A COMMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL NON-PROLIFERATION SYSTEM: FROM TACTICAL STABILITY TO STRATEGIC INSTABILITY

Is UN and IAEA reform a possible solution?

1. The international non-proliferation system, codified by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), essentially reflects, in its structure, cold-war geopolitics, showing an obvious "asymmetry" between countries possessing nuclear weapons (UNSC 5 permanent members i.e. USA, Russia, China, France and UK) and those possessing no nuclear weapons. Without prejudice to "illegitimate" nuclear countries –India, Pakistan and Israel – which are not bound by the NPT as they did not sign it, we must emphasize one point. An issue which is normally risen to prove that there is no "perception of geopolitical asymmetry" in the UN system is based on the consideration that there are over 180 countries which accept their non-nuclear status. But this is not a convincing argument. In fact, this theory ignores the economic reality of these non-nuclear countries. Most of them are third-world countries which cannot afford the high costs (some ten billion dollars) associated to an R&D plan, mass production and deployment of a nuclear deterrent, even if a "minimal" one, unless this is – if any – part of the cold war "heritage".
   Most of the other non-nuclear countries are OECD countries, their security being guaranteed differently thanks to their global economic dominance and their ties with the 5 nuclear countries under the NPT system. However, many of these countries – e.g. EU non-nuclear countries (France and UK are nuclear countries) as well as Japan and South Korea – could, should they decide to do so, develop a nuclear weapon prototype in a few months.
   Therefore, it is obvious that in the 21st century the NPT system is a tool which is unable – as it was when established – to reflect the geopolitical and economic environment after the cold war.

2. In plain words, as in any complex physical system, political systems have a "sustainability stage" that follows an "implementation stage".
   As regards international security, the sustainability stage is also known as "stability". In particular, regarding the NPT system, we must wonder whether *this system will remain stable through time*. The main theory here is that the NPT system is intrinsically unstable and that there is a number of nation-states which ensure immediate "*tactical stability*" – because of the tremendous international pressures they have to undergo and in order to prevent further economic and political isolation – which, in the long run, will change – should the international community fail to respond to the whole of there "existential insecurities" – to instability, to later develop into a "strategic instability". Therefore, if some basic principles of the international non-proliferation system are not changed, this is expected to collapse through a time scale imposed by domestic evaluations such as political costs-benefits associated to the nuclear option. Consequently, we will enter a new phase in international relations which will be – like in all complex physical systems – highly chaotic (hence unpredictable) and unstable. First of all, this assumption is a consequence of

worldwide economic globalization; secondly, it is linked to the existence of unilateral aggressive policies by the "superpowers" managing the "Global Government".

3. An essential feature of globalization, and of an ever increasing, consequent integration of each single economic system of each nation-state, is not only a worldwide approximation and integration of international economies and financial markets, but also a *progressive suppression of the technological and know-how divide* (the latter through one of the most significant expressions of globalization i.e. the Web) among world actors. A consequence of this will be, among other things, that nuclear technologies and relevant dual technologies (which are not modern technologies since they were developed in the fifties) will be made available and disseminated throughout the global village to an ever increasing extent. Also relevant knowledge will be less exclusive; this, at least because of the possibility –made effective by the Web – to rely, anywhere in the world, on unlimited technical-scientific literature, even though first-rate technological R&D centers are unavailable.
   Finally, the market will try to absorb the technologies which were originally developed for defense purposes and the strategic materials employed in goods for civil use. One aftermath is that – the know-how being on hand – some thousand technological components, materials and circuits which are non-physical parts of the Bomb (other than fissionable material) will be made available starting from civil products, developing "clones" from the technological components traded on the markets. Also nuclear fissionable materials (highly enriched uranium – HEU – and plutonium) will become available to proliferating countries, because a worldwide illegal market trading nuclear material fit for the bomb will presumably be established (just think of Russia with its current 600 ton fissionable material i.e. 30,000-40,000 A-bombs under insecure safety conditions) and because natural uranium enrichment technologies and civil nuclear fuel reprocessing technologies (necessary to extract plutonium) are advancing towards technologies that are less complex and univocal, thus accessible to any proliferating country. Therefore, production of crude nuclear devices will be possible not only for the non state actors but also – and on a broader scale – for "threshold" countries as regards the NPT system. The reason for choosing to become a nuclear country will just be a mere question of political "costs and benefits".
   In other words, once the technological and know-how divide will decrease by integrating nation systems on a worldwide scale, countries having minimum technological infrastructures as to manpower and means – which are economically and politically "discriminated" with their "national security" requests not guaranteed by the major world powers, and which are located in geographical regions that are politically, socially and economically unstable – might choose that economic and political costs – associated to procuring a minimum nuclear deterrent for "political dissuasion" (implying at least two nuclear weapons, one as a detonator for demonstration purposes and one to be used as a "blackmail weapon") rather than for true strategic purposes – would be lower than the "benefits" accruing from coming on the regional (and worldwide) geopolitical stage as new active, and no longer passive, nuclear subject within a world regime basically anarchic and increasingly ruled by force rather than law.
   Obviously, it is rather difficult to determine when an X country (X countries are those countries which happen to be in competitive or unstable regional situations, or which feel that their existence is threatened by other regional or global actors) will decide – within the framework of such "existential costs and benefits" equation – to tread over

