Turkey's non-nuclear weapon status

A theoretical assessment

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Turkey's security policy upholds nuclear (and WMD) nonproliferation and commitment to the regimes concerned. In the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world, military threats to Turkey's security emanate mainly from the Middle East, where security is still defined in a Realist world. Turkey has several issues with its neighbours and maintains strategic balance with superiority or rough equality in its military power, its alliances, and to a lesser extent, economic ties. This paper analyses Turkey's policy as a non-nuclear weapon state amid uneasy neighbours, which have had WMD and/or nuclear programs, through the lenses of several International Relations theories that explain proliferation dynamics: Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and other theories explaining state behaviour by opening the 'black box'. The analysis reveals the pillars that make up the policy including motivations and constraints. The post-9/11 US security and foreign policy and Iran's nuclear program are independent variables that introduce intervening variables (like the effects on the regime and norms) which have impacts on these motivations and reconstraints. The paper distinguishes between (i) the presence of motivations to pursue a nuclear weapons capability, (ii) working to keep the 'nuclear option' open and (iii) the actual decision to go nuclear. The main argument is that the independent variables have challenged the maintenance of the policy as a security asset, and Turkey may consider a 'nuclear option' when this asset converges into a security deficiency. The paper concludes with recommendations to keep Turkey on the current track.

Turkey's security policy and non-nuclear weapon state status

Since the establishment of the Republic, Turkey has sought alliances to maintain its security. At the onset of the Cold War, Turkey joined the Western camp, and became a member of the Atlantic Alliance in 1952. NATO membership formed the cornerstone of Turkish security policy by solidifying its ties to the West and by providing a nuclear umbrella. In 1979, Turkey signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state, and became member to other agreements regarding the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems.

This study analyses Turkey's policy as a non-nuclear-weapon state (NNWS) amid WMD-capable neighbours in the Middle East. In the post-Cold War and post-September 11 (9/11) periods, military threats to Turkey's national security mainly emanate from the Middle East, where security is still defined in Realist terms. Throughout the Cold War, Turkey pursued a policy of nonintervention and indifference regarding the Middle East [1]. The end of the Cold War, and particularly the Gulf War of 1991, demonstrated that Turkey had to revise this policy: while NATO did not disintegrate, its collective defence commitment was questioned during this period. Turkey started to engage in bilateral and trilateral strategic cooperation with the United States and Israel in the 1990s [2]. While earlier Turkey and the United States (US) were less than strategic partners, Turkish-American relations boomed in military, political and economic aspects as Turkey's strategic importance for the United States increased in this period in terms of its regional role geographically, politically and culturally.

Turkey's security policy is shaped on the basis of the strategy of deterrence in the first place. Defence comes second [3]. Cold War and post-Cold War period security policy rested on the nuclear deterrent of NATO and Turkey's military power, which is the second biggest army in NATO. Turkey is located at the intersection of conflict regions, namely, the Balkans, Caucasus and the Middle East, and that of strategic routes for trade, commerce, energy, etcetera. After the end of the Cold War, military threats mainly emanated from the Middle East, especially after the Gulf War. Relations with Syria, Iran and Iraq have been uneasy due to a number of issues ranging from water disputes, border issues, terrorism, mutual threat perceptions of regimes, Turkey's alliances with the West, the United States and Israel, etcetera. All three possessed ballistic missiles that could reach strategic targets and main cities. The mass destruction weapons capabilities were also a cause of concern: Syria possessed chemical weapons, Iraq had chemical and biological weapons (CBW), and was working on a nuclear program before the war. Iran was suspected of having CBW capability and of working on a nuclear program. The absence of conflict was mainly because of Turkey's military deterrent that was bolstered in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey after the Cold War [4], and the NATO defence commitment. Economic relations played a minor role.

Why Turkey did not aspire to have a nuclear weapons capability was not just because of its deterrent capabilities, and later of its strategic relations with the United States and Israel in military matters. There were other elements that sustained this policy as a security asset. Next section will give a theoretical explanation of how Turkey's non-nuclear weapon status was formed and the factors that sustained it.

