Revisiting Fred Iklé’s 1961 Question, “After Detection—What?”

Writing nearly four decades ago, Fred Iklé penned the fundamental arms control compliance question: “after detection—what?” In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine in January 1961, he framed the issue as follows:

The current debate on arms control and disarmament puts great stress on the problem of how to detect violations of whatever agreements may be reached....Yet detecting violations is not enough. What counts are the political and military consequences of a violation once it has been detected, since these alone will determine whether or not the violator stands to gain in the end. In entering an arms control agreement, we must know that we are technically capable of detecting a violation but also that we or the rest of the world will be politically, legally and militarily in a position to react effectively if a violation is discovered....[e]ven if we can develop an inspection system that makes the probability of detection very high, a nation contemplating a violation will not be deterred if it thinks it can discourage, circumvent, or absorb our reaction. We must study, therefore, not only what our opponent may do to avoid detection, but also what he may do to escape the penalty of being detected.

If Iklé’s question is remembered at all in the current arms control debate, it is typically recalled as rhetorical in nature. Arms control opponents sometimes invoke Iklé to support their arguments that arms control is possible only when it is not necessary and that it is a dangerous delusion between military adversaries. There is a certain irony in their invocation of Iklé in this way, given his own subsequent service as head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). Iklé’s question is invoked less frequently, but also to good effect, by those arms control supporters who argue that tending arms control agreements “deserves at least as much attention as the negotiations that produced them in the first place.”
But Iklé’s question was not rhetorical. He described and evaluated various measures to be taken after detection. He identified a role for economic and political sanctions, though he expected that their effect would be stronger on cautious violators than adventurous ones. He predicted difficulty in sustaining such sanctions, arguing that the party injured by the violation might not want to jeopardize “long-term policies which seem more promising and important than countering an accomplished evasion.” He was especially skeptical that world opinion could be turned rapidly into substantive political and military changes damaging to the violator, observing that “one reason world opinion is so impotent is that memory is so short.” He anticipated an influential role for international organizations in sustaining the political will to punish violators, but also saw the ability of the violator to exploit the weaknesses of those organizations to his advantage.

Iklé argued further that political and economic sanctions were unlikely to prove viable without military ones as well. He described two types of military sanctions. One he called “restorative measures,” aimed at restoring the military situation to what prevailed before the arms control measure was implemented. He predicted the limited benefit of such measures as a deterrent, since the violator might well conclude that he will be no worse off by cheating, and might well be better off if his actions go undetected or if the injured parties prove incapable of responding (“heads you lose, tails we’re even,” as Iklé put it in characterizing the perspective of the cheat). The other type of military sanction goes beyond restorative to punitive actions. Iklé argued that treaty violations should change the injured parties’ perceptions of the cheating state by dispelling doubts about its peaceful or cooperative intentions and clarifying its intent for aggression. The changes in perception would lead to an abandonment of negotiated restraint as a foundation of the strategic competition and renewed military spending aimed at credibly deterring the feared military aggression of the violator. The prospect of such punitive measures promised more effective deterrence of treaty violations, argued Iklé, than the prospect of restorative ones, as the violator would have to calculate the possible long-term reversal of his military fortunes, whatever short-term gains might be won through cheating. As he put it, “Those who wish to prevent the violation of arms-control agreements must deter potential violators by their evident determination to make a double sacrifice….They must be ready to assume a greater economic burden for defense and they must risk a step-up in military competition.”

Iklé characterized this set of political, economic, and military measures as “a program to deter evasion.” Surveying the Cold War setting, he was clearly pessimistic about its prospects for success. He well foreshadowed the kinds of debates that would emerge over future Soviet compliance with the treaties on strategic arms limitations, anti-ballistic missiles, biological weapons, and threshold testing. And he certainly anticipated Soviet tactics to frustrate international efforts to secure compliance with its treaty obligations, as well as the numerous difficulties the United States faced in leading those efforts.

A re-reading of Iklé’s article four decades later adds some valuable perspective and insight into the challenges of contemporary arms control compliance in Iraq, North Korea, Russia, and elsewhere. But to re-read his essay today is to be reminded of how much the world has changed. It was penned as John Kennedy was preparing to replace Dwight Eisenhower as president, when the supposed missile gap was a central issue in the presidential campaign. Four decades later, a very great deal has changed that bears on the compliance problem—in the content and scope of arms control, in the structure of the international system, and in the international role of the United States, for example. How has the compliance problem changed over four decades? Does Iklé’s 1961-vintage pessimism about the ability of international processes to secure arms control compliance by egregious treaty violators remain valid in today’s world?

In an effort to answer these questions, this article proceeds as follows. It begins with an assessment of the salient differences between the world in which Iklé wrote and the world of today as they relate to the compliance problem. This assessment chronicles the emergence of a substantial set of political, military, and economic tools for coping with noncompliance. But it also identifies the emergence of a set of extant compliance problems that are of genuine historical significance because they threaten the future viability of the entire arms control regime. The article then explores the role of the United Nations Security Council in dealing with these compliance challenges. This is a role that Iklé hardly anticipated. The capacity of the major powers to enforce the treaty regime is emerging as a sine qua non of their spe-
cial status in the U.N. system. Whether optimism or pessimism is in order hinges on whether one believes that those major powers have enough of a stake in the arms control regime as a means to exercise their singular influence to enable them to cooperate on noncompliance challenges that are also threats to the peace.

THEN AND NOW

How has the arms control compliance context changed between 1961 and today? The changes are numerous—nine are reviewed here.

Increase in Arms Control Measures

First, Iklé focuses almost exclusively on a single arms control measure—the proposed nuclear test ban. To be sure, there is the occasional reference to the Antarctica Treaty, the Korean armistice, and the Disarmament Conference of the 1930s. But the merits and demerits of Iklé’s “program to deter evasion” are evaluated almost solely in terms of what might and might not be possible vis-à-vis the test ban.

