Executive Summary

This paper considers why states with nuclear weapons have relinquished them and why others which could have developed nuclear weapons have not done so. Studying past motivations for giving up the nuclear option may suggest ways in which the international community might encourage such decisions in the future. Historically, there has been a multiplicity of reasons behind decisions to relinquish or renounce nuclear weapons. It is possible, nonetheless, to discern commonalities.

First, the desire for enhanced international recognition and acceptance is a powerful motivation behind nuclear forbearance. Second, the decision to renounce or relinquish nuclear weapons is dynamic and mutable; international efforts must be similarly flexible and creative. Third, internal factors—such as democratization and leadership—can create unique entry points for the international community to encourage nuclear forbearance. Fourth, a diffusion of regional tensions is usually necessary to persuade states to disavow the nuclear weapons option. Even bitter regional rivals and antagonists have historically forgone nuclear escalation through policies that build trust and goodwill and that increase economic cooperation. Fifth, the international community must maintain a committed and consistent opposition to nuclear acquisition in order to uphold the norms that serve to dissuade countries from pursuing the nuclear weapons option. Sixth, the involvement and influence of the United States is necessary to sustain continued nonproliferation and disarmament efforts. Seventh, vulnerability to a perceived regional or global enemy remains the driving force behind consideration of the nuclear weapons option; thus, successful nonproliferation efforts will seek to enhance a country’s security environment.
Since the advent of the nuclear era, thirty-three countries have had known or suspected nuclear weapon programs or have seriously considered acquiring nuclear weapons.¹ Nine of these states currently have nuclear weapons. The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) recognizes five of them—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States—as ‘official’ nuclear weapon states, while the remaining four—India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea—are not party to the NPT, but in practice are acknowledged by the international community as possessing nuclear weapons.

Remarkably, though, the other twenty-four countries have renounced the nuclear weapons option and joined the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states. While some simply gave up the theoretical option of acquiring nuclear weapons, having taken no practical steps towards this goal, others dismantled research programs, relinquished inherited weapons or (in the sole case of South Africa) gave up nuclear weapons they had indigenously produced after great effort and expense. The cost-benefit analysis involved has thus varied enormously across the range of cases.

A further complication that arises in a study of this kind is how to determine the motivations of states with no admitted nuclear weapons ambitions but with a purportedly peaceful nuclear research program. There is often a fine line between a program dedicated to exploring the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and one that strays into weapons-related research.² Laboratory experiments with plutonium are an example. In the early days of the nuclear age, especially before the advent of nuclear safeguards designed to prevent the diversion of materials and technology from peaceful to military purposes, states and their institutions were less cognizant of the implications of such work. This study thus focuses on clear-cut instances of states which were known to be conducting at least nascent nuclear weapons-related research as part of a broadly defined nuclear research program.

This paper examines the motivations of states that are known to have abjured the bomb. A case study approach is adopted in order to explore whether commonalities in decision-making might be identified. This may suggest entry points for the international community to influence such decisions in the future.

The case studies identified for their particular illustrative power, in rough chronological order of their decision to abjure nuclear weapons, are: Sweden; South Africa; Argentina and Brazil; the three former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan; and Libya.

Sweden is examined because, in spite of its long history of defence self-sufficiency, it judged that maintaining its non-nuclear weapon status in the framework of a vigorous multilateral nonproliferation and disarmament regime would be a better guarantee of its security and traditional neutrality. South Africa was selected as the only state, to date, to have voluntarily surrendered its indigenously developed nuclear arsenal. Argentina and Brazil together provide an

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance and advice of Dr Trevor Findlay, Director, Canadian Centre for Treaty Compliance in overseeing this paper, and the support of Justin Alger, Administrator and Researcher, Canadian Centre for Treaty Compliance.

States with nuclear weapons aspirations, past and present

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*This column does not differentiate between aspirations towards nuclear weapons that, on the one hand, resulted only in policy discussions (as in the case of Australia and Norway, for instance) and, on the other hand, aspirations resulting in a research program, either fleeting and exploratory (as in the case of South Korea) or dedicated and deliberate (as in the case of Brazil). This is due to the difficulties inherent in determining to what extent a general nuclear research program has strayed into nuclear weapons research. For example, both Egypt and South Korea have been discovered to have experimented with plutonium in the past, but both have denied having a nuclear weapons program. Canada conducted nuclear weapons-related research, but in the context of the Manhattan Project, not as a national weapons research effort.

† Some observers have additional states on their lists, including Greece, Indonesia and Turkey. In 1963, US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara presented President Kennedy with a list of states with ‘a scientific community and industry to support nuclear programs’ which also included East Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. See Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: the Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2007, p. 71. There is no current evidence that these states actually embarked on a nuclear weapons program. Since then, of course, many more states have acquired what is known as a ‘latent’ nuclear weapons capability through the normal process of industrialization.
instance of a dyadic relationship which appeared headed towards mutual nuclear deterrence but which pulled back in favour of verified bilateral nuclear restraint and deepening security and economic cooperation. The three former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan will be examined collectively due to their unique experience of giving up inherited nuclear weapons. Finally, Libya’s renunciation of its nuclear weapons program will be analyzed because it is relatively recent and because it seems to have made its decision due to considerable international pressure.

**Select case studies**

**Sweden: neutrality more secure without nuclear weapons**

Since the Napoleonic era, Sweden has fiercely guarded its independence through a foreign policy committed to non-alignment in peace and neutrality in war, and maintenance of a defence policy that stressed a strong independent deterrent capability. These characteristics permitted Sweden to emerge from World War II relatively unscathed. With the advent of the Cold War, Sweden’s greatest security challenge lay in its proximity to a nuclear-armed and increasingly belligerent Soviet Union. This raised the question of whether nuclear weapons might be useful for Swedish defence. While the Swedes realized that they would never be able to achieve nuclear weapons parity with the Soviets, a minimal deterrent might give them pause. Moreover, tactical nuclear weapons might deter a conventional Soviet attack on Sweden by inducing the invading force to be widely dispersed, rendering them more vulnerable to conventional Swedish capability. At the end of World War II, Sweden certainly possessed the industrial and technological capacity to produce nuclear weapons. During the 1950s and 1960s, rapid economic advancement gave it an even more significant latent technological potential for doing so.

