

Opinion

By EPHRAIM ASCULAI

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The death knell of the non-proliferation regime?

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On December 2, 2015, International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Yukiya Amano presented to the IAEA member states his long-awaited report on Iran's Possible Military Dimensions (PMD) of its nuclear program. This issue had been outstanding since November 2011, with Iran refusing to cooperate in its resolution until mid-2015.

In his report, Amano concludes that: "The agency's overall assessment is that a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device were conducted in Iran prior to the end of 2003 as a coordinated effort, and some activities took place after 2003... The agency has no credible indications of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009."

Without going into the fine details of the report, it is clear that it indicted Iran for developing nuclear weapons, contrary to its persistent denials, claims and statements to the effect that it never did so. Moreover, Iran repeatedly quoted a non-existent fatwa against nuclear weapons, it proposed resolutions against nuclear weapons in international fora and presented itself to the world as a clean-handed nation.

When the report came out the Iranian officials were quick to condemn it as false, but did not conduct an all-out campaign against it, for a reason that became clear as time went on.

This reason was simple: the world was willing to forgive and forget these serious transgressions of Iran's obligations according to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It was willing to do so because it wanted to proceed with the agreement with Iran, delaying the time when Iran would again be capable of producing nuclear weapons within a short time frame.

On December 15, the IAEA Board of Governors convened to discuss the director-general's report. The P5+1, the chaperones of the "deal" with Iran, managed to pass a resolution that notes, inter alia, the completion of the IAEA verification activities regarding the PMD issues. The resolution did not even mention the above-mentioned report's conclusions. The resolution did not even use the mild diplomatic language "deplores the past Iranian misdeeds" if unsatisfied with the findings.

So, what was the purpose of the whole exercise? A state was accused of developing nuclear weapons, was found guilty, and not even a slap on the wrist took place. The only thing remotely resembling a reference to this matter is "Welcoming Iran's reaffirmation in the JCPOA [the "deal," the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] that it will under no circumstances ever seek, develop or acquire nuclear weapons, and Iran's agreement that it will not engage in activities, which could contribute to the development of a nuclear explosive device." Can anyone trust Iran to hold to this "reaffirmation"? It did not work before, and one has to be completely naïve to think that it is of any value now or in the future.

It would be imprudent not to assume that Iran already has a working nuclear explosive mechanism design, received from Pakistan, the same way Libya did, and its research and development activities were intended to improve this design, not to invent it. Ignoring this possibility would be folly. The aim of the deal with Iran was intended to extend the "breakout time" in Iran, the time needed for the production of a nuclear explosive device, from two months to one year. This also is a very short time, and in any case Iran will be there, even if it obeys the deal to the letter, in 10 years, or even less.

Iran threatened the world that unless the "Iran Dossier" would now be closed, it would withdraw from the deal. No one dares to call Iran's bluff. If Iran really needed the removal of the economic sanctions, it would not withdraw from the deal, but who will test this? The implications of this event are far more reaching than is visible at first sight. The main implication is that any state, even a member of the NPT, can probably develop nuclear weapons with impunity. It will not be punished in any way, especially if it is a threatening, terrorism-supporting state, with hegemonic ambitions, regional or even wider-reaching. The United States that was once considered the champion of non-proliferation aided and abetted in this misdeed.

The poor record of the US in this matter is not limited to Iran. Look at the failure of dealing with North Korea, the agreement with India and the discussions on a possible deal with Pakistan.

Non-proliferation is not a major factor in these. Think of Pakistan's assistance to Iran and Libya, think of North Korea's assistance to Syria, against whom, so it is reported, the US even refused to act.

The next victim of this shambles is the possibility of creating a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Who will sit down and discuss such a possibility – with Iran at the same table? Will Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others, including Israel, believe a word Iran utters or even signs? From now on, it will be a free-for-all in the area of proliferation, and it will not really matter whether a state is a

party to the NPT or not. The shortsightedness in not daring to deal properly with Iran could be the undoing of the whole world order, rickety as it may have been until now.

Sadly, this will not be soon remedied.

The show will go on, including the five-year NPT meetings, proposed draft resolutions both at the IAEA and the UN will be presented, and some of them passed, extolling the past achievements of the now almost non-existent non-proliferation regime.

The writer is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).

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