Between then and now, the United States has become party to more than 30 arms control measures. The resulting arms control regime encompasses a few bilateral measures and many multilateral ones, both regional and global. At the very least, this suggests that problems of noncompliance must not have been seen as sufficiently egregious in their cumulative effect to dissuade U.S. presidents from negotiating such measures or to dissuade the Senate from offering its consent to ratification. The implementation of these measures has secured a good deal of compliance by many states with a variety of undertakings. But the record of the last four decades also amply demonstrates that some states undertake arms control commitments with the intention to cheat. Noncompliance has been marked in each of the decades since Iklé authored his piece and in some instances the noncompliance has been proven to be egregious—especially by the Soviets. This has had a sobering effect on arms control. Arms controllers do not now readily believe that states honor their promises. They have also come to appreciate the fundamental differences between the challenges of gaining compliance by willing states and by unwilling ones.

Development of Compliance Mechanisms

Second, Iklé did not anticipate the subsequent development of specialized compliance mechanisms within the arms control regime.

A brief history is illustrative. The 1961 Antarctic Treaty provides for regular meetings of states parties and on-site inspections supplemented by aerial inspections, as well as recourse to the International Court of Justice for disputes that cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties to the dispute. The 1968 Latin American Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty established a three-tiered organization (OPANAL) consisting of a general conference of states parties, an elected council, and a permanent secretariat to handle implementation questions. The 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) includes a provision for conferences of states parties at five-year intervals to review the operation of the treaty; it also relies on the previously existing International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to carry out some oversight functions. The 1972 Seabed Arms Control Treaty and the 1975 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) followed suit by providing for review conferences at five-year intervals in order to resolve problems that might arise after the treaties’ entry into force. The 1972 agreements under the rubric of SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks), encompassing the Anti-ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Interim Agreement on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, saw the creation of a permanent Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) that, inter alia, was to consider compliance questions. The 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty incorporates a modified version of the SCC called the Special Verification Commission. The 1992 Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) created a joint consultative group to resolve issues of compliance and to support the work of an elaborate multilateral verification mechanism. And the 1995 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) relies on an implementing body (the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) to investigate allegations of noncompliance. The CWC also encompasses unprecedented obligations to come to the aid of victims of a chemical attack and to penalize states that choose to remain outside the regime (by prohibiting sales to them of certain chemicals sensitive from the point of view of possible warfare applications but also important in industrial and developmental processes).
Moreover, various ad hoc mechanisms have been put in place to deal with particularly stubborn problems of noncompliance. A trilateral process involving the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia was created after revelations about illicit biological weapons activities in the former Soviet Union and lingering concerns in Russia, with an eye toward gaining full Russian compliance with the BWC. The United Nations Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) was created by the U.N. Security Council after the Persian Gulf War with an eye toward gaining full Iraqi compliance with its disarmament obligations. The Agreed Framework was negotiated with North Korea and the Korean Peninsula Energy Organization (KEDO) was created with an eye toward restoring North Korea’s full compliance with its NPT obligations.

Furthermore, international organizations have come to play an important role in supporting the implementation of arms control treaties and promoting compliance by hold-out or drop-out states. At the global level, the United Nations has come to play a prominent role in arms control compliance—especially the Security Council, whose members have taken on formal obligations under the NPT, BWC, and CWC to serve as the court of last resort for issues of withdrawal and noncompliance. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), for example, have emerged as important political actors in regional arms control processes.

This brief history reflects a substantial political effort by the leaders of the arms control process to tailor agreements to the requirements of full and effective compliance. The treaties themselves have developed a series of inducements to minimize the number of hold-out and drop-out states, ranging from the self-accepted legal obligation to affirmative inducements, such as trade benefits, to economic and political penalties. There is, moreover, a wide-ranging effort underway to improve the capacity of these institutions to deal with noncompliant behavior as a result of the discoveries of noncompliance by Iraq and North Korea in the early 1990s. This includes the enhanced safeguards initiative being implemented by IAEA members and the effort to add a compliance protocol to the BWC, among other measures.

Sanctions have played a role in the work of these institutions in promoting compliance, although hardly an unambiguous one. Although sanctions are much criticized today for their frequent ineffectiveness and sometimes repugnant socio-economic effects in targeted countries, it is important to recognize the progress made over four decades in understanding when and how to apply sanctions to positive effect. Given the growing number of specialized compliance mechanisms noted above, it has been possible to shift from heavy reliance on unilateral measures to more reliable use of multilateral ones. Sanctions have also been tailored to specific problems, as for example those sanctions that target companies engaged in illicit weapons activities. In the case of the nuclear crisis set in motion by North Korea’s weapons program and attempt to withdraw from the NPT, sanctions are credited by U.S. negotiator Robert Gallucci with having played an instrumental role in motivating the North Korean leadership to make the decisions sought by Washington.11

Changes in the Content of Arms Control

A third important change is in the content of arms control. As noted above, the primary focus of Iké’s analysis was the nuclear test ban. Violations of a ban on nuclear tests would pose specific kinds of risks and consequences for the other parties to the ban. But as the number of arms control agreements has increased, their content has obviously shifted from bans on nuclear tests to bans on many other types of activities. Today, arms control is concerned not just with test bans but also other forms of nuclear restraint, as well as prohibitions in the biological, chemical, missile, and conventional weapons domains. The nature and character of the risks of noncompliance (as well as the benefits as perceived by the violator) must also have changed as the content has shifted.

At the very least, this has greatly increased the burden associated with monitoring and verifying compliance. In 1961, noncompliance might be detected by keeping a few advanced technologies closely focused on Soviet test sites. Today, detecting noncompliance requires monitoring activities in a very large number of countries, and activities of many different sorts. Moreover, the dividing line between compliance and noncompliance has grown a good deal fuzzier than the fairly clear and dramatic distinction between tests and no tests. In the chemical and biological domains, defensive activities are permitted while offensive ones are not; especially in the biological area, the dividing line between prohibi-
ited and permitted activities is murky. In the chemical, biological, and conventional domains, commercial activities and interests fall increasingly within the purview of arms control treaties, as some banned activities might occur in private rather than state-owned facilities. In each of these areas, states possess substantial latent capabilities in their civilian infrastructure, posing risks of treaty break-out more varied and diverse than in the nuclear test domain.