Within this strategic and historical context, it is unsurprising that Sweden started its own nuclear research program immediately after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, making its program almost as old as that of France. The debate over the nuclear weapons option was initially limited to an exclusive circle of elites within the Swedish military, political and scientific communities. This secretiveness ended in 1954 when the Swedish Supreme Commander openly called for acquisition. Once the program was revealed, there was vigorous political debate, including in the Swedish parliament, where some Conservatives agitated for research leading to the development of nuclear weapons. The Swedish nuclear weapons option was effectively finished in 1968 when the government declared—with parliamentary support—that acquisition was no longer in Sweden’s interests.

Swedish public opinion apparently came to the realization that nuclear weapons would jeopardize, rather than enhance Swedish strategies of nonalignment in peace and neutrality in war. The government and military jointly concluded that a nuclear weapons capacity would

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attract unnecessary and dangerous attention from the Soviets, and, in the event of nuclear war, make Sweden a likely candidate for a preemptive nuclear strike. Even the benefits of tactical nuclear weapons were outweighed by the risk that, if used in war against their invading forces, the Soviets would be unlikely to perceive this as purely defensive. In such circumstances, Sweden would face devastating nuclear retaliation, thus defeating the most elementary purpose of Swedish neutrality.6

This is the Catch-22 of nuclear acquisition, a dilemma that has affected the decisions of many countries in regions of strategic contention, such as the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan. Even a tactical nuclear weapons capacity, designed to prevent and or foil an attack, would increase suspicion and ensure that in the event of conflict these countries would more likely be readily targeted for total destruction.

Swedish policy towards nuclear weapons was strongly influenced by the Swedish disposition towards conflict resolution and multilateral solutions to international problems. This national character trait was represented in government by the Social Democratic Party, dominant in Swedish politics after World War II. Yet Sweden’s activism on the question of nuclear disarmament is arguably in pursuit of hard-nosed strategic objectives as much as humanitarian and ethical ones.

The Swedish solution was to give up the nuclear option; maintain a strong conventional military force (spending on which may have been jeopardized by an expensive nuclear weapons program), sustained by significant exports of military equipment, including jet fighters; and stay out of NATO. It also sought to maintain a studied distance from the United States on such controversial issues as the Vietnam War. In addition, it became active in nuclear arms control and disarmament efforts, including by funding the establishment of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and an often hyperactive role at the United Nations and in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Sweden was prominent in negotiations on the NPT and became one of the first countries to sign and ratify it (in 1968 and 1970, respectively). Sweden’s unilateral renunciation of the bomb in 1968 was thus coincident with, and clearly done in the framework of, the opening for signature of the NPT as a vehicle for constraining nuclear proliferation and winding back existing nuclear arsenals. Here was a case of arms control as a motivation for, or at least complementing a pre-disposition towards, nuclear restraint.

Sweden is thus particularly embittered by the fact that the quid pro quo for it and other non-nuclear weapon states surrendering the nuclear option—nuclear disarmament by the nuclear weapon states—has not been fulfilled. Paradoxically, so skeptical were they that the nuclear weapon states would disarm that they joined West Germany and Italy during the NPT negotiations in hedging their nuclear bets by insisting that a state party be allowed to withdraw from the treaty on three months’ notice if it felt its ‘supreme interests’ were jeopardized.7 The Swedish case thus reinforces the perception that one of the critical ways to discourage states

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6 Paul, p. 89.
from considering or reconsidering the nuclear option is for the nuclear weapon states to fulfill all of their obligations under the NPT.

**South Africa: the interconnection between internal and external factors**

The development by South Africa in the 1980s of a small nuclear arsenal, comprising six nuclear weapons, was driven by the perception that the country faced an existential threat, both internally and externally. The apartheid regime saw itself involved in a perpetual struggle against a perpetual enemy, whose objectives were the dismantling of the South African state. Low-intensity military operations by anti-apartheid movements in its border regions, coupled with the hostile and in some cases Marxist inclinations of its neighbours, contributed to the regime’s siege mentality. Aggravating South Africa’s paranoia was, first, its inability to rejoin the Western alliance system to which it had belonged in World War II, and, second, the international sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council and the Commonwealth due to its apartheid policies. The ultimate fear of the apartheid regime was that its struggle against its challengers would result in a level of regional and even continental instability that would invite the direct and sustained intervention of the Soviet Union, which, along with its ally Cuba, was already supporting the anti-apartheid forces.

These factors contributed to the growing militarization of the South African state and hastened the conclusion that only an independent nuclear deterrent could ultimately guarantee the security of the South African state. (South Africa also pursued other so-called weapons of mass destruction: chemical and biological). South Africa apparently had a, somewhat incoherent, ‘three-phase’ nuclear strategy designed to:

1) deter potential enemies through a policy of neither confirming nor denying its nuclear capability (although how it could credibly do this without revealing the existence of its nuclear weapons is a mystery);
2) force the hand of the US to intervene on its behalf if it were ever faced with imminent attack by publicly revealing its nuclear capability; and,
3) if all else failed, demonstrate capability and resolve by conducting nuclear tests.

Yet if the South Africans truly believed that the Soviet Union might directly attack it, it is hard to see how such a small arsenal would provide a credible deterrent, especially since South Africa had no means of delivering them against the Soviet Union. Even tactically, it is difficult to see how nuclear weapons could have been used against the guerrilla bands that were waging war on its frontiers, although presumably South Africa could have threatened the so-called Front-Line states, such as Zambia and Zimbabwe, which were supporting the guerrillas. Thus, South Africa’s strategic goal in obtaining nuclear weapons, at least at the outset, appears to have been more political than military.

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South African President F.W. de Klerk’s electoral victory in September 1989 ‘signaled the end of the nuclear weapons program’. On 26 February 1990, he issued internal orders to terminate the effort and to dismantle all weapons. This was completed just days before a comprehensive safeguards agreement was signed with the IAEA in 1991, after which the Agency sought to verify South Africa’s disarmament. Although South Africa acceded to the NPT in 1991, it was not until March 1993, in a speech to parliament, that de Klerk revealed the existence of the dismantled program.

