Overview

Nuclear latency can be viewed as the possession of most or all of the technologies, facilities, materials, expertise (including tacit knowledge), resources, and other capabilities necessary for the development of nuclear weapons, stopping short of full operational weaponization. Technically, it derives from the dual-use nature of the atom. The issue also has to be seen historically—involving the full range of capability possessed by aspiring, existing, and former nuclear-weapon states, and the possible diffusion of nuclear-weapon relevant information via a number of outlets, including non-state nuclear supply networks, the Internet, etc.

Nuclear latency has been an issue for nearly seven decades. Concerns about latency in the form of the possible misuse of civilian nuclear power programs for military purposes was on the minds of the authors of the Acheson-Lilienthal Report and the Baruch Plan. In this context, nuclear latency was seen to pose a strategic technological threat that could result in strategic surprise.

Although the threat emanating from a single weapon or a small arsenal is not seen in the same way it was in the 1940s, there remains a concern that some limited number could dramatically change the global strategic equation. Iran’s nuclear program has raised the issue at one end of the continuum and simultaneously revitalized interest in disarmament at the other.

Neither the Nonproliferation Treaty nor the other nonproliferation and arms control treaties reached so far directly address latency and the concept is not fully encompassed or explored in policy debates over nuclear weapons proliferation, nor in the treaties, institutions, and norms designed to address these threats through nuclear nonproliferation, arms control and disarmament.

From the perspectives of both nonproliferation and disarmament, latency is a reality that can be seen as positive or negative, but in any case complicates the achievement of the objective. Some questions that this workshop will explore include: is nuclear latency unique? Is latency a condition for nuclear-weapon states and for many non-nuclear-weapon states? Can it be a strategy for proliferant states? Can it be a viable nonproliferation strategy? How has latency been seen and addressed in the past? Will latency be a positive or negative for future efforts to control or eliminate nuclear weapons? To what extent will latency exist in a nuclear–free world?
Agenda — October 2nd, 2014

08:30  Arrival and Light Breakfast

09:00  Welcoming Remarks
   Joseph Pilat  Los Alamos National Laboratory
   Christian Ostermann  The Wilson Center

09:30  Nuclear Latency: History, Concepts, and Issues
   Speakers:
      Ariel Levite  Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
      Alex Montgomery  Reed College
      TBA

11:00  Break

11:15  Nuclear Latency, Weapons, and Energy Programs
   Speakers:
      Raymond Jeanloz  University of California, Berkeley
      Steven Koonin  New York University*
      William Charlton  Texas A&M University

12:45  Lunch

13:45  Historical Case Studies: Brazil, Japan, and Iran
   Speakers:
      Matias Spektor  Fundação Getúlio Vargas
      Takaaki Daitoku  Northwestern University
      Aniseh Tabrizi  Kings College London

15:15  Break

15:30  Historical Lessons and Implications for Nonproliferation and Disarmament
   Speakers:
      Olli Heinonen  Belfer Center, Harvard University
      Robert Litwak  The Wilson Center
      Mark Fitzpatrick  International Institute for Strategic Studies

17:00  Reception

*Invited