Main pillars of Turkey's nuclear nonproliferation policy: a theoretical assessment

Theories that explain nuclear proliferation and nonproliferation are numerous. They provide explanations at international, state, domestic and ideational levels [5]. Turkey's non-nuclear weapon state status can be understood in the framework of these theories, and this study uses Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism as different lenses to look at the domestic level. I distinguish between motivations, that is, factors that trigger states to seek nuclear weapons; keeping a 'nuclear option' open, that is, acquiring civilian nuclear technology and keeping it in a way that would allow diversion to military use; and the actual decision to go nuclear, that is, a government decision to have an operational nuclear weapons program. The following

explanation is more relevant to the motivational aspect of proliferation. The next two aspects are discussed for the Turkish case later in the analysis.

During the Cold War, nuclear proliferation was tackled mainly from the Realist and Neo-Realist viewpoints that considered nuclear weapons as the ultimate means of military capability given the bipolar international structure [6]. Realist theories have a pessimistic view of international politics, in which main actors are states seeking power to ensure security for their survival. The ultimate national interest is power, which is understood in a military sense. States are in constant struggle to increase their military capabilities for security and defence, which creates a 'security dilemma' and which fuels an arms race. As a result, states either balance or bandwagon: they form balances of power to avoid war, and lesser powers bandwagon to ensure their survival. Realist theories argue that nuclear proliferation will spread as a chain reaction, because the acquisition of nuclear weapons by one state will initiate a security dilemma. Therefore, as a result of national security concerns, the acquisition by a regional adversary of nuclear arms or the possibility of such acquisition triggers proliferation drives, and states would either go nuclear to balance power, or join alliances with a nuclear power.

In this framework, against the Soviet expansionist and nuclear threat, NATO's nuclear umbrella and relations with the United States had provided Turkey with sufficient reason not to seek a nuclear weapons capability. The end of the Cold War did not significantly alter NATO's nuclear posture. Doubts about NATO's commitment during the Gulf War, and the ballistic missile and WMD programs of its neighbours challenged Turkey's position, however, but there were other variables that either constrained Turkey to revise its policy, or that maintained it as a security asset.

Among those factors, one can immediately notice that Turkey is a signatory to the NPT and all other nonproliferation WMD regimes; so first and foremost, Turkey is legally and politically committed to keep its NNWS status. Turkey's international commitments go beyond legal constraints, and build an image of a dedicated member of the regime, and confirm the country's status as an 'accepted' state among the community of nations. The nuclear nonproliferation regime was bolstered after the Cold War by the extension of the NPT, the denouncement of nuclear weapons by a number of states and their NPT memberships, the success of the UN inspections in Iraq, and cooperation between the United States and Russia to prevent proliferation, etcetera. Being an NNWS thus became the accepted norm of the international community, as opposed to the past decades, during which possession of nuclear weapons was a sign of prestige and status. The constructivist approach to the study of international relations explains the construction of identity and the evolution of norms as a result of social interaction [7]. In this sense, Turkey's status was contemplated as an asset rather than a deficiency.

Liberal theories are powerful in explaining why states choose not to go nuclear with their emphasis on cooperation, institutions and regimes. States start to cooperate for a common goal. Out of cooperation, they develop common rules and procedures for decisionmaking and resolving problems without having recourse to arms. They establish institutions and institutionalise these procedures; therefore they would want to continue cooperation. Neo-Realist concern about cheating is met by the Neo-Liberal answer that state behaviour in institutions is a reiterated game, and not one-for-all, hence states would refrain from cheating to avoid punishment. Therefore, gains from cooperation override those from conflict and institutions are sustained [8]. Altogether, these institutions, codes of conduct, rules and norms