The fact that the program was seemingly more political than military in intent may help explain the apparent ease with which de Klerk was able to make the decision to disarm. There were multiple incentives to do so. Even in the early 1970s there were powerful voices within the apartheid establishment that spoke out in opposition to the development of nuclear weapons, contending that they would frustrate South Africa’s long-term strategic objective: integration with the Western political and economic alliance system. Moreover, the US and its Western allies had revealed their staunch opposition to a South African nuclear weapons capacity on several occasions, and the government had responded. Notably, in 1977, South Africa abandoned plans to test a nuclear device in the Kalahari Desert after Soviet satellites detected its preparations and Western countries warned that such a test would lead to even more international opprobrium than it was already suffering.

But the greatest motivating factor was the end of apartheid, which promised to end South Africa’s international isolation and transform its strategic situation. In his speech in 1993 setting out the rationale behind South Africa’s rejection of nuclear weapons, de Klerk indicated that internal and external developments had ameliorated the country’s security environment: the Cold War had ended and with it the spectre of ‘total onslaught’ that so petrified the apartheid regime. The withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola and the resolution of the status of its neighbours, including the independence of Namibia, also favoured South Africa’s external relations. De Klerk may also have been motivated by a racially-motivated wariness about allowing nuclear weapons to fall into the hands of a government led by the African National Congress. But above all, in foreseeing the inevitable end of the apartheid system, de Klerk apparently perceived nuclear weapons as a liability that jeopardized South Africa’s ability to integrate itself into the international community. This perception was revealed by his observation that, ‘A nuclear deterrent had become not only superfluous but in fact an obstacle to the development of South Africa’s international relations’.

While perhaps not one of de Klerk’s motivations, South Africa has subsequently enjoyed international acclaim as the only state to voluntarily dismantle an indigenous nuclear arsenal. Its decision to immediately codify its decision by acceding to the NPT was widely applauded. Its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its verification of the country’s nuclear disarmament was path-breaking and exemplary. The entire process has burnished South Africa’s credentials in Africa, within the nonaligned movement, and at

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10 Cirincione et al., p. 410.
12 Reiss, p. 20.
13 Reiss, p. 32.
international fora including the United Nations and the Conference on Disarmament. It gives South Africa moral stature in criticizing the remaining nuclear weapon states for their inaction in fulfilling their nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

The South African case points to the varied motivations for states seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, which should help reveal how they might be weaned away from such a decision. International pressure on South Africa to forego nuclear weapons was to no avail as long as its paranoia remained. When its internal and external conditions changed, induced in part through international pressure over apartheid, this removed the justification for retaining nuclear weapons. This has clear implications for current countries of concern, notably Iran, Syria and North Korea.

**Argentina and Brazil: bilateral cooperation supplants nuclear proliferation**

Although neither country developed nuclear weapons, Argentina and Brazil maintained the option for over thirty years.¹⁴ This was partly due to bilateral rivalry and antagonism, but also a desire for international prestige. While tensions between Argentina and Brazil never approached the intractability that has defined other great dyadic geopolitical rivalries, such as that between India and Pakistan or the two Koreas, the period from the Peronist era in Argentina in the 1940s to the collapse of their respective military dictatorships in the 1980s was defined by bilateral distrust and competition. Brazil, even while flaunting its international and regional aspirations, suspected that Argentina was attempting to prevent its emergence as regional hegemon. Argentina feared being economically and politically subsumed by the size and power of its Brazilian neighbour. Within this context, Argentina apparently considered nuclear weapons as a means of balancing Brazil’s dominance in conventional weapons.¹⁵ Such concerns led to a ‘zero-sum’ competition as both countries escalated their nuclear energy programs, further contributing to each country’s alarm about losing a political, technological and potentially military advantage. Maintaining the nuclear weapons option was strongly supported in both countries by successive military dictatorships, with their attendant fixation on security.

The return to civilian rule ushered in a new paradigm that facilitated the establishment of relations built on trust and cooperation, leading both countries to perceive the nuclear weapons option as an impediment to regional stability and security. Nevertheless, it took several more years before civilian rule was consolidated over the Brazilian military, which seemed driven by the perception that Brazil’s international stature would be enhanced by nuclear weapons (as well as by acquiring nuclear-powered submarines that would use domestically enriched uranium). This was also true for the Argentinean military, which was still smarting from its defeat at the hands of a nuclear-armed foe, the United Kingdom, in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War.

In 1990, Brazil took the first step by renouncing its secret nuclear weapons program and undertaking a series of measures towards binding nonproliferation commitments.¹⁶ On 17 September 1990, President Fernando Color de Mello closed Brazil’s Cachimbo nuclear test site.

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¹⁵ Paul, p 101.

¹⁶ Cirincione *et al.*, p. 396.
The Argentinean civilian leadership proved amenable to the realization that sparking an arms race with its much larger and more powerful neighbour would exhaust and undermine Argentina’s stature in the world. By acknowledging Brazil’s regional leadership, Argentina improved its own political and economic prospects by facilitating an increasingly cooperative bilateral relationship based on mutual security and mutual economic growth.

In 1994 Argentina and Brazil together brought into force for themselves the application of the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, which had established a nuclear weapon-free zone in Latin America. Refusal by both countries to fully implement this treaty had been a leading source of international and regional consternation regarding their nuclear motivations, especially as neither had joined the NPT. Even after resolving the Tlatelolco issue both governments continued to resist the NPT because they perceived it as infringing on the rights of developing countries to pursue nuclear technology, while at the same time entrenching the position of the nuclear weapon states. At least in the case of Brazil, public opinion was firmly behind this stance.

Because of this shared historic opposition to the NPT, but still recognizing the need to provide assurances about their non-nuclear intentions to each other and to the world, Argentina and Brazil established an unprecedented bilateral system of nonproliferation verification. In 1991 they established the Argentine-Brazil Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), designed to verify that the nuclear activities in both countries are used exclusively for peaceful purposes. The IAEA joined ABACC and the two states in a quadripartite agreement that gives the IAEA a role in verifying the bilateral safeguards arrangement. ABACC thus institutionalized the confidence and cooperation that Brazil and Argentina had developed through the 1980s as they escalated their interaction in the nuclear field, notably through increasing numbers of official and technical visits to each other’s nuclear installations.