**Shift from Bilateral to Multilateral Arms Control**

A fourth important difference between past and present is the shift from bilateral to multilateral arms control. To be sure, Iklé’s interest was attracted primarily to the prospective test ban among the then-nuclear weapon states (and China, not yet a member of the club)—in short, a multilateral endeavor. But he was writing about a bipolar world, a strategic confrontation between two nuclear-armed superpowers, and an arms control process chiefly between Washington and Moscow. Throughout the Cold War, most of the arms control that mattered to Washington was bilateral arms control with Moscow, and thus the compliance that mattered most to Washington was compliance by the Soviet Union. After all, Soviet noncompliance with its strategic arms obligations potentially threatened the very survival of the United States. But today, the bilateral Washington-Moscow agenda is an ever smaller part of the overall arms control regime.

From the perspective of the compliance topic, this has had a number of implications. Some are negative. Because Washington’s political interest in arms control has been fueled mostly by the high politics of bilateral negotiations with Moscow, the declining prominence of the bilateral dimension has starved the rest of the arms control agenda of the attention of senior policymakers and the political capital of the administration. The shift from bilateral to multilateral has also added substantial political and bureaucratic complexity to the task of dealing with noncompliance within the various regimes and institutions. But on the positive side, it has also created the institutional and normative foundation upon which to build political coalitions against noncompliant states. This role has been especially evident in dealing with Iraqi noncompliance, where the existence of the global arms control regime was essential to creating the will to impose harsh conditions on Iraq at the end of the war to expel it from Kuwait. Unfortunately, multilateral arms control processes have also shown themselves to be particularly dependent on the will and capacity of a few especially interested states to mobilize them to action. This is troubling at a time when the one state generally capable of mobilizing international institutions—the United States—exhibits at best episodic interest in their effective functioning. And then, once interested, it exhibits a preference for unilateral enforcement actions.12

There is another important implication of this shift from bilateral to multilateral arms control that has received less notice. In the days of bilateral Cold War arms control, it became important to distinguish militarily significant cheating by the Soviets from other forms of noncompliance that cast doubt on the veracity of the Soviet leadership but did not alter in any important sense basic assumptions about U.S. national security. In multilateral regimes, the issue of what cheating threatens whom and how seriously is a good deal more complicated. Noncompliance by violators may pose little or no security threat to most other states parties to the treaty. Accordingly, Middle Eastern parties to the NPT, for example, have shown little interest in restoring North Korean compliance with the NPT, beyond a limited political one. East Asian states, conversely, have shown little interest in restoring North Korean compliance with the NPT, beyond a limited political one. East Asian states, conversely, have shown little interest in restoring North Korean compliance with the NPT, beyond a limited political one.

**Questions about Evidence of Violations**

A fifth important difference between then and now relates to the evidence of violation, which Iklé argued must be such “as to impress the public as authoritative and impartial”13 given the centrality of public opinion in the United States and among its allies and coalition partners in sustaining the political will to impose penalties on violators. Iklé did not envisage the often profound questions of credibility that are raised today when the United States offers evidence of noncompliance to its arms control partners. Ironically, the present politicized context appears to be a vestige of the sharp politicization of the Cold War compliance debate among the United States and its friends and allies unleashed by the Reagan administration’s determination to rebuild Western political consensus against the “evil empire.” That administration’s failure to build support for its “Yellow Rain” allegations that the Soviet Union and its proxies were using chemical and biological weapons in Afghani-
stan and Southeast Asia led many U.S. friends and allies to conclude that America could not be trusted to keep the evidence straight. The Clinton administration’s failure to offer internationally persuasive evidence in support of its allegations that Iran is pursuing illicit nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons program was also troubling, as was its apparent failure to persuade critics that the pharmaceutical plant bombed in Sudan in response to the embassy bombings in Africa was in fact engaged in weapons activities. Numerous friends and allies find the United States to be chronically unreliable in uncovering, confirming, reporting, and sharing evidence of noncompliance, a factor that greatly complicates the challenge of building international political coalitions against noncompliant states. Of course, it is important to bear in mind that others must find it more convenient to argue with the United States about the nature of the evidence than to act on the evidence by signing up for punitive measures.

Nor did Iklé anticipate how politicized the domestic U.S. compliance debate would become. The current problem has its roots in the Cold War, when the compliance debate seemed to be taken hostage by the extremes in the debate about arms control’s utility in coping with the Soviet military threat. One extreme cast arms control as a dangerous delusion, with noncompliance the inevitable behavior of totalitarian states and over-compliance the inevitable behavior of democratic ones. The other extreme turned a blind eye to allegations of noncompliance, believing that they were made in bad faith by those who sought to bring down the arms control regime by dramatizing compliance problems of marginal significance. One vestige of this debate is the present difficulty in gaining Senate consent to ratification of arms control instruments negotiated and signed by the United States. At the beginning of the second Clinton administration, more than half a dozen treaties awaited Senate action. At the end of the administration, only one (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) had been acted upon—and rejected by the Senate. Domestic politicization is also evident in the partisanship that has emerged over the course of action necessary to restore compliance. Clinton administration strategies to restore compliance by North Korea and Iraq were too often but one more point of debate in the domestic competition for constituency and power.

New Actors in the Arms Control Process

Sixth, Iklé described an arms control process between unitary government actors that plays out in front of a Greek chorus of international public opinion. How much more muddled the process has become.

Today, that perception of governments as unitary actors has given way to an understanding of the competing influences within various national capitals. Sometimes it even appears that there is greater cooperation across governments than within them. For example, ACDA (and its successor entities in the Department of State) has cooperated with the implementing authorities in other countries to implement the CWC even as the executive and legislative branches in the U.S. government have had trouble agreeing to the priority that should be given such cooperation (and even on the disposition of ACDA itself).

