



Congressional Testimony

SIX YEARS LATER: ASSESSING LONG-TERM THREATS, RISKS AND THE U.S. STRATEGY FOR SECURITY IN A POST-9/11 WORLD

Testimony by Jessica T. Mathews
President
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
National Security and Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
Washington, DC
October 10, 2007

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

WASHINGTON DC ■ MOSCOW ■ BEIJING ■ BEIRUT ■ BRUSSELS

Written Testimony of

Jessica Tuchman Mathews
President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

I want to commend this committee for the farsightedness of this series of hearings. While I appreciate that the point is to get beyond the all encompassing focus on Iraq, I do want to begin by noting that the series might better be titled 'Threats, Risks and Strategy in a Post-Iraq World' because the events of 9/11 have had far less of an effect on the real world than that day had on the American psyche.

Iraq is a very different matter. This war is the turning point that has and will change the basic parameters of American security for – in all likelihood – many decades.

The war's monopoly on our political energy has now stretched to 5 years – an eon in a time of fast-moving global change. One of its greatest – as yet uncounted – costs is the degree to which it has sucked the oxygen from almost every other issue. A dramatically changing global climate might as well not be happening. The reappearance of huge federal budget deficits is hardly noticed. The need for change in an unsustainable energy policy has barely surfaced. And, in these five years a number of international security problems have grown, from neglect, into full blown crises. Unless a major effort is made to reverse current trends, the fissures now spreading across the global nonproliferation regime, could easily become the worst of these.

Among all the challenges we face, only nuclear weapons pose an existential threat to the US. A world with 20 or 30 or more nuclear weapons states (NWS) holds few prospects for avoiding nuclear catastrophe. The stability that prevailed for the 50 years of the Cold War didn't just happen. It required unrelenting effort by both superpowers – and some very near misses. The likelihood that a nuclear outbreak could be avoided with 20 powers calculating their interests against all the others is vanishingly small. The probability that some of all that weapons fuel would end up in the hands of terrorists is about 1.

The effect of such a proliferation of nuclear states on the US is quite clear. Because we are and will remain by far the world's greatest conventional power, we will suffer the greatest relative loss of power as the number of states possessing the "great leveler" grow.

And of course, while deterrence still works against states, it is not effective against nonstate groups with neither populations nor territory to protect.

The President has called nuclear proliferation the greatest risk we face. He is correct in that. But only sporadic attention has been given in the past half dozen years to the nuclear threats from North Korea and Iran, and little if any to the systemic weakness spreading across the regime itself.

The good news is that for 40 years the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) has kept the number of nuclear states far lower than its authors dared hope. The bad news is that the past 10 years have been very bad ones for the treaty and for the huge body of rules and institutions that have been built around it. This period began with nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998. Five years later the commercial network headed by Pakistan's A. Q. Khan came to light, involving scientists and businessmen from a dozen countries selling technology, equipment and nuclear bomb designs to whomever could pay. The North Korean and Iranian programs – both using the NPT as a cover for illegal weapons programs – underlined the regime's Achilles heel which is that *no* safeguards can provide real protection when a country has direct access to weapons fuel – plutonium or highly enriched uranium.

The Bush administration made a radical change in nonproliferation thinking and policy – one that urgently needs repair. In his 2003 State of the Union address, the President described the threat of weapons of mass destruction this way: “The gravest danger facing America and the world is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.” This new formulation attracted little attention at the time – again because the country was already consumed with the debate over the Iraq war – but it was profound. Whereas past presidents of both parties had focused on the weapons, this formulation shifted the focus to the regimes that have or seek them. And, of course, the U.S. decides who are the good guys and who are not (even though, as we should remember, our own judgments change radically over the years. We supported Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, for example.) Having shifted the focus from the weapons to the regimes, it is a short step to regime change as the answer.

This is the hole we are in today – one that diminishes our ability to deal with Iran: both directly with Tehran and with other key players who balk at taking small steps in the fear that that would give legitimacy to a U.S. attack or who make bad deals with Tehran in the mistaken notion that they are serving world security thereby.