While economic issues were not at the heart of their mutual nuclear forbearance, Argentinean-Brazilian rapprochement, which began with nuclear issues, was instrumental in laying the foundation for developing relationships in other fields, notably in the area of trade, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of El Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR) or the Southern Cone Common Market.

The accession of Argentina and Brazil to the NPT in 1995 and 1996, respectively, ended decades of international suspicion about the motives behind their nuclear energy programs. The factors that contributed to their eventual decision to do so were complex. The strong personalities of their civilian leaders was instrumental in overcoming entrenched military interest in maintaining the nuclear weapons option. Wider national ambitions also played a role. Argentina desired to end its isolation after the Falklands/Malvinas War and to integrate itself into the global political economy, while Brazil was emerging as an aspirant to permanent membership of the UN Security Council, which it had long argued should not be exclusively a preserve of nuclear weapon states. The end of the Cold War had diminished the relevance of the non-aligned

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18 Brazil signed the treaty in 1967 and ratified it in 1968, but had not declared a waiver to bring it into force for itself; Argentina also signed in 1967 but did not ratify it until 1994, shortly before depositing its waiver.
19 Reiss, p. 58.
movement, and the Brazilian civilian administration viewed regional—and eventual global—economic cooperation as a more viable means of achieving Brazilian leadership. These strategic objectives required benign and trusting relations with regional countries, impossible without Brazilian nuclear forbearance.

The failure of Brazil and Argentina to join the NPT, even though they had renounced nuclear weapons through bilateral and regional agreements, was also continuing to impede relations with the US, which had pressed them for decades to join the treaty. The absence of these two states from the NPT became increasingly glaring as the treaty approached universality, ultimately leaving at the time only Cuba, India, Israel and Pakistan (and later North Korea) as holdouts. Brazil and Argentina may have been motivated by a desire to avoid this list of strange bedfellows.

Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine: nuclear disarmament for political and economic payoffs

The three countries that inherited nuclear weapons from the dissolving Soviet Union—Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine—are anomalies due to the unique circumstances of the end of the Cold War. Apart from South Africa, they are the only countries that have actually relinquished nuclear weapons. Their behavior suggests that international pressure is effective when employed in a way that facilitates—not frustrates—a country’s national interests and aspirations. They all ultimately came to perceive their unexpected possession of nuclear weapons as an impediment to their national security rather than as a windfall. All relinquished their nuclear weapons in order to ameliorate their political and economic circumstances at a time when they felt vulnerable and precarious in their newfound sovereignty.

Belarus

Of the three states, only Belarus made clear from the outset of its independence that it intended to relinquish its nuclear weapons to Russia. Its nuclear arsenal comprised 81 single-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and an unknown number of tactical nuclear weapons. Although it expressed displeasure that Russia was not adequately consulting it about the logistics and timing of the removal process, it never deviated from its disarmament trajectory.

The most compelling reason for this eagerness to disarm was the painful legacy of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor disaster which, even though it occurred on Ukrainian territory, had contaminated twenty percent of Belarus’s territory. The political fallout from this incident apparently instilled in the population a distaste for all things nuclear, including nuclear weapons.20

Belarus also gave up the chance of a permanent nuclear arsenal for more practical, strategic reasons. The government feared that a nuclear-armed Belarus would be a target of a nuclear first-strike if hostilities broke out between Russia and NATO. It also believed that its long-term strategic prospects would be frustrated without a policy of accommodation with Russia; this required a relatively benign and low-profile military posture. Russia and Belarus from the outset of independence had a close relationship, even at one stage considering a political union. This undoubtedly facilitated the expeditious transfer of nuclear weapons to Russia. Taking no

20 Reiss, p. 130.
chances, the US encouraged this trajectory by providing technical assistance and financial incentives that served to whet ‘Minsk’s’ appetite for additional aid’ on ratification of START,\(^{21}\) the Lisbon documents, and the NPT.\(^{22}\)

The bilateral US-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) provided for strategic nuclear reductions by both superpowers. Since the treaty had been finalized in July 1991, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December of that year, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine had not been named as parties, even though they now possessed part of the nuclear arsenal that would be subject to reductions. The Lisbon Protocol was thus negotiated to encompass the new reality by recognizing the three countries (along with Russia) as successors to the Soviet Union for the purposes of nuclear arms control. Belarus signed the Lisbon Protocol in 1992 and acceded to the NPT in 1993.

As the first of the three to relinquish its Soviet nuclear weapons, Belarus demonstrated to Kazakhstan and Ukraine that the international community would deliver tangible political and economic benefits if they did likewise. It also helped create political momentum and pressure on the other two states to follow its lead.

**Kazakhstan**

The rhetoric and policies emerging from Kazakhstan during the early years of its independence indicated an ambivalent strategic outlook that was worrisome to both Russia and the US. Notably, Kazakhstan appeared uncertain about how to reconcile its newfound sovereignty with its inherited nuclear weapons in a way that served its interests. The size of its inherited arsenal was significant, comprising between 1,200 and 1,400 nuclear warheads for ICBMs and heavy bombers.\(^{23}\) It was not clear whether it would willingly relinquish this apparent military and strategic asset.

Kazakhstan’s choices regarding nuclear disarmament were shaped by its security environment, which was dominated by the looming presence of nuclear-armed Russia and China. Relations with China were contentious due to territorial disputes, and Kazakhstan feared that relinquishing nuclear weapons would make it susceptible to Chinese coercion. The brokering of a collective security arrangement in 1992 at Tashkent with Russia and other former Soviet republics in the form of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) partly alleviated this concern.