The problem, however, is not just that governments do not act quite as they might have in 1961 to conduct their arms control policies. Rather, governments have been joined in the arms control process and the compliance debate by a host of new actors. The role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is well recognized, both as promoters and opponents of arms control. The pro-arms control NGO community has not, unfortunately, been noted for a strong interest in dealing with noncompliance, often because it perceives a need to defend arms control instruments from their detractors. Alternatively, anti-arms control NGOs have also done the compliance agenda little service by leaping on every allegation of noncompliance as proof of the idiocy of arms control. The media as well plays a role today that it did not four decades ago in setting the agenda of policymakers and shaping public opinion. The emergence of the Internet has created unprecedented interconnectedness and transparency among scientists working in militarily-sensitive areas and has even empowered individuals to act as investigators and arbiters of treaty compliance by states. Business, too, has interests to promote and protect, as argued above. And, as already noted, multilateral organizations have a large and growing role in mediating and shaping the compliance debate among states.

As noted above, Iklé also lamented the short memory of the Greek chorus—the inability of the public and the international community to sustain the political will to keep the heat on violators. No better contemporary ex-
ample exists than Iraq. This problem has been reinforced by the changing role of the media, which deluges readers and viewers with huge amounts of information and opinion and then moves quickly to another topic. But the emergence of a set of other institutional stakeholders in arms control has helped to ameliorate this effect. The emergence of these other actors has certainly reinforced the argument made above that compliance strategies are increasingly coalition-building strategies—the coalitions in question include constituents more numerous and diverse than the formal arms control partners themselves.

**Shifts in Military Measures**

A seventh important change relates to the universe of possible military measures. Remember, Iklé was thinking test ban. He was writing in a world in which mutual assured destruction was looming on the horizon, thus ruling out punitive military action. As noted above, he considered military remedies that might restore the status quo ante and other measures beyond those, including a military build-up. He was also writing in a world of sharpening debate between hawks and doves, and believed that doves would resist any military measures because they would increase the risk of nuclear war.

The military dimension of the compliance debate has become far more multifaceted with the passage of time. How, for example, might the United States seek to restore the status quo ante vis-à-vis a violation of the BWC or CWC, when the United States has made a prior unilateral decision not to possess such weapons? The United States supports both treaties not least because it sees little or no deterrent value for itself in threats of retaliation in-kind, preferring instead to rely on means that seem to offer higher value. It is not going to deal with Russian noncompliance with the BWC by reconstituting the biological arsenal it abandoned unilaterally in 1969.

But there are other military dimensions as well. Defensive countermeasures belong in the lexicon. Because non-parties and violators of the BWC, CWC, and NPT exist in regions where the United States and United Nations offer security guarantees, it is necessary to prepare militarily for the possibility that such weapons might be used to deter or defeat intervention by a U.S.-led U.N. coalition. The failure to undertake such preparations, encompassing passive and active defenses and counterforce attack capabilities, increases the likelihood that treaty violators will be emboldened to use their illicit weapons in asymmetric strategies. Especially if the use of such weapons has a crippling effect on the intervention, this could have terrible consequences for arms control. Such use would demonstrate that nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons can be used as trump cards not just against conventionally-superior military forces but also against security guarantees by the major powers and the United Nations. It is perhaps not by accident that the treaty violators of major current concern—Iraq and North Korea—are also states that have committed aggression against their neighbors, utilized terrorism to protect their regimes and extend power abroad, and now brandish veiled weapons of mass destruction threats to coerce their neighbors today. The coincidence of arms control violations with substantive threats to the peace presents specific and urgent problems for military planning.

Preemptive strikes also belong in the overall lexicon in a world not dominated by mutual assured destruction. In those cases where a clear and substantial violation of a treaty commitment also represents an imminent threat to the peace, the failure to preempt when and where politically and militarily feasible consigns many to death or, at best, unwelcome coercion.

**Changes in International Power Structures**

Eighth, between the early 1960s and the late 1990s, there have been far-reaching changes in the international context. A world order that had aligned itself in more or less bipolar terms in 1960 has given way to a very different world today. In some ways, it is much more multipolar, with a diffusion of economic and military power internationally, a growing role for regional security and political factors in the global equation, and the relative rise of Europe, Japan, China, and some developing countries to positions of significant international influence. The “third way” sought by nonaligned leaders at the height of the Cold War has given way to a situation in which most developing countries aspire to join international institutions and processes. Still, a few resist heatedly the distribution of power internationally, and a subset of this group by their contempt for norms of domestic and international behavior have cast themselves as rogues. In other ways, the world is virtually unipolar, with the United States alone among the major powers in possessing a global worldview, a military capacity to project power into large theaters and fight high inten-
sity wars there, and seemingly singularly capable of mobilizing multilateral institutions to action. But the United States is also uncertain about its present world role, sometimes acting unilaterally, other times acting through international institutions, and yet other times not acting at all.

These changing relations of power within and among the major powers, indeed the changing cast of major powers and their changing place in the international system, as well as the emergence of a tier of states aspiring to greater status and a group of rogue states, has had far-reaching impact on arms control. This shift has created new agendas, new coalitions among states, and new leadership requirements. Its impact on the compliance problem has been two-fold. First, more than at any time in the modern era, the major powers are in general agreement about the value of the global arms control regimes in promoting general international stability and their individual national security. Chinese and French membership in the NPT after the Cold War has added significantly to its political strength, for example. Second, the most egregious problems of noncompliance are found not among the major powers but among the rogue states—states whose relative insularity and aggressive leaders only magnify the difficulties of restoring compliance. Their leaders seem to have even fewer reasons than did the Soviet leadership to cooperate to implement arms control agreements; indeed, for Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong II, confrontation has been a route to domestic legitimacy and a modicum of international political support from those who see Washington’s commitment to arms control enforcement as a hint of an overbearing American role in its “unipolar moment.”