form regimes [9]. Liberal theories explain Turkey's membership to the NPT and other nonproliferation regimes: the NPT aims at the total and eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons, and forms the cornerstone of the regime. Non-nuclear-weapon states benefit from negative security assurances and international cooperation to deal with proliferation risks. In terms of security, Turkey's ties to the West, particularly its European Union (EU) perspective constitutes a political constraint, because Turkey is within a liberal zone of security with the West (that is, based on cooperation), and a 'nuclear Turkey' would be disadvantageous to Turkey's EU membership bid.
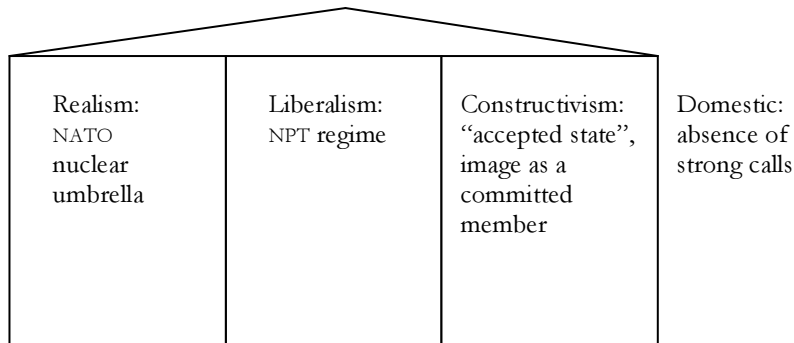
Realism: NATO nuclear umbrella	Liberalism: NPT regime	Constructivism: "accepted state", image as a committed member	Domestic: absence of strong calls

Figure 1. The pillars that make up Turkey's NNWS status

Motivations and constraints with regard to proliferation should also be understood by opening the black box. Decisionmaking theories and organisational theories are helpful in this respect. Bureaucracies and organisations within the state can be effective in motivating or constraining policymakers, because eventually the proliferation decision is taken by governments [10]. In Turkey, the parameters of security policy is basically shaped by the military, and is subject to approval by the National Security Council which has both civilian and military members (chaired by the President, and composed of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers of National Defence, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs, the Chief of the General Staff, Commanders of the Army, Air Force, Navy and the General Commander of the Gendarmerie). Governments are sensitive to the public opinion, especially regarding national security issues. Turkey has attempted several times to transfer civilian nuclear technology in order to be able to generate nuclear power, but it was unsuccessful mainly due to international concerns and economic constraints [11]. There has not been a passionate call from the military, politicians or the public for Turkey to acquire nuclear weapons. However, the picture is transforming since 9/11. The next section looks at the effects of independent variables on Turkey's NNWS status. Overall, Turkey's NNWS policy is depicted schematically in figure 1.

Turkey's position in the post-9/11 world: what has changed?

9/11 is a turning point for the international nuclear nonproliferation regime as a result of the dramatic shift in US foreign and security policy and its impacts on international politics, and on the definition of war and peace. The new security strategy of the United States has a new

definition of threat and response: the new threat is terrorism operating transnationally, seeking WMDs and getting support from states of concern or failed states, mainly through illicit trade of arms and drugs. Terrorists are regarded to wage an apocalyptic war against the United States and the West. Therefore, the United States and its allies aim to prevent these attacks by means that are not limited to military, and can bypass Cold War institutions for swift and effective action. Nuclear weapons are not weapons of last resort in this war against terrorism [12]. Beginning from the Iraq War of 2003, this new strategy deteriorated relations with allies and adversely affected nonproliferation efforts and regimes, for which multilateralism and legitimacy is essential. The Bush administration drew clear lines between 'good and bad', and called Iran, Iraq and North Korea the 'Axis of Evil' [13]. The US stance before the Iraq War adversely affected relations with the allies, and challenged the functioning of international institutions [14]. Iran's nuclear program has been worrisome, and the American position did not help to address the issue. North Korea carried out a successful nuclear test on the grounds of national security reasons. Furthermore, the United States initiated nuclear cooperation with India.