The Kazakh government also sought reassurance in a strong relationship with the United States. Given US opposition to the emergence of additional nuclear weapon states following the break-up of the Soviet Union, retaining a nuclear weapons capacity was a significant impediment to the establishment of such relations. The US was able to encourage Kazakh disarmament by promising improved relations if Kazakhstan proceeded. The tipping point occurred in 1993 when Vice President Al Gore met with President Nursultan Nazarbayev and promised that an official visit to Washington would be arranged after Kazakhstan’s accession to the NPT.\(^ {24}\)

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\(^{22}\) Reiss, p. 135.


\(^{24}\) Reiss, p. 149.
employment of ‘dollar diplomacy’ was also effective in inducing Kazakhstan’s compliance. In 1994, President Bill Clinton promised that its economic aid to Kazakhstan would be tripled. In addition, the US gave Kazakhstan some $US84 million to offset dismantlement costs.

Internal dynamics also played a significant role in the unfolding of Kazakhstan’s disarmament. First, the existence of a substantial ethnic Russian population in the country provided impetus for a cooperative foreign policy towards Russia. Second, the legacy of Soviet nuclear testing on Kazakh territory (which hosted the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, one of two operated by the Soviet Union) also ensured that the Kazakh population and government were painfully aware of the high costs—political, physical and psychological—associated with a nuclear weapons capacity. Non-governmental protests to close Semipalatinsk ensured that anti-nuclear sentiment was a factor in Kazakh politics.


Ukraine
When Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991, it inherited between 4,000 and 5,000 tactical and strategic nuclear weapons, including some 200 strategic delivery systems, comprising 44 heavy bombers with long-range air-launched cruise missiles and ICBMs equipped with multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles. This constituted the world’s third largest nuclear arsenal after those of Russia and the US. This deeply rattled the Russians, since it was contrary to their traditional treatment of Ukraine as an indivisible part of Russia, and also because it was viewed as a direct challenge to Russian security. This prompted Russia to apply pressure on Ukraine to return the weapons—a stance which in turn rattled many Ukrainian officials, some of whom viewed a nuclear capability as necessary to deter Russia.

The US government under President George H. W. Bush expressed strong concern about this situation, presumably because many of the strategic nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory were aimed at the United States, but also because it did not wish to see additional nuclear weapon states emerge from the Soviet Union’s disintegration.

In December 1991, four months after Ukraine achieved its independence, the CIS produced an Agreement on Joint Measures on Nuclear Arms wherein Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk agreed to relinquish Ukraine’s tactical nuclear weapons to Russia by 1 July 1992, and to join the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. In its elation and inexperience, however, Ukraine’s negotiators failed to secure Russian compensation for the highly enriched uranium (HEU) in the warheads that were being returned to Russia. An upsurge in public and parliamentary distrust of Russia prompted Kravchuk to call for a suspension of the withdrawal process, which the Russians simply ignored. This further aggravated Ukrainian insecurities, and seemed to make

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Kravchuk less inclined to continue the disarmament process, which resulted in Russian accusations of Ukrainian recklessness.\textsuperscript{27} Ukraine’s relationship with Russia was particularly contentious at this time due to the disputed status of the Crimea and disagreements over the disposition of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet based at Sevastopol.

As bilateral Ukrainian-Russian negotiations deteriorated, the US became increasingly involved in the efforts to ensure repatriation of the nuclear weaponry to Russia. As American involvement escalated, Ukrainian vacillation on its nuclear disarmament seemed designed to extract as much compensation as possible. There was also fear in Ukraine that the US would no longer be interested in Ukraine—or Ukrainian security—after the nuclear weapons were returned; this made Kravchuk hesitant to continue disarmament until Ukrainian security concerns were ameliorated. American diplomatic efforts under President Clinton shifted from being limited to the nuclear weapons issue to a multidimensional approach that served to assure Ukraine of America’s sustained commitment to it.

American efforts culminated in the 1994 Trilateral Agreement between the US, Russia and Ukraine which, among other financial and technical incentives, established a framework for financial compensation for the HEU in the tactical nuclear weapons already returned to Russia. More importantly, Russia agreed to recognize and respect Ukrainian territoriality and sovereignty. This was a significant political and symbolic triumph for Ukraine, and decreased Ukrainian fears about Russian intentions. The US and the UK joined Russia at this time in assuring Ukraine that they would not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine.

Ukraine gained increased international stature in 1992 by signing START and the Lisbon Protocol. Despite Ukrainian discontent, the US had insisted that the protocol include the dicta that Ukraine (and Belarus and Kazakhstan) would accede to the NPT ‘in the shortest possible time’. Ukraine acceded to the NPT in 1994 as a non-nuclear weapon state.

In the end, the Ukrainian leadership recognized that nuclear weapons would only exacerbate tensions with Russia and invite it to interfere in the affairs of the young Ukrainian nation. Ukraine also came to perceive its nuclear weapons as complicating relations with Western countries, especially the US, which Ukraine viewed as its ultimate guarantor in a post-Soviet world. Hence, Ukraine was willing to relinquish its nuclear arsenal in large part because it became convinced that its long-term security and prosperity depended on fully joining the international community.

Ukraine was motivated by economic considerations as well, having realized that its development could be hampered by the financial costs associated with maintaining a large nuclear weapons arsenal at a time when its economic prospects as an independent state were uncertain.\textsuperscript{28} Turning the situation to its economic advantage, Ukraine ensured that it received substantial financial concessions and compensation from both the US and Russia in exchange for its nuclear disarmament, including Russian forgiveness of a multibillion dollar debt for oil and gas, and a commitment of some $US900 million in American assistance and investment.\textsuperscript{29} This was viewed

\textsuperscript{27} See Reiss, pp. 94, 97, 101.
\textsuperscript{28} Gak, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{29} Reiss, p. 129.
as particularly necessary for Ukrainian internal stability and sustainability given the precarious state of its economy in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

**Commonalities: Security and Status as Incentives for Disarmament**

What were the commonalities among the three former Soviet states’ decisions to disarm? The ex-Soviet republics embraced nuclear disarmament with varying enthusiasm and with some variance in motivation, but certain commonalities can be ascertained.