Rise of Compliance Challenges

Finally, Iklé was writing conjecturally about prospective arms control compliance challenges. Today, noncompliance is an objective fact. There are some vestigial concerns about noncompliance by Russia—about both its will and ability to comply with treaty obligations in the nuclear, biological, and chemical domains. But the more fundamental compliance challenges are posed by Iraq and North Korea. Their illicit weapons programs pose a real and substantial military threat to their neighbors and to the United States, who as a security guarantor in both regions cannot risk having the credibility of its guarantees called into question by small states made large by arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. In fact, their illicit programs appear to threaten the very viability of the treaty regimes. The “what” that has come “after detection” is now a long and, from an arms control perspective, largely sordid story of lack of capability and/or will among the so-called enforcers. These two cases have called into question the effectiveness of the arms control process. If the failure to restore compliance is ultimately seen as definitive, this history will convey to others the message that arms control is nothing more than a paper tiger, and that the major powers are incapable of securing compliance by those who would cheat. What is at stake in the effort to restore compliance by both states is not merely the future of their specific weapons capabilities; rather, it is the credibility of the multilateral architecture put in place to deal with weapons of mass destruction globally. The emergence of these twin threats to the regime is especially harmful. One failure might not prove threatening to the regime, if somehow it could be explained away as the result of unique circumstances. Two failures could not be explained away so simply.

What does this lengthy review tell us about how the compliance problem has changed over four decades?

There is much to suggest that the international community is better prepared today than in 1961 to successfully implement strategies to deter evasion and to restore compliance. Arms controllers have been sobered by the necessity of coming to terms with stubborn problems of noncompliance and by the less taxing but still difficult political work of effectively implementing treaty commitments. The most egregious problems of noncompliance are posed by rogue states and not peer competitors, and thus lend themselves to some measure of concerted international action. With French and Chinese membership in the NPT after the end of the Cold War, the five permanent members of the Security Council are now all states parties to the major international treaties on nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (although doubt about Russian and Chinese compliance with their BWC obligations remain). The tools of compliance policy are far more numerous. The comprehensive NBC treaty regime has emerged as a tool for building coalitions among states to punish noncompliant behavior. Mechanisms for implementing sanctions have increased in number, especially international sanctions. Military means also play a growing role, as do ad hoc political measures aimed at restoring compliance in particular instances. Treaty instruments have evolved to more di-
rectly address the challenges of effective implementation and full compliance. The arms control architecture that emerged after Iklé wrote his famous article is far-reaching in its scope and effective in gaining the adherence of many states that are otherwise capable of building and/or acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

On the other hand, the historical record includes few examples of actually restoring compliance except those made possible by a change of regime (as in Russia). The existence of arms control compliance mechanisms does not ensure their success—one U.S. secretary of defense called the Standing Consultative Commission “a diplomatic carpet under which Soviet violations have been continuously swept, an Orwellian memory hole into which our concerns have been dumped like yesterday’s trash.” The Agreed Framework has been similarly vilified. The multilateral context and the changing content of arms control have added a good deal of complexity, both institutionally and politically, to the compliance agenda. The domestic and international politics of compliance is highly politicized, with deep divisions of opinion about how important certain types of violations actually are, about the elements of the strategy to restore compliance, and about the costs to be imposed on those whose compliance may yet be restored. The arms control architecture created over the last four decades may yet prove to be a house of cards—if it proves ineffective at restoring compliance where noncompliance is now an established fact.

In short, between 1961 and 2001, the context of the arms control compliance problem has changed fundamentally. But the problem itself has changed hardly at all. Some states sign arms control agreements with the intent to cheat and the challenges of restoring their compliance are numerous.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Whether the arms control inheritance of the last four decades will prove to be a robust architecture or a house of cards will be determined in large measure by the new administration coming to Washington in 2001. New policymakers will have to consider a set of basic strategic questions as they construct the new administration’s agenda.

Is nonproliferation still a worthy goal of U.S. policy, or should Washington shift its attention even more in the direction of counterproliferation? To outward appearances at least, the commitment to nonproliferation and to a strategy that balances nonproliferation and counterproliferation cuts across the U.S. political spectrum and is deep and abiding. But some in Washington believe that the fight against nonproliferation is a losing one and has already been lost in regions of particular security concern to the United States. Adherents of this perspective tend also to be devotees of ballistic missile defenses.

If the answer to the first question is yes, then a second question follows: is multilateral arms control a useful way to secure the nation’s nonproliferation interests? Although the benefits of the multilateral control regimes are often over-sold by their supporters, there appears to be no deep opposition to the continued implementation of the treaties controlling nuclear proliferation and chemical and biological disarmament. But here too, the consensus may be less broad and deep than it appears. Especially on the conservative side of the spectrum there are advocates of a retreat from multilateral arms control—and for the last few years they have set the agenda for the Senate. Many believe the Clinton administration threw away the most effective nonproliferation instrument—the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM). It is highly doubtful, however, that a new administration would find many partners for a strategy that junks the existing treaty regime and tries to reconstruct a U.S.-directed export control process.

If the answer to the first two questions is yes, then the new administration will have to consider the place of the compliance agenda in its overall arms control strategy. This means that it will have to attempt to come to terms with the challenges posed by Iraq and North Korea—and the loss of credibility (for the arms control regimes) attendant to the fact that compliance has not been restored despite nearly a decade’s worth of effort.

How might these challenges play out in the period ahead? Perhaps the problem will simply go away. A coup in Iraq could come at any moment and spell the end of Saddam Hussein’s willful contempt for the obligations imposed on him at the end of the Persian Gulf War. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) could opt to confederate with the Republic of Korea (South Korea)—or simply collapse as the prolonged famine takes its toll on the viability of the state. But although policymakers may long for such a sudden
turn of events as an escape from the dilemmas of compliance politics, they cannot bet on it. Both Saddam Hussein and the DPRK have already outlived the longevity expected of them by many. Iklé’s still trenchant analysis of the regime in Pyongyang is a sobering reminder of its longevity.

Alternatively, there may be a prolonged period ahead of uncertainty about whether or not the processes in place will ultimately secure treaty compliance by Iraq and North Korea—neither failure nor success. We have already lived with this situation for years longer than most experts thought would be necessary, especially in the case of Iraq. Perhaps the ambiguous situation will last not years but a decade or two, as the process produces incremental progress but not ultimate success.

Another possibility is that the compliance conflicts with both countries will come to a head sooner rather than later. If there is clear success with both countries, it seems likely that the architecture constructed over the last four decades will have a good deal of efficacy and longevity. A more ambiguous situation, failure with one but success with the other, would likely have different implications for the specific regions, and would arguably fray the global regime without leading to its unraveling.

