

EDITOR'S NOTE

How do we know what we know? Or to put it more precisely, how do we know that our knowledge of any particular subject or issue is both accurate and complete?

If, like many of our readers, you are an expert in one or more aspects of the field of global nonproliferation, then you have a wealth of resources upon which you can draw, including professional journals and listservs, regular interaction with colleagues, arcane or difficult to obtain official documents and transcripts, and, of course, a deep background of higher education and personal experience. (Government officials often, but not always, have access to even more information. However, this does not necessarily improve their comprehension of a particular topic.) Taken together, these resources enable you to understand and interpret mainstream media news coverage of complicated nonproliferation issues in ways that the general reader cannot.

One reason for the existence of an independent press is to make such issues comprehensible and relevant for the ordinary reader. Journalists are assigned particular news beats, and over time they can develop expertise in the issues they cover. Reporters and their editors also serve as filters, deciding which stories to pursue and which to ignore, which deserve prominent and sustained coverage and which do not, and which experts to draw upon to offer readers a variety of views and interpretations. This role is especially important given the increasing consolidation of the news media and the ability of elite publications like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to drive by example the coverage of many national and international stories. Pressure to publish exclusives and sell more papers (this is the news *business* after all), also determines the quality and the tenor of coverage, in ways both good and bad.

A vigorous, free, and independent press, therefore, is essential to a healthy democracy even if, as is the case in the United States these days, fewer and fewer people get their news from newspapers and magazines. But what happens if the news media provide insufficient, incorrect, or biased coverage of a critical issue over a sustained period of time? Specialists, with their background and extensive resources, can separate wheat from chaff, adding nuance and filling in the blanks to assemble a fuller and more accurate story. They can also debunk, critique, and even try to correct this coverage.

But for the majority of non-experts (a category, it must be noted, that also includes a large number of elected officials) such recourse is not possible. What's reported (and, just as important, what is not) not only reflects reality, it effectively becomes reality. Lacking the critical skills of the expert, the average reader may not—and most likely will not—be able to detect a slant, an error, or an oversight, let alone correct it. And when these mistakes are repeated frequently enough and across multiple media outlets, alternative perspectives cannot gain a foothold, leading to significant misperceptions and bad public policy.

In our lead article, Hugh Gusterson (George Mason University) assesses this problem by critically examining the mainstream print media's coverage of North Korea and its nuclear program, in particular the implementation and subsequent collapse of the 1994 Agreed Framework. Gusterson also documents the print media's over-reliance on anonymous and government sources at the expense of independent experts. And he

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explains that too often coverage of North Korea has been driven by an overarching narrative framework that oversimplifies and stereotypes North Korea (and ridicules leader Kim Jong Il) at the expense of sound diplomacy and effective policy.

Christopher A. Stevens (University of Nebraska–Kearney) looks at an issue that should receive more attention but hasn't: why do states give up their nuclear weapons? Focusing on Ukraine and utilizing interviews with many Ukrainian officials, along with a close analysis of Ukrainian and Russian news sources, Stevens makes the case that Ukraine did not surrender the large number of nuclear weapons it inherited following the collapse of the Soviet Union (making it, for a time, the possessor of the third-largest nuclear arsenal in the world) because it was paid to do so, or because it faced significant financial and technical obstacles in operating and maintaining them. Rather, Ukraine's leaders could not conceive of a threat requiring the use of nuclear weapons, so they dispensed with them largely because they were deemed unnecessary. A proper understanding of Ukraine's motivations, argues Stevens, is essential if the lessons from this case of successful disarmament are to be applied elsewhere.

Masafumi Takubo (independent writer and activist) reviews the long and not altogether successful history of Japan's efforts since the mid-1950s to develop a plutonium reprocessing capability and close its nuclear fuel cycle. Now, despite serious proliferation concerns, Japan is preparing to start commercial operations at the Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant, the first such large-scale facility in a non-nuclear weapon state. Takubo discusses Japan's quest to open Rokkasho, including its use of misleading data to justify operating the plant. He recommends that before Rokkasho opens for business, a comprehensive public dialogue between the national government and local stakeholders take place, allowing for the full exploration of less expensive and less dangerous alternatives, such as interim dry cask storage, to manage the country's growing stockpile of spent fuel.

Monika Heupel (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/German Institute for International and Security Affairs) examines the progress, or lack thereof, in implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which in 2004 mandated that all states legislate mechanisms to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, their means of delivery, and certain technologies related to their manufacture, and to enact and enforce laws barring non-state actors from involvement in such proliferation. Unfortunately, the resolution's universal nature and lack of specific standards, combined with insufficient resources and institutional capacity in many countries, has hampered its implementation. Heupel reviews these challenges and recommends a strengthened 1540 Committee, greater assistance from nongovernmental organizations for those countries that need it, increased commitment from the United States (which lobbied heavily for 1540's passage), and boosted political will to fulfill the resolution's full potential.

This issue also features three book reviews covering Iran's nuclear program, an inside look at the negotiations to curtail a North Korean bomb, and a history of the genesis and dissolution of the Cold War nuclear arms race. Barbara Slavin (U.S. Institute of Peace) compares and critiques *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, by Alireza Jafarzadeh, and *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, by Shahram Chubin. C. Kenneth Quinones (Akita International University) looks at *Failed Diplomacy: How North Korea Got the Bomb*, by Charles Pritchard. And Karthika Sasikumar (Simons Centre for Disarmament

and Non-Proliferation Research) offers some observations on *The Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Arms Race*, by Richard Rhodes.

Finally, we inaugurate with this issue a new correspondence section, wherein we invite our readers and contributors into a dialogue about the articles we publish and the subject matter we cover. We hope you find it a valuable addition to the *Review*, and we encourage you to offer your own comments.

Stephen I. Schwartz, Editor