

PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVOLVING NUCLEAR ORDER

TOBY DALTON, TOGZHAN KASSENOVA, AND LAURYN WILLIAMS, EDITORS

The global nuclear order appears increasingly tense, primarily because many states feel that the structure and distribution of benefits is unjust. Among the states that will determine how the nuclear order will adapt, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, and Pakistan are particularly important.

These states occupy an uncomfortable middle ground in the order. Each possesses advanced nuclear technology, and three of them hold nuclear weapons. Unlike other states that seek to fundamentally change the existing system, these states would like to improve their standing in the order even though they remain deeply uneasy with its perceived lack of fairness.

The Current Nuclear Order

- Criticism of the existing order tends to focus on the lack of progress toward disarmament by countries possessing nuclear weapons. Critics reject incremental arms control measures as an indicator of progress. Many states also disparage growing constraints on access to peaceful nuclear technology, which they believe will impede their economic development.
- The existing order primarily benefits states that developed nuclear technology earliest and wrote most of the rules governing international nuclear affairs. The evolution of the order will likely be driven by middle-ground states that have developed advanced nuclear technology and actively participate in nuclear governance decisionmaking, but whose interests are not completely served by the existing system.
- Thus far, middle-ground states have preferred working within the system to overturning it. Nuclear regimes provide sufficient elasticity for these states to pursue their interests within existing limitations.

Perspectives From the Middle Ground

Middle-ground states share more interests than are apparent. Despite obvious differences, including the possession of nuclear weapons by some, middle-ground states share concerns about fairness, access to peaceful nuclear technology, and the growing salience of nuclear weapons in U.S. and Russian security policies.

Regional interests trump global norms. Regional security dynamics and relationships tend to influence these states' nuclear policies more than global norms and a desire to change the order.

Nuclear weapons have declining currency. Despite the rising salience of nuclear weapons in the United States and Russia, middle-ground states tend to consider the possession of advanced nuclear technology and membership in export control groups to be more legitimate symbols of status in the order.

Nuclear policy capacity is underdeveloped. Expert communities in middle-ground states are generally small and diffuse, which hampers their effectiveness in seeking to influence the evolution of the order. Civil society groups and governments in these states could prioritize the development of stronger technical, policy, and legal expertise on nuclear issues.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Toby Dalton
Co-Director, Nuclear Policy Program

Togzhan Kassenova
Associate, Nuclear Policy Program

Lauryn Williams
Project Manager, Nuclear Policy Program

CONTACT

Christopher Dockrey
Government Affairs Manager
+1 202 939-2307
cdockrey@ceip.org

Clara Hogan
Media Manager
+1 202 939-2241
chogan@ceip.org

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