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Nuclear Nonproliferation Games

America is acting like a nuclear chump. We don't need to.

Sometimes generosity just doesn't pay. Consider the Obama administration's desire to lead the world toward restraint on nuclear weapons. It is pushing an agreement with Russia that will reduce America's nuclear arsenal, and it is offering less-developed states access to nuclear-power technology to persuade as many of them as possible to help control the further spread of nuclear weapons.

What has been the response? Mostly, more states demanding freer access to more sensitive nuclear technology than our government will share, and an ever larger number of nuclear-supplier states rushing in to fill the demand.

The chutzpah of these alternative suppliers goes beyond just undermining America's nonproliferation efforts overseas. Increasingly, they are also demanding U.S. subsidies, federal contracts, and licenses to expand their American nuclear business.

These demands could easily be used as leverage on them to bring them into line on nonproliferation export controls. Yet, so far, the U.S. has not chosen to do so. Instead, the White House has turned the other cheek.

Last year, the Obama administration bragged that it had set the nonproliferation gold standard when it finalized a nuclear-cooperation agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Under this deal, the transfer of U.S.-controlled nuclear goods was tied to the UAE's forswearing making nuclear fuel itself (a process that brings a state within months of being able to acquire nuclear weapons) and opening its facilities to highly intrusive inspections.

However, no sooner did the administration announce its model deal than the French, Russians, and South Koreans rushed into the Middle East to seal nuclear agreements devoid of these key U.S. nonproliferation requirements.

The Emirates finally decided to go with a heavily discounted South Korean bid. Shortly thereafter, the

French offered Saudi Arabia and Jordan civilian nuclear assistance. The French went ahead even though Saudi Arabia and Jordan were stiffing U.S. diplomatic requests to forswear making nuclear fuel.

Russia, meanwhile, matched France's nuclear-power offers to Egypt and Turkey — two other Middle Eastern countries that have rejected U.S. pleas to forgo the making of nuclear fuel.

None of this is helping Washington establish tighter nuclear-nonproliferation controls. But it directly suggests a modest proposal: Why not condition these foreign suppliers' expansion of their American nuclear business upon their willingness to follow much tougher nonproliferation standards internationally?

Russia, for example, wants to export much more of its enriched uranium to fuel U.S. power reactors. It also is showing renewed interest in possibly importing spent fuel of U.S. origin for safekeeping — another nuclear business proposition potentially worth billions. Both ideas would require the approval of the U.S. government.

France has bigger ambitions. It not only wants to sell nuclear-fuel plants, reactors, and nuclear services to the United States, it's lobbying to get the U.S. government to help pay for these projects. Last year, it secured a $2.7 billion contract from the U.S. Department of Energy to complete a massive nuclear-fuel fabrication plant in Georgia. It also is seeking billions of dollars in U.S. loan guarantees to build power reactors throughout the United States. Just last month, it secured a $2 billion federal loan guarantee to build a uranium-enrichment plant in Idaho.

What has Washington gotten in return? Not much. American diplomats asked French officials if they would join Washington in requiring new nuclear customers in the Middle East to forswear making nuclear fuel. So far, the only answer the White House has received — and has regrettably accepted — is *Non*. In fact, administration officials have all but decided to throw in the towel.

This would be a mistake. If the Obama administration could persuade France to follow America's lead on nonproliferation, Germany would be sure to follow. Russia, which is now trying to secure German help to make Russian reactors reliable enough to be attractive for export, would have to uphold the tougher German requirements on every machine Russia exported that incorporated important German nuclear technology. South Korea and Japan, close U.S. allies, would also be likely to fall into line. All of these opportunities are ones our government should exploit.

Earlier this month, Howard Berman (D., Calif.), chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, announced his plans to tighten U.S. nonproliferation controls over nuclear cooperation. In this endeavor, he and the ranking Republican member of the committee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Fla.), along with other interested committee members, should ask why our government should help foreign nuclear firms profit in America if they are undermining our nonproliferation efforts abroad. The answer should

be obvious, and the legislative remedy — cutting them off — just as clear. Indeed, it's high time we reined in our generosity toward these firms and stopped being such nuclear chumps.

— Henry Sokolski is the executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center in Washington, D.C., and author of Controlling the Further Spread of Nuclear Weapons *(Council on Foreign Relations).*