First, it was realized that a nuclear weapons capacity would undermine their respective security environments. This was especially true for Ukraine and Kazakhstan, which were wary of Russian intentions towards their newfound sovereignty. Nuclear weapons could have invited an escalation of confrontation because they would be invariably perceived as a threat to Russian security and leadership. Similarly, the presence of nuclear weapons increased the odds of conventional conflicts developing into nuclear conflicts, either with Russia or China. Also, all three countries were interested in fruitful relationships with the remaining superpower, the United States.

Second, it was recognized that nuclear weapons impeded full incorporation into the broader international system due to the widely accepted international norm that now regarded the emergence of new nuclear weapon states as highly undesirable for international security. These countries, all in their early years of independence, demonstrated a keen desire to be recognized as being worthy of international acceptance and friendship by complying with that norm.

Third, all three countries were motivated by the substantial economic benefits they received in exchange for returning their nuclear weapons to Russia. These came largely from the US, including through its Cooperative Threat Reduction program, which provided significant financial support for dealing with the Soviet nuclear legacy. The G8 Global Partnership, which has brought a range of additional states into cooperative threat reduction efforts in Russia and the former Soviet republics, has reinforced the credibility of the bargain that was struck in return for nuclear disarmament by the three states. Canada, for instance, has provided substantial assistance to Ukraine in dealing with its nuclear legacy.

Finally, while all three cases demonstrate that in the right circumstances states can be convinced that the costs of retaining a nuclear weapons capacity are too burdensome, they also demonstrate that there is usually a symbiotic relationship between internal and external factors. Had there not been an internal disposition that enabled and facilitated consideration of the relinquishment option, the influence of Russia and the US might not have been sufficient to prompt nuclear disarmament. On the other hand, without the efforts of the international community, it would have been much more likely that these countries—especially Ukraine—would have been determined to retain rather than relinquish their nuclear weapons.

**Libya: multiple reasons for disarming, few if any for continuing to go nuclear**

Since 1969, when Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi came to power, Libya’s rhetoric and behavior with regard to nuclear weapons, like much of Qadhafi’s rule, has been unpredictable. Since Libya lacked the technical capacity to develop nuclear weapons itself, Qadhafi sought
assistance from multiple foreign sources, even pursuing the purchase of an actual nuclear weapon from China. In 1975 the Soviet Union provided a research reactor and fuel for the Tajoura Nuclear Research Centre southeast of the capital Tripoli. Collaboration with Pakistan’s rogue nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan, resulting in his network providing nuclear equipment, materials and weapon designs, also enabled Libya to make modest progress. But the lack of an industrial base and requisite technological capabilities prevented Libya from advancing very far. Compared to Iran or pre-1991 Iraq, Libya was poor and technically backward.

In December 2003, after three decades of seeking civilian and military nuclear capabilities, Libya renounced all of its ‘unconventional weapons’ aspirations. This closely followed the American and British invasion of Iraq, prompting many to claim that it was fear of a similar attack on Libya that prompted Qadhafi to act. Retrospectively, Libya’s decision came to be touted as the first success of the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), designed to preemptively seize illicit shipments of nuclear material and equipment before it arrived at its destination.

In fact, the US and UK had for some time been conducting secret talks with Libya to seek its voluntary renunciation of its weapons of mass destruction plans and capacities. During such tripartite negotiations in 2003, a Libyan-bound ship was intercepted carrying centrifuge components that had been purchased on the international black market. While there is uncertainty about the significance of the ship’s seizure—whether it was surrendered in good faith by the Libyans or whether it reflected a Western intelligence coup that dramatically demonstrated to Libya its inability to evade detection—this event served as a catalyst for Qadhafi’s decision to proceed with disarmament.

The US and the UK facilitated this process by their cooperative and non-confrontational diplomatic approaches that shielded Qadhafi from the stigma of capitulation or defeat. The remarkably cooperative relationship between Libya and the IAEA throughout the disarmament process demonstrated the clear advantages of consensual compliance.

Although the invasion of Iraq may have given the Libyan leadership a contextual urgency to embrace disarmament, it seems more realistic to accept a multiplicity of underlying motivations. A stagnating economy in the 1990s made Qadhafi acutely aware that Libya’s oil-exporting economy was highly susceptible to Western sanctions. Although understanding Qadhafi’s mercurial personality is always problematic, he apparently came to realize that Libya’s future was bleak unless it ended its pariah status in the international community. Libya’s isolation had been entrenched as a result of its support for and complicity in international terrorism—epitomized by its direct involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am jet over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Libya sought to end its political and economic isolation by accepting responsibility and paying substantial reparations for its involvement in this and other terrorist attacks. Perceiving the US and UK as the gatekeepers to enhanced international acceptance and prominence, Libya renounced its illicit weapons programs apparently in order to

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ingratiate itself with them—while also receiving political benefits and the promise of economic ones.

Unlike other Middle East countries that have considered the nuclear weapons option, Libya never faced an existential threat from a regional or global enemy, which may explain why it was relatively easy to convince it to give up its unfulfilled ambitions in this area. As Arab involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became less direct, Qadhafi had diminished reason to fear Israeli military supremacy. Moreover, Qadhafi’s perception of Libya as being in the vanguard of support for national liberation movements against Western imperialism was undermined by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In renouncing its unconventional weapons programs, Libya calculated that its security and status would benefit greatly from the international goodwill and privileges that would follow a complete and permanent break with its dalliance with nuclear weapons. And so it has proven: sanctions against it have ended, investment in its oil industry has resumed, diplomatic and other relationships with Western states have improved, and Libya has been elected to the UN Security Council for two-years as a non-permanent member. Such rewards for nuclear abstinence should, in theory, have a positive effect on the decisions of others. The US in particular has sought to portray the Libyan model as one to be followed by others, notably North Korea and Iran.

**Common Choices, Conditions, and Circumstances**

These case studies demonstrate that the mix of motivations for a country to give up the bomb are always unique. Such a decision is usually the result of a complex interplay of internal factors with external ones.