But it is useful to ponder what failure in both cases might mean—failure defined as the open deployment of previously foresworn weapons of mass destruction, and over the objection of the international community. Such deployments would pose important new threats to regional neighbors within range of delivery systems, raising questions about preemptive war, the viability of deterrence, and possible future arms racing. A nuclear-armed Iraq would likely accelerate nuclear weapons activities in Iran, and possibly among other neighbors. A nuclear-armed DPRK would reenergize interests in South Korea in a nuclear weapons capability of its own, while also calling into question the premises that led to the U.S. withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons early in the decade. These developments would trouble both China and Japan, especially if they were seen to portend a reunified, nuclear-armed Korea. States that have signed up to arms control treaties in the belief that they would be sufficient either to prevent NBC acquisition among their neighbors or to elicit international efforts that reverse such acquisition might well conclude that they too must abandon those treaties to secure their interests. This could lead to an unraveling of the treaty regime, whether regionally or globally. Some states might conclude that their interests require a formal public stance of adherence to the regime but surreptitious weapons development activities as a hedge against an uncertain future. An arms control regime that has weakened substantively but not visibly may be a particularly worrisome prospect, because it is likely to elicit few efforts by the major powers to redress the problem while also planting the seeds of a possible wildfire-like spread of weapons in response to some catalytic event. If formalized restraint as envisioned in the arms control regime were to go the way of the Hague Convention and Washington naval treaties, one result could well be regional wars in which weapons of mass destruction are used by one or both sides to secure battlefield advantage. Further proliferation of such weapons among states would likely also increase the access of non-state actors to such weapons, many of which are motivated by special grudges against the United States and/or the other major powers. Thus, a major power might find itself the victim of a weapon of mass destruction attack even if it were not involved as a local military actor in some regional conflict.

Role of the U.N. Security Council

If the last decade’s underperformance of the treaty regimes on compliance has raised profound questions about the efficacy of those regimes, it has also raised fundamental questions about the role of the U.N. Security Council in promoting their effective implementation. As noted earlier, the Security Council is assigned the role as final arbiter of issues of enforcement of and withdrawal from the major multilateral treaty regimes. When the implementing bodies, ad hoc coalitions, and key interested states cannot resolve specific compliance problems, responsibility falls to the Security Council. This is consistent with its members’ responsibility under the U.N. Charter to guard against threats to international peace and security—and with their authority to use force in order to do so.

On Iraq, the Security Council’s role over the last decade is both impressive and disturbing. Council members originally found unanimity after the revelations about Iraq’s unconventional weapons in determining that those weapons should be eliminated before a full peace with Iraq is restored, and proved remarkably willing for a number of years to support UNSCOM in its confron-
tations with Baghdad. But then consensus began to unravel. Some of the five permanent members (P-5) were eager to reap the economic benefits of resumed oil trade with Iraq and began to put these interests above eliminating Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. Some also saw the United States as bent on maintaining sanctions on Iraq so long as Saddam Hussein remained in power. The growing prominence in Moscow politics of Yevgeny Primakov, an old friend of Iraq’s, only magnified the concerns of many UNSCOM supporters that Russia had effectively switched sides in the confrontation between the Security Council and Iraq. China’s support was tentative at best, given its profound commitment to the principle of non-interference in the affairs of others, a commitment born in its long history of interference in its own affairs by outside powers, but one which would appear to hinder its performance of certain collective security responsibilities. The relative isolation of the United States among the P-5 was magnified by opinion in the other P-5 capitals that America’s hegemonic position in world affairs is dangerous because it fuels an impulsive unilateralism and a new willingness to hector others to meet standards of behavior set in Washington. That isolation was only enhanced when American leadership intimated that the sanctions on Iraq would not be dropped even if UNSCOM pronounced Iraq free of banned weapons and would go only after Saddam Hussein went. By the time of renewed confrontation with Iraq in early 1998, Baghdad had succeeded in dividing the Security Council membership sufficiently to ensure that military action would not be taken to induce its compliance with the original Security Council requirements. But in the replay of the confrontation in late 1998, Iraq succeeded in isolating all of its supporters on the Council. Over the next two years, they have found only enough common cause to create a successor to UNSCOM—the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), which has yet to send an inspector into Iraq. Sanctions remain in place, though Iraq’s isolation is being steadily whittled away by defectors from the sanctions, and the Security Council’s principal members are divided as ever on how next to proceed, as the United States and Britain continue essentially unilaterally to enforce the no-fly-zone. Reports continue to emerge of renewed Iraqi WMD development.

On North Korea, the story is hardly better. Here too there can be no dispute about the nature or extent of the DPRK’s noncompliance with its arms control obligations. The DPRK agreed to trade away an alleged nuclear weapons program for other gains. The Agreed Framework negotiated in 1994 was widely understood to be the only alternative to a war that neither China nor Russia would support. It was also seen to be an alternative to the sanctions on North Korea that Beijing had explicitly indicated to be unacceptable. The Security Council has been less directly involved in the North Korean than the Iraqi issue. But each phase of the DPRK nuclear problem has played out among the United States, China, and Russia. China has acquiesced to the implementation of the Framework by the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), but has done little to support it with political or economic means. In 1998, the approach appeared to be faltering badly. Allegations surfaced of new nuclear weapons activities even as doubts remained about how effectively the Agreed Framework froze old activities. The DPRK hinted at withdrawal from the Framework as a result of failure by the United States to honor its end of the bargain. Congressional support for the administration’s strategy appeared ready to terminate. But the Framework survived, largely on the argument that there is no better alternative. Confidence in eventual success on the nuclear question has risen with the dramatic diplomatic developments associated with Pyongyang’s opening to Seoul and Washington and with the hope that the Sunshine Policy pursued by South Korean President Kim will sooner or later make possible a political resolution of the Korean conflict—or at the very least give North Korea good reason to delay further pursuit of its nuclear and missile ambitions.