These developments had implications on all three main pillars that sustain Turkey's NNWS position. First – regarding realist explanations which focus on Turkey's NATO deterrent and military power along with the post-Cold War strategic cooperation with the United States and Israel –, the 2003 operation in Iraq demonstrated that the NATO collective defence guarantee would not come automatically, because Turkey's request to bolster its defences in case of an Iraqi aggression was turned down [15]. In addition, the change in the US post-9/11 foreign and security policy affected relations with Turkey severely as a result of a series of misperceptions: Turkey refused to let the US troops use Turkish land for the Iraq Operation on March 1, 2003. On July 4, 2003, Turkish 'Special Forces' in Iraq's north were detained by US counterparts, reportedly due to false intelligence from Kurdish groups [16]. This event (called the 'Hood Event' since the Turkish soldiers were detained and transported with hoods on their heads) caused outrage in the Turkish public because of the significance of the army in the Turkish security culture and that of the Special Forces, which are a special group of soldiers in the Turkish General Staff. Above all, Turkey has been fighting with separatist terrorism by the PKK since the early 1980s, which finds shelter and support in the same region. The war in Iraq led to a power vacuum and terrorist attacks resumed. Turkey's expectations from the United States to address terrorist infiltration from Iraq's north in order to put an end to these attacks were not met for at least four years. This increased resentment and anti-Americanism among the Turkish public. The reports that Israel is also conducting activities in Iraq's north and supporting the Kurdish groups were not well received in Turkey [17]. Last but not least, the public opinion turned very low after the Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians. All these developments resulted in questioning the reliability of the Atlantic Alliance, the United States and Israel. Anti-Americanism and anti-EU positions sentiments rose among the Turkish public following the tension in Turkish-American and Turkish-EU relations.

Second, in 2003, it was revealed that Iran had made important failures in meeting the requirements of the safeguards agreement with the IAEA, and that the United States could not prevent North Korea to produce nuclear weapons and to withdraw from NPT membership. Turkey feels very strongly about the nuclear nonproliferation regime and the NPT, but these developments undermine the effective functioning of the regime and of the Treaty. Therefore, non-nuclear-weapon states started to question the effectiveness and meaning of the Treaty,

and that of the UN to deal with such cases. Iran and Turkey have had tough relations, and the absence of conflict owes to the rough strategic balance. If the international community cannot prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, it will create strong proliferation dynamics in the Middle East.

Third, Iran's nuclear program and North Korea's withdrawal relate to the significance of nuclear weapons for the status of a state, and the international norms that evolved through the regime. Although they were included in the 'Axis of Evil' as the states of concern, if the international community would sink into acquiescence after the acquisition of nuclear weapons and withdrawal from the Treaty, that would affect the norms of the regime: possession of nuclear weapons would be considered as an act that could go with impunity, and non-possession as a security deficiency.

As a result, Turkish nonproliferation experts point to the possibility that Turkey may want to have the basic infrastructure to have a nuclear option, and may choose to go nuclear when needed and not be constrained by an ineffective Treaty [18]. However, it should be underlined that proliferation is a political decision, and that Turkish policymakers would need to go through a cost-benefit analysis – which is addressed in the next section.

Prospects and recommendations

Turkey has recently announced its decision to transfer civilian nuclear technology for energy purposes – the latest attempt in the past four decades. There are views supporting and opposing such transfer from energy and security viewpoints. What is relevant to this study is that there are those in several circles that view this transfer as a technological capability that would give Turkey a nuclear option in case its current policy converges to a security deficiency as a result of international and regional developments [19]. The assessment of such a view is the subject of another study, but it should be underlined that post-9/11 developments, that is, deteriorating relations with the United States and Israel, doubts about NATO, growing anti-Americanism and anti-EU sentiments, Iran's nuclear program and North Korea's recent test, resulted in questions over Turkey's non-nuclear-weapon state status particularly in terms of the effectiveness of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, and the reliability of Turkey's alliances vis-à-vis the rising proliferation of WMD in the region.

On the other hand, a decision for Turkey's acquisition of nuclear weapons would not be a rational choice: if Turkey would decide to go nuclear, international pressure would be intense. Turkey is already a candidate to the EU, and has a membership perspective, which ties Turkey firmly to the West and the Western liberal zone. Becoming an EU/EC member has been a state policy, based on the modernisation process dating back to the Ottoman times. Turkey's nuclear aspirations would jeopardise this process and would have high political costs. Likewise, it would have adverse effects on relations with the United States, which is an indispensable ally despite all the tensions. Economic sanctions would be applied to the already sensitive Turkish economy, which would impair micro and macro balances. Condemnation and isolation from the international community would be unbearable militarily, politically and economically. What is more, the place of nuclear weapons in the military strategy is doubtful, that is, against which country would Turkey use it or threaten to use it? If it were Iran, there are other more powerful international and regional actors. Turkey has other leverages that it could use against Iran in diplomatic relations. Last but not least, it would make Turkey a target [20].