Beyond Iran, there are two urgent threats to the system: a growing disenchantment among the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) who have come to believe, 15 years after the end of the Cold War, that the NWS never intend to keep up their end of the bargain: nuclear disarmament. The second is the glaring need to strengthen the regime: to impose meaningful penalties on states that abuse it as a cover for illegal weapons programs: to eliminate direct access to bomb fuel in NNWS and to address the threats

from terrorists and corporate networks that were unanticipated when the treaty was written 40 years ago.

The US however, is not in a position to lead in this effort. Before it can do so it needs to reestablish its own credentials. To do so it will have to:

- Revoke the National Security Strategy of 2002, which still stands, focusing on regimes rather than weapons;
- Renounce unilateral preventive war,
- Ratify the CTBT, and
- Cancel development of new nuclear weapons

Reestablishing arms control momentum with Russia is another priority. I must add, however, that the administration's decision to base an antimissile system in Poland and the Czech Republic derails hope for much progress in this direction for the time being. Pushing ahead with a system that does not yet work, against a threat from Iran that does not yet exist, at the expense of relations with a state, Russia, whose participation is essential if the threat is to be prevented, is a choice that can only be called incomprehensible. This too needs reconsideration.

A great deal of attention is being given these days to the style, tone and rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy. These are all important – as is recovering the ability to listen – really listen – to others, and retrieving confidence in our ability to conduct successful diplomacy as the principal means to gain our ends. But restoring the trust in American leadership that has been so widely lost will only come from *deeds* and it won't happen overnight. The good news in the nuclear area is that the critical steps are all under our own control.

Let me turn much more briefly to three other challenges. Any short list such as this is necessarily arbitrary, but to me these three – and nonproliferation – stand out.

First, China. History has no examples of a rapidly rising new power not producing at least tension and usually outright conflict as a result of its entry into the circle of major states. China is well aware of this and it has a strong desire to avoid conflict – hence the slogan “Peaceful Rise.” Conflict is bad for business, after all, and above all else, China is determined to grow. Yet if the past is any guide, it is going to be difficult to manage China's rise peacefully, especially in a resource constrained world that must begin to deal seriously with climate change.

The only silver lining to 9/11 was that it put an end for the time being to the swelling of another period of America determined to see China as an enemy. That ended overnight, substituting Saddam Hussein, a real enemy, for a potential or imagined one.

We are on a pretty good track now, but if, by our behavior, we turn China into an enemy; if we get China wrong, that – other than the failure to rescue and repair the nonproliferation regime – will be the single worst, most dangerous security mistake we can make.

The policies that we must urgently turn from wrong to right, deal with the Middle East and with the world of Islam. Olivier Roy, the distinguished French expert in this field, points out that the West has tried three approaches in the Middle East and all three have failed. We have tried to strengthen existing authoritarian regimes; we have tried to push for reform of such regimes (often to the point of their collapse), and we have tried to impose democracy from scratch. None have worked. What we have *not* tried to do is to build democracy with the participation of the existing political forces – and those forces today are Islamist. They cannot be end run – they must be engaged. We should be thoughtfully engaging with moderate Islamist forces; by which I mean those that renounce violence as a political tool, even when and if we find others of their views abhorrent.

A precondition of success in the Middle East will be a much more vigorous and engaged effort on the Israeli-Palestinian situation and one that is and is seen to be more evenhanded.

Finally, we have to tackle global climate change, which means we - at long last – need a national energy policy. Voluntary policies and research-only policies should be seen for the cop out that they are. Research is necessary but not sufficient and no serious national objective has ever been made voluntary. The endless, fruitless debate over whether to use price or regulation should end with the recognition that an effective policy requires both. The search for silver bullets – from oil shale to fuel cells to biofuels – should be seen as a recurring hunt for a magical solution that would avoid our having to make real, society-wide change. A realistic energy policy must begin – must be built on – the recognition that by far the largest, cheapest, most quickly accessible and most climate-sensitive energy resource we have – by far – is drastic improvements in energy efficiency, in every sector.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your patience. I hope these thoughts prove useful as you look ahead at a daunting security agenda.