In 1998 the Security Council faced a third test of its capacity to protect the global arms control regime—as a result of the nuclear weapons tests in South Asia. Although these tests were conducted by states outside the NPT and thus were not formally violations of treaty obligations, they were certainly shocks to the nonproliferation regime, an insult to the obligations borne by most other states not to test such weapons, and a test of the capacity of the major powers to act to restrain behavior deemed harmful to international peace and security, and thus to deter future such actions. The five permanent members of the Security Council responded to the tests with a consensus view of the restraint that would be desirable if India and Pakistan are to develop their nuclear potential consistent with their promise to build only
minimum deterrents. But the consensus view masked a good deal of disparate opinion about whether or how to induce India and Pakistan to take the desired steps. The United States found little or no support for imposing economic penalties on either state and even less interest in the possible impact of South Asian developments on the global nuclear status quo.

The lack of consensus and political will among the permanent members of the Security Council to resolve these compliance problems has surprised many. With the end of the Cold War, there was much new hope that the Council would at least live up to the aspirations of the founders of the United Nations. With regard to their arms control enforcement responsibilities, this hope took specific expression in the form of a declaration made in 1992 (and subsequently reaffirmed) by which the P-5 stated their intention to treat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as a general threat to the peace (code words for justifying their use of force) and committed themselves to concerted follow-up actions to strengthen nonproliferation approaches. Expectations for a more active Security Council role on the arms control compliance agenda were reinforced by the decisions of France and China to join the NPT regime.

What accounts for the disappointing performance of the Security Council on this score? Some analysts see the answer as having to do with accidents of history that put certain specific decisionmakers in the wrong place at the wrong time. A better answer has to do with the structural changes in the international political system discussed above. Russia is in strategic retreat today, and defines its international role as much by distancing itself from Washington and frustrating U.S. purposes as by any other factor. China experiences a sharp political conflict between its sense of its emerging great power role and its historic commitment to non-alignment and non-interference. Moreover, the ability of both Russia and China to provide political leadership to the global arms control regime is impaired by noncompliance problems of their own; Russia with the CWC and BWC and China with the BWC and its nuclear nonproliferation obligations. France and Britain define their role on the Council as much by the quality of the relationship they wish to have with the United States as by any other factor.

But of course the major player among the major powers is the United States. At best, it is weakly engaged in its Security Council role. Its capacity to rely on the United Nations was hobbled until recently by its chronic inability to pay its dues. Many in Washington see multilateral processes as somehow inconsistent with America’s singular status and influence, thus ensuring that America’s engagement in those processes is at best cyclical and unreliable. Moreover, its interest in the global treaty regime is not particularly strong. Its capacity to play an effective leadership role in the CWC has been significantly impaired by the sorry record of its last-minute ratification and delayed implementation, having remained formally in noncompliance with the treaty by virtue of its failure to pass implementing legislation for over two years. Few in Washington recognize that America’s arms control partners in the multilateral treaty regimes include a number of states for which U.S. compliance is a big issue (not just Russia and China but also European allies and the Non-Aligned Movement states, for example). Few in Washington recognize also that the failure of Washington to mobilize and lead multilateral institutions and processes when others would wish it to do so only increases the likelihood that those others will not endorse U.S. initiatives when Washington decides to move on its own.

Of course, the premise behind the special responsibilities of the P-5 is not that they will find consensus on all questions of international affairs—it is only that their interests will coalesce sufficiently in the case of especially dire threats to the peace to enable them to act to protect or restore the peace. So far at least, they have failed to find the necessary consensus in the case of Iraq (and to a lesser extent North Korea) to secure the outcomes that their arms control obligations require. If and as the “solutions” in place in both cases unravel further in the period ahead, the P-5 will be compelled by circumstance to make choices about their security guarantor roles. Most of them have apparently been willing to make choices that appear to be tactical defeats for Washington in the two compliance campaigns. This augurs poorly for the future.

But whether they will continue to tolerate Iraqi and DPRK noncompliance when the choices they make call into question their very efficacy as major powers and their special rights as permanent members of the Security Council is an open question. Formal “break-out” by Iraq and North Korea would be a direct insult to the power of the Security Council and its members. At a time of heightened debate at the United Nations about the le-
The very premise that there are major powers in the international system that take responsibility for the management of the system may be flawed. The major powers exercised an influence in the international system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that they may not exercise in the twenty-first. This too has to do with structural changes in the international system, including the rise of a great many states to positions of wealth and regional political and military influence, as well as the blending of hard and soft power sources in the interstate system. As “the world’s only superpower,” the United States has found that it lacks the power sufficient to achieve its stated goals in both Asia and the Middle East. Part of what is at stake in the confrontations with Iraq and the DPRK is the very efficacy of a U.N. system built on the premise that the major powers can protect the peace when the chips are down. Their failure could well signal the eclipse of the major power system as such. A world order built on an assumption of some semblance of great power unanimity would likely give way to a world order in which regional orders are built by locally powerful states, whether in hegemonic fashion or in competition with one another.27

Alternatives to the U.N. Security Council

What are the alternatives to a leading role for the Security Council in restoring compliance by Iraq and North Korea? Some people will look to other components of the U.N. system to compensate for the shortcomings of the Security Council. They should not look too long or hard.

The secretary general historically has played only a minor role in dealing with arms control compliance issues. This changed conspicuously in early 1998 with Kofi Annan’s decision to mediate between the Security Council and the regime in Baghdad in order to prevent U.S. military action. Few in Washington view this development as positive from the point of view of future efforts to deter evasion by arms control violators. Baghdad has exploited the secretary general’s emergence as a competing source of power and decision at the United Nations, thus weakening Iraq’s accountability directly to the Security Council. Other treaty violators may well conclude that in future showdowns with the Security Council, a secretary general committed to peace at any price could be exploited to isolate politically those members of the Security Council that see the use of force as necessary to create a viable peace.