the nuclear threshold in order to make up for its factual or potential isolation through nuclear deterrents which would however imply a political rather than a military value.
"Treading over" this threshold will obviously depend on the special regional and global conditions affecting the considered country, and on its capacity to fill the abovementioned technological and know-how divide with regard to the rest of the world.
Obviously, this scenario changes from country to country, but it may also depend on less tangible factors such as the existence of strong nationalistic trends or politicized religious issues or a progressive loss of a specific cultural-historic-ethnic heritage.
It is reasonable to presume that this will however take place within this century – each X country with a different timing – if no remedy is urgently provided for asymmetries, inequalities and "dual standards" of this international non-proliferation system. In other words, if an X country, i.e. a "threshold" country regarding the NPT, should decide, due to economic and political consideration, to immediately push ahead with the NPT, thus achieving the first "tactical stability" stage as regards world security, in a longer time-scale, should its national security and world non-isolation issues fail to be satisfied by the international community, it may decide to quit the NPT and become a new de facto nuclear country in a second stage of "strategic instability". Some examples of X countries which may go nuclear after a tactical "stability stage", are North Korea and Iran.
Finally, the old "domino theory" of cold war – applied when an X country goes nuclear (or acquires nuclear skills) – will cause the final move: all the countries, strategically competing with such X country, will try to become nuclear powers to guarantee their national security. By applying the "attractors" physical theory to this geopolitical scenario, *no large number of X countries is needed* to nullify the international NPT system: *a few countries are just enough*.
Back to North Korea and Iran, the domino theory would suggest that nuclear countries may subsequently become like their strategic competitors: a nuclear North Korea would affect South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Australia, while a nuclear Iran would drag along Turkey, Egypt, Libya and some Gulf countries. This latter case – considering that the Middle East contributes for 2/3 to world oil reserves known currently – would inevitably imply that, sooner or later, highly industrialized EU countries might go nuclear, at least for "political deterrence" towards the new nuclear countries in an extended Middle East, "sitting" on the world's main fossil hydrocarbon resources.

4. What can we do to avert this world catastrophic scenario? At a world institutional level, we should:

    a. Establish macro-regional Fora which would simultaneously and synergically monitor regional security as well as economic and social aspects, and all factors regarding local religious and/or ethnic conflicts;
    b. Conceive "packages" including "engagement" and " coercion" elements, i.e. rewards and punishments to be managed simultaneously, and not only in a split-up manner in relation to, from time to time, package components;
    c. Grant UN, or some of its technical agencies such as IAEA (and also UNDP, FAO, etc.), greater "political power" to be really independent and autonomous as regards the major world powers. Obviously, this point is also meant to transform UN's Security Council, not only by granting new permanent seats to the new actors within the international post-cold war system, but also by

changing present seats (e.g. granting the EU one seat only instead of the two prevent ones, France and UK).
As regards to the specific subject dealt with in this report, let's consider IAEA. This agency should also act as a "World Government", and not only as a mere multilateral technical body. On the basis of regional Fora's evaluations, this agency should be free to implement its nuclear and control technological co-operation programs, not totally bound by its member countries' requirements. A transformed IAEA should also bind its technological, nuclear and dual assistance and co-operation to member countries to their compliance with the NPT system. Obviously, this would require new tools enabling control, monitoring of and access to the nuclear structures of all member countries in a non-discriminatory and impartial way. In this new capacity , the agency should have a "control room" free from its "Board of Governments" which should instead play a less political role, affecting agency's operations to a lesser extent.

5. It is obvious that, in the present world scenario, these reform proposals are a mere provocation and mere utopia, and that the 5 NPT members – which also are the 5 permanent members of the Security Council – will never commit part of their powers to international agencies of the UN system. However, "something" innovative and modern must be implemented in the international relations system if we want to prevent an inevitable erosion of the world non-proliferation system and its complete – and perhaps not so far away – collapse.

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