with increased credibility will the US be able to create the trust needed to pursue cooperative action. After all, enforcement alone is not enough to change the intent of Iran to pursue nuclear weapons. One way to create trust will be to openly speak on a wide variety of bilateral issues that do not necessarily relate to nonproliferation. Another important way to increase trust would be to utilize European nations already engaged with Iran. By doing this, the US establishes an honest broker for mediating dialogue with Iran on nonproliferation. On some issues, the US should follow the efforts begun by European nations, and on other issues, the US should lead. Ultimately, the commitment to building trust in the long term depends on dedication and perseverance. The US must not be deterred by singular failures, but be willing to strive towards long-term success. Such a policy will result in achieving goals previously thought impossible.