The General Assembly has long played a role as a stimulus to diplomatic initiatives on disarmament, though its actual contributions to the international diplomacy of compliance are difficult to find. The Assembly debate on arms control has been animated largely by the aspiration to rid the world of nuclear weapons, and thus has concentrated on what many there consider to be the failure of the nuclear weapon states to comply with their NPT Article VI obligations to eliminate their nuclear arsenals. The success of a few especially vocal leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement in co-opting the Assembly arms control debate is particularly troubling from the perspective of the compliance agenda, as those leaders are often the countries of primary proliferation concern. Why, for example, should India be accorded leadership of the North-South nuclear debate when India, one of only three countries outside the NPT, acts in ways that the treaty signatories have foresworn and thus violates the international norms they have sought to codify and extend?

If the United Nations cannot get the job done, how else might it be done? An alternative to concerted actions by the major powers is unilateral action by the United States. Presumably that action would be military in nature, aimed at removing illicit weapons and programs that diplomatic means have failed to prevent. After all, the United States has specific security guarantor roles in both East Asia and the Middle East, roles unlike those of any other major power. From the point of view of immediate arms control interests, this may not be an unacceptable development, given the plausible alternatives. A U.S.-led solution to the problem would likely reinforce the confidence of U.S. friends and allies in the functioning of an orderly international system and the efficacy of existing institutions, including arms control and collective security, to deal with the challenges posed by the rogue states. By reinforcing the role of arms control, deterrence of future acquisition by other states would be strengthened. It would help to set to rest questions about America’s capacity to attach its power to
problems of common international concern, and reinforce among medium-rank powers that they will not be left to fend for themselves in an anarchic international system dominated by great power antipathy.

But unilateral action by the United States would have significant drawbacks. It would likely fuel only greater resistance to Washington’s policy initiatives in Moscow and Beijing, stiffer anger from America’s allies, and deeper anti-Americanism among the developing countries and Non-Aligned Movement. At the very least, this would harm future prospects for building U.S.-led political coalitions against other noncompliant states. Moreover, while unilateral military action might “solve” the problem in any given instance, sole reliance on the repeated use of solely U.S. military power to eliminate the weapons arsenals of rogue states would be morally troubling to many Americans, as to U.S. friends and allies. As Michael Walzer has argued, “when the world divides radically into those who bomb and those who are bombed, it becomes morally problematic even if the bombing in this or that instance is justifiable.” Leaders in Moscow, Beijing, and elsewhere might not be highly motivated to help Washington escape the charge of hegemonism and unilateralism, but nor can they be motivated to make choices that leave them in a world in which their power too is seen to have been eclipsed and in which they are left to fend for themselves against regional actors with weapons of mass destruction (and long-range delivery systems).

But what if the United States were not to act to try to eliminate these weapons in the event of the failure of the Security Council to do so? The failure of the United States to act to protect its regional allies and partners would call into question its global role as a security guarantor and perhaps its leadership position more generally. If the result were to be the collapse of extended deterrence by the United States to allies in Europe and Asia and U.S. disengagement from theaters where weapons of mass destruction are present, then the world would likely change in fundamental ways. And NBC proliferation would likely be one undesirable result.

In sum, a decade after revelations about illicit weapons programs in Iraq and North Korea, the multilateral treaty regime suffers a growing crisis of confidence about its efficacy in the face of willful violation. This is a crisis of confidence in arms control. It is also a crisis of confidence in the roles of the major powers and the U.N. Security Council in securing arms control compliance. It is a crisis that is not widely recognized in Washington where, to the extent there is strong lingering interest in arms control, the focus is very much on the bilateral U.S.-Russian agenda and not the multilateral one. But it is oft expressed by decisionmakers in countries that have abandoned actual weapons capabilities or weapons development programs. In private conversations in Washington and elsewhere, they often report the debates that have re-opened in their countries about whether it made sense to abandon NBC weapons—whether the bet they placed on arms control, on the security guarantors, and on the United States was the right bet. Addressing their concerns is central to any nonproliferation strategy. Providing confidence in the efficacy of the regime and predictability in the security environment is central to ensuring that the large and growing number of states capable of building weapons of mass destruction choose not to do so.

CONCLUSIONS

Questions about the ability of arms control instruments to secure compliance by willful treaty violators will be around as long as arms control is utilized as a tool to promote national security and international stability. A serious commitment to arms control means taking seriously the political and security aspects of noncompliance. A program to deter evasion, as envisioned by Fred Iklé in 1961, is necessary to deal with noncompliance. So too is a program to reverse evasion by restoring compliance.

From the vantage point of 2001, Iklé’s rather conjectural review of the problem has only gained currency and immediacy in the intervening decades. Although the understanding of the political and security aspects of noncompliance has deepened and the tools for coping with it have grown more numerous and robust, the underlying dilemma remains. But today, unlike 1961, the entire arms control architecture is being sorely tested by extant problems of material violations by two states (and compounded by politically insufficient arms control compliance among the major powers). “Programs to deter evasion” have failed in at least two important cases. Programs to restore compliance are struggling if not failing. The multilateral arms control regime is in a crisis of confidence.
If Security Council members succeed in fulfilling their responsibilities as the final arbiters of arms control enforcement in these two cases, not only arms control but international security seems likely to be greatly strengthened. But if they fail, the alternatives are grim. One is reliance on U.S. unilateralism, an approach that for political reasons is likely to be short-lived and in any case would have various deleterious consequences for the larger world order. The other is the explicit irrelevance of the major powers to this set of problems. The result could be a dramatic eclipse not just of American power but of the institutions, processes, and balances of power that have defined the post-Cold War era.

2 Ibid., p. 208.
5 Ibid., p. 209.
6 Ibid., p. 217.
7 For a review of the Soviet compliance debate at the height of the U.S. domestic debate about the role of arms control in coping with the Soviet Union, see Robert J. Einhorn, “Treaty Compliance,” Foreign Policy 34 (Winter 1981-82), pp. 29-47.
8 This essay was originally prepared for a July 1998 workshop entitled “Compliance With Arms Control and Nonproliferation Agreements: Closing the Conceptual and Policy Gaps,” co-hosted by the Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute and the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies. The author is grateful to Rolf Ekeus, Michael Moodie, and Amy Sands for thoughtful commentary on earlier drafts of this article.
10 Ibid.
11 Robert Galluci’s remarks at “Compliance with Arms Control and Nonproliferation Agreements” workshop, July 1998.