What would draw Turkey into making a choice would not only be questions on its alliances and threat perceptions. Turkey's difference from the other states in the Middle East, which are concerned about Iran's nuclear program, is its EU perspective. Turkey is materially and ideationally between the East and the West. Its EU prospects keep the country in cooperative mechanisms to address security issues. If this perspective is lost, it is highly likely that it will be drawn into the Realist zone of international security in the East, and could base its security policy on material capabilities. Considering the status of relations with the United States and the instability in the region, the country could be motivated to seek self-sufficiency, and perhaps to seek a nuclear weapons capability. Most of the issues that are brought forward in the United States and the EU accession negotiations touch upon Turkey's national security referents, basically social and territorial integrity, which lead the country to take a defensive position and to prioritise its security interests over political goals. Thus, it is integral to understand Turkey's security concerns, and to keep it in the Western liberal zone of security.

The cases of Iran and North Korea and the way they have been tackled are not promising for a vigorous nuclear nonproliferation regime. The US policy after 9/11 has not been very helpful: the new strategy does not rule out the use of nuclear weapons, hence it legitimises them as an instrument of statecraft. On the other hand, there were proposals to revise the NPT in a way that would prevent proliferation by denying the transfer of sensitive technologies (which were also endorsed by the Director General of the IAEA [21]), but the proposed amendments are likely to be opposed on the grounds that it would not strengthen the Treaty, and rather lead to rifts, mainly due to economic concerns [22]. Multilateralism is pivotal in keeping a strong regime. As the United States gave up working by consensus following 9/11, relations with allies soured, leading to a tendency to shift from the neo-liberal bases of international politics to a more realist one, in which states would be inclined to provide self-help and turn inwards, as it is the case with Iran and North Korea. Nuclear weapons have been those of deterrence, and to keep it stable, the United States and the Soviet Union had spent great effort. New nuclear powers will be inexperienced in crisis management, which would increase risks of misuse or accident.

Notes

1. Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey, Journal of International Affairs 54 (1) (2000) 200-208.
2. For details, see Şebnem Udum, Missile proliferation and missile defense: Turkey and missile defenses, Turkish Studies 4 (3) (2003) 71-102.
3. Turkish Ministry of Defence, Turkey's National Defense Policy and Military Strategy, White Paper, Part IV, Section I, 2000.
4. See Ali Karaosmanoğlu and Mustafa Kibaroğlu, Defense reform in Turkey, in: Istvan Gyarmati and Theodor Winkler (Eds.), Post-Cold War Defense Reform: Lessons Learned in Europe and the United States, Brassey's, Washington, DC, 2002, pp. 135-164.
5. For an analysis of theories explaining nuclear proliferation, see Tanya Ogilvie-White, Is there a theory of nuclear proliferation? An analysis of the contemporary debate, The Nonproliferation Review (Fall 1996), 43-60; Scott Sagan, Why do states build nuclear weapons? Three models in search of a bomb, International Security 21 (3) (Winter 1996/1997), 54-86.

6.   Daniel Deudney, Dividing realism: structural realism versus security materialism on nuclear security and proliferation, in: Z.S. Davis and B. Frankel (Eds.), The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results, Frank Cass, London, 1993, pp. 20-21; Benjamin Frankel, The brooding shadow: systemic incentives and nuclear weapons proliferation, in ibid., pp. 37-78; John M. Deutsch, The new nuclear threat, Foreign Affairs 71 (1992) 120-134; George Schultz, Preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, Department of State Bulletin 84 (December 1984) 17-21; Michael M. May, Nuclear weapons supply and demand, American Scientist 82 (6) (1994) 526-537; Bradley A. Thayer, The causes of nuclear proliferation and the nonproliferation regime, Security Studies 4 (3) (1995) 463-519; Richard Betts, Paranoids, pygmies, pariahs, and nonproliferation revisited, in: Z.S. Davis and B. Frankel (Eds.), The Proliferation Puzzle: Why Nuclear Weapons Spread and What Results, Frank Cass, London, 1993, pp. 100-124; David Gompert, Kenneth Watman and Dean Wilkening, Nuclear first-use revisited, Survival 37 (3) (1995) 27-44.