A range of external involvement is possible. In extreme cases a country’s ‘motivation’ to disarm is entirely externally driven. The US and UK bombing and invasion of Iraq in 1990, followed by the Security Council’s demand that its remaining nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capabilities be dismantled under international supervision and verification, is one such case. Such externally imposed nuclear forbearance may not necessarily endure. At the other extreme are countries whose nuclear forbearance, while undoubtedly affected by external considerations and context, is due to decisions that are entirely voluntary and made through a process of internal policy consideration. Examples include Australia, Canada and Sweden. Their decision to eschew nuclear weapons has subsequently become deeply ingrained.

The choices of the vast majority of countries that have refrained from developing nuclear weapons have, however, emerged from circumstances that belong in the spectrum’s muddled middle. The complexity and diversity of this middle ground reveals that there is a plethora of reasons behind nuclear forbearance. Generally, though, the decision to forego nuclear weapons has been made at the national level for reasons of supreme national interest.

**Trading nuclear weapons for international comity**

The factors that determine a state’s relationship to the international system—isolation or inclusion—would appear to be of great importance in persuading states to give up the nuclear
option. The Western alliance systems, dependent largely on the US ‘nuclear umbrella’, gave West Germany, South Korea and Japan, for instance, a sufficient security blanket to reassure them even in the face of a direct nuclear threat.

The cases of Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan indicate that countries may relinquish the uncertain military advantages afforded by nuclear weapons in exchange for international recognition and acceptance, albeit not necessarily combined with NATO-style nuclear guarantees. These three states, however, having just become independent, were uniquely vulnerable to pressure to relinquish their inherited nuclear weapons. Such conditions are unlikely to persist again except in the unlikely event that other nuclear weapon states break up. One possible scenario would be the acquisition by South Korea of North Korean nuclear weapons should unification occur prior to the North’s disarmament.

On the other hand, it was the inability of apartheid South Africa to join the post-World War II Western alliance system that aggravated its insecurities and entrenched its determination to develop nuclear weapons in order, so it believed, to draw the US into supporting it in a crisis. Taiwan and South Korea presumably had similar considerations in mind when they flirted with the idea of going nuclear—before being thwarted by the United States. The South African case also illustrates the opposite of this tendency; that nuclear weapons might be foregone for the very purpose of securing international respectability and full membership of the international community. Presumably, a post-apartheid South Africa that had retained its nuclear weapons would not have been so rapturously welcomed back into the international community.

**Efforts to wean states away from nuclear weapons must be flexible**

The historical record shows that states’ decisions about nuclear weapons acquisition are dynamic and mutable. The factors that influence countries’ nuclear choices—perceptions of their security environments, national leadership, national norms, economic considerations, domestic developments and international relations—are part of a constantly evolving situation. Approaches designed to persuade individual states to renounce or relinquish nuclear weapons must match this dynamism. Policies by outsiders need to be sufficiently fluid to encompass the starts, stops, setbacks and shifts that comprise a state’s nuclear policy. A persistent, malleable and multidimensional approach will be much more likely to outlast and circumvent temporary failures and hindrances.

The flexibility demonstrated by the United States in dealing with Russia and the three former Soviet republics that inherited Soviet nuclear weapons is noteworthy. The administration of President George H. W. Bush, and certain members of the US Congress, notably Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, recognized from almost the outset that international security would be gravely damaged were three new nuclear weapon states to emerge from the Soviet collapse. Such states would be inexperienced in handling such weapons, would alarm their new neighbours, and may even be tempted to proliferate. Almost equally alarming was the danger that the Soviet nuclear weapons legacy could pose in terms of proliferation of materials and capability to terrorists or other unauthorized groups.
Similarly, the handling of the Libyan case by the UK and the US showed great sensitivity and creativity. The Libyans were dealt with in secret in an effort to help them avoid losing face until the seizure of illegal shipments became public. Even then, the US and UK were alert to the dangers of the Libyans changing their minds if they felt themselves humiliated by the process. Involving the IAEA as the international verification organization was helpful in this respect.

Flexibility can also imply addressing issues beyond the immediate question of nuclear forbearance. Broadening the dialogue to encompass subjects beyond nuclear weapons has been advocated by many as a means of building confidence with Iran and North Korea.

Democracy can be a catalyst

Democracy can in some circumstances, but not all, be a powerful variable in determining whether a country will forego nuclear weapons. Sweden and Switzerland both decided by democratic means not to go nuclear (as compared with secretive decisions in other democratic states such as the US, UK and Israel).

While there is a correlation between democratic developments in countries like Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan and South Africa, and their decisions regarding nuclear forbearance or relinquishment, democracy was more of an enabling factor in these instances rather than the direct cause. It was the extension of democratic rule in these countries that provoked a national desire for rapid economic growth through participation in the global economy, as well as enhanced recognition and acceptance in the world. However, the historical record shows that even non-democratic or partially democratic countries may be susceptible to the blandishments of increased trade, investment and financial assistance in return for nuclear self-denial.

Role of leadership

Individual leadership is an important factor in the decisions that engender—or hinder—a country’s nuclear forbearance. As a famous study by Pringle and Spigelman entitled The Nuclear Barons indicates, nuclear weapons programs have invariably been driven by single-minded individuals with the necessary political connections, vision and stamina.\(^{32}\) The United States’ J. Robert Oppenheimer, India’s Homi Bhabha, France’s Pierre Guillaumat and Pakistan’s A.Q. Khan are outstanding examples. Seemingly irresistible political and economic incentives designed to encourage states to abjure nuclear weapons can be thwarted by pro-nuclear leadership, as in the case of North Korea’s Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

But leadership can work the other way. Nuclear rapprochement between Argentina and Brazil was achieved in large part due to the amiable relationship that developed between Presidents Carlos Menem of Argentina and Fernando Collor of Brazil. Both were dynamic leaders whose individual vision and energies provided vital momentum for the bilateral disavowal of nuclear weapons. Moreover, decisions that result in nuclear restraint do not always come from individuals who would be readily identified in advance as natural advocates of such a course of action. Few would have predicted that US President Ronald Reagan would have been an advocate for the abolition of nuclear weapons, as he was by the time of the 1986 Reykjavik

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summit. While South African President de Klerk could not have been expected to be a catalyst for nuclear disarmament, his vision of a multiracial and democratic society resulted in an end to his country’s nuclear weapons program. Personalities behind the scenes can also be instrumental, as evidenced by the relatively moderating influence of Saif al-Islam, Colonel Qadhafi’s son, who apparently was a convincing champion of Libya’s renunciation of unconventional weapons.33

While it is sometimes difficult to predict the emergence of leaders particularly amenable to nuclear forbearance, the enormous potential of such opportunities makes it worthwhile to constantly watch and probe for leaders whose non-nuclear visions and aspirations can be encouraged and rewarded.

