

International Precautionary Policies: The Non-Proliferation Treaty

Carah Ong, Washington DC Office Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, presented the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a 36-year old Precautionary Policy to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force in 1970. It was built on a basic bargain: the non-nuclear weapons states agreed to forego developing or otherwise acquiring nuclear weapons in exchange for a commitment on the part of the nuclear weapons states to end the nuclear arms race at an early date and to engage in “good faith” negotiations to achieve nuclear disarmament. For the treaty to succeed in its purpose, both sides of the bargain must be fulfilled. With a few notable exceptions, the non-nuclear weapons states have kept their end of the bargain. On the other hand, the nuclear weapons states have shown scant inclination to fulfill their disarmament commitments. Both sides of the bargain are equally important and mutually reinforcing. Preventing nuclear proliferation cannot be guaranteed without nuclear disarmament, and nuclear disarmament cannot succeed without preventing nuclear proliferation.

In order to counter the perceived power of nuclear weapons states, acquiring nuclear weapons has become the goal of some countries and extremist groups. The rapid spread of and increased ability to access information, along with scientific expertise and technical capacity, has also made it easier than ever before to build a nuclear weapon. Furthermore, it has also become easier to obtain fissile material from hundreds of poorly guarded nuclear sites throughout the world. With all of these developments, the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the non-proliferation and disarmament regimes in general are under severe threat of unraveling altogether.

The five nuclear weapons states recognized under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States) have long tried to maintain exclusivity in their possession of nuclear weapons, which over time has only enhanced the perception that nuclear weapons are a source of power and prestige. In addition, their continued possession of nuclear weapons demonstrates to the world that even the most economically and militarily powerful nations rely upon nuclear weapons for security. Furthermore, the possession of nuclear weapons provides the nuclear weapons states with a psychological advantage through the tacit threat to use these weapons in a worst case conflict scenario. All of these factors provide incentives for proliferation.

There are currently some 440 nuclear reactors in 31 countries. Every nuclear reactor has the potential to manufacture nuclear weapons material. Reprocessed plutonium (a product of the nuclear power process) and highly enriched uranium (fuel for nuclear reactors) make up the essential ingredients of nuclear weapons. There is due concern that any one of the 44 nuclear capable states could turn their “peaceful” nuclear program into a nuclear weapons program. This “loophole” under Article IV of the NPT must be addressed. The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation calls for all states currently capable of producing highly enriched uranium and plutonium to commit to: a global ban on spent fuel reprocessing and reduced reliance on nuclear energy; bring uranium

enrichment and plutonium separation facilities under strict international control; regulate and store spent nuclear fuel under strict international control; make the International Atomic Energy Agency Additional Protocol mandatory for all states; and highly restrict the trade of all nuclear materials and technology.

The nuclear weapons states must promptly and transparently begin the “unequivocal undertaking” to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear arsenals by making the eight commitments listed above and leading the way in closing the Article IV “loophole.” If this is not achieved, other countries and extremist groups will continue attempts to counter the perceived power of the nuclear weapons states by acquiring their own nuclear weapons capabilities. This would be a tragedy of enormous proportions.

Current US Legislation to Preserve and Strengthen the Non-Proliferation Regime

Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) has introduced H. Res. 373 in the House of Representatives. During the last week of May 2006, Rep. Woolsey wrote to colleagues: “During this time of heightened tensions with Iran, the US should lead by example and send a message that it will pursue disarmament.” H. Res. 373 will compel the United States to consistently fulfill its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The legislation will also demonstrate the United States’ ongoing commitment to global non-proliferation and to conserve positive international relations with states currently party to and complying with the rules of the NPT.

President Bush has proposed sweeping exemptions from US nuclear trade law and practice in order to provide nuclear technology and fuel to India, even though India has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has conducted nuclear test explosions. The administration's proposal would not require India to restrain the growth of its nuclear arsenal and would weaken the international system of nuclear safeguards, which is intended to prevent the diversion of civil nuclear technology for weapons. With the importation of nuclear fuel, India could use its scarce uranium reserves to increase its nuclear weapons output from less than ten per year to over 50 per year. The proposal would implicitly endorse India's nuclear arsenal and encourage an Asian arms race.

Congressman Howard Berman (D-CA) has introduced a bill, H.R. 5430, that would establish a set of tough, but reasonable conditions that a non-NPT country must meet to become eligible for civilian nuclear trade with the United States. These include halting the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium for nuclear weapons, making a binding commitment not to conduct nuclear tests, accepting IAEA safeguards on all civilian nuclear facilities and materials, and maintaining a strong export control system.

Resources

For more information on the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, please visit:

[Http://www.wagingpeace.org](http://www