7.   Alexander Wendt, Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics, International Organization 46 (2) (1992) 391-425; Bill McSweeney, Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

8.   David Baldwin (Ed.), Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism: The Contemporary Debate, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993.

9.   Robert Jervis, Cooperation under the security dilemma, World Politics 30 (1978) 167-214; Robert Jervis, Security regimes, in: Stephen Krasner (Ed.), International Regimes, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1983, pp. 173-194.

10. Scott Sagan, The perils of proliferation: organization theory, deterrence theory and the spread of nuclear weapons, International Security 18 (Spring 1994) 66-107; Stephen M. Meyer, The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984.

11. See Mustafa Kibaroglu, Turkey's quest for peaceful nuclear power, Nonproliferation Review 4 (3) (1997) 33-44.

12. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, The White House, Washington, DC, September 2002. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf).

13. President Bush's Remarks, Address to a Joint Session of the Congress and the American People, United States Capitol, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html).

14. When the European countries and the members of the UN Security Council considered to discuss an operation in Iraq, the United States, which was seeking swift action, saw the UN as a 'forum of discussion', and some European countries as 'the old Europe'. See 'Post-War Iraq and Beyond: The UN's Role, United States Institute of Peace', June 17, 2003 (http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2003/0617_ESun.html); 'Rumsfeld: France, Germany are 'problems' in Iraqi Conflict', CNN, January 23, 2003 (http://edition.cnn.com/2003/

15. WORLD/meast/01/22/sprj.irq.wrap). Although the NATO Article V is invoked after meetings
     in NATO, and the NATO support arrived, the deliberations before the Iraq

War in 2003 created doubts about commitment of the Alliance to Turkey's security.

16. Although this happened because of the conflict of interest among members about the Iraq Operation itself, it was recognised that rifts in NATO would jeopardise Turkey's security.

17. Çuval Olayı'nın Kilit İsmi Konuştu (The Key Name of the 'Hood Event' Talked), Hürriyet, December 18, 2006 (http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/5632219.asp?m=1).

18. Magdi Abdelhadi, Israelis 'train Kurdish forces', BBC News, September 20, 2006 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5364982.stm); İsrailli Kuzey Irak Turunda (Israelis in Northern Iraq Tour), Radikal, December 30, 2005 (http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=174406); İsrail Kuzey Irak'a Askeri Kamp Kurmuş! (Israel Establishes Military Camp in Northern Iraq!), Platform Dergisi, June 23, 2006 (http://www.platformdergisi.net/news/detail.php?id=1519).

19. Mustafa Kibaroglu, Iran's Nuclear Program May Trigger Young Turks to Think Nuclear, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 20, 2004.

20. The author's interviews with some retired military personnel, the remarks by former ministers from the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), views of Mr. Ali Külebi, Chairman of TUSAM (Turkish National Security Strategies Research Center) and articles by Mr. Doğan Heper, a columnist in the Milliyet daily, suggest that the threats to Turkey's national security in the region and beyond may necessitate Turkey to seek self-sufficiency, hence it may be wise to have the technological infrastructure.

21. Mustafa Kibaroğlu, Kitle İmha Silahlarının Yayılması Sorunu ve Türkiye (The Issue of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Turkey), Doğu-Batı (August-October 2003) 134-142.

22. See the remarks of the Director General, Mr. Mohammad El Baradei, 'Nuclear Nonproliferation: Responding to a Changing Landscape', 18 May 2006. (http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Statements/2006/ebsp2006n007.html).

23. Considering the nuclear suppliers and the potential clients, like Russia and Iran, there are likely to be differences of interest between the United States and Russia regarding amendments to the Treaty.