Rivals can be reasonable

If a conflict is intractable or existential, as in the case of Israel and its Arab neighbours, or India and Pakistan, it unlikely that rivals will be able to engender sufficient trust to divest themselves of nuclear weapons without underlying issues being resolved. The historical record demonstrates, however, that rival states can sometimes agree to refrain from escalating their rivalry to the nuclear level in a way that de-escalates their rivalry overall. By both joining the NPT Australia and Indonesia were able to set aside nuclear rivalry as a potential complicating factor in their already complex relationship. Argentina and Brazil refrained from escalating their rivalry, choosing instead to embrace cooperative economic growth and mutual security. The attempted denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the proposed Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone for the Middle East are examples of this sort of approach. While not always successful, attempts to deal with national nuclear aspirations in the context of broader dyadic or regional relationships, should be part of the toolbox of international efforts to encourage nuclear disarmament.

Role of the United States

Since the dawn of the nuclear era, the United States has maintained a position of unmatched influence in international efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. It was instrumental in the establishment of the nonproliferation regime and has often been the most active—sometimes alone—in seeking to address individual proliferation problem states.

Just as importantly, states have often approached the nuclear weapons option through their perceived relationship with the US, whether good or bad. While states that enjoy friendly relations can benefit from US dominance, notable by sheltering under the US nuclear umbrella, states with unfriendly relations, such as Iran and North Korea, are much more likely to perceive the nuclear weapons option as a hedge against American power. On the other hand, many states have been motivated, in part at least, to disavow nuclear weapons by the possibility of closer and financially lucrative relations with the US. Nuclear relinquishment by Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Argentina and Brazil, and Libya demonstrate that a desire for rapprochement with the US—for political, symbolic, economic and strategic reasons—was a significant motivation.

It is essential that the US remains actively involved in efforts to reverse and limit the spread of nuclear weapons. While the US is not a sufficient influence on its own to stop nuclear proliferation, in most cases its involvement will be necessary. States like Iran and North Korea have made it clear that dealing with others will not necessarily produce the desired outcome and that only bilateral negotiations with the US will do the trick.

**Precedent and consistency are important**

Non-proliferation and disarmament efforts are severely undermined when the international community fails to remain constant in its opposition to nuclear weapons. States that have relinquished their nuclear weapons have indicated that their behavior was guided by awareness of the will of the international community. South Africa, for example, closely observed the relatively muted response of the international community to the Indian ‘peaceful nuclear explosion’ in 1974, and concluded that international determination to oppose nuclear proliferation was weakening. Similarly, the former Soviet republics were influenced by the realization that the international community was not prepared to passively accept the expansion of the number of nuclear weapon states. Iran has undoubtedly noted that the US administration under President George W. Bush explicitly withdrew its threat of military action against North Korea when it became clear that that country had nuclear weapons.

While the NPT has established a norm against the acquisition of nuclear weapons, this is not self-sustaining; rather, it remains potent only so long as the international community maintains consistency in its application.

**The sources of insecurity, whether nuclear or conventional, must be addressed**

Even more than the pursuit of enhanced status or prestige, it has been the perception of a lack of security or compromised security that has driven most states to consider the nuclear weapons option. Unless a country’s insecurities, whether nuclear or conventional, are adequately allayed, political and economic inducements will not be sufficient to derail a committed nuclear weapons trajectory. International non-proliferation and disarmament efforts that do not address this basic motivation will not succeed.

Security fears may be attenuated through positive security guarantees, such as those extended to West Germany and Japan, or negative security guarantee, such as those extended, however inconsistently and confusingly, to all non-nuclear weapon states not in league with a nuclear weapon state. The existence of numerous nuclear weapon-free zones guaranteed by the nuclear weapon states, suggests that such approaches can be successful in preventing—and even preempting—the acquisition of nuclear weapons in a regional context. However, providing nuclear guarantees to prevent nuclear acquisition is not a long-term solution given the legal requirement for all NPT state parties to achieve nuclear disarmament. Nuclear guarantees cannot be sustained in perpetuity if getting to zero is a serious goal.

Moreover, such measures do not address the possibility that nuclear weapons will be sought to address a conventional military threat, as in the case of Pakistan and India, and Israel and its
Arab neighbours. Here is where holistic measures to deal with national security dilemmas are essential.

Conclusions

Understanding the motivations presented in this paper is not sufficient to resolve the problems posed by nuclear proliferation. Historically, external pressure is generally effective only when changing circumstances have created an environment that is receptive to international involvement. Until an internal change occurs that creates an entry point, states committed to encouraging nuclear forbearance must remain vigilant and opportunistic, ensuring that a framework for future cooperation is established pending the rise of new circumstances that will create opportunities for progress.

Nevertheless, the past five decades have witnessed remarkable and sometimes counterintuitive success stories that demonstrate that the spread of nuclear weapons is not inevitable. The countries that have decided to forgo nuclear weapons testify to the worthiness of international efforts to roll back or prevent further nuclear proliferation. At a time when North Korea continues to engage in nuclear brinkmanship, and as uncertainty mounts about what can—and should—be done about the nuclear capabilities and aspirations of Iran, lessons from the historical record should be heeded. Countries that currently seem entrenched in their nuclear belligerence and defiance of the international nonproliferation regime may undergo shifts similar to the ones examined in this paper. Furthermore, the four countries that relinquished their indigenous or inherited nuclear weapons demonstrate that nuclear weapons status is reversible. The choices and circumstances of these countries are important because they show that nuclear weapons are not sufficient or necessary for national security. Nuclear weapons can, on the contrary, be obstacles to the realization of vital national interests and aspirations and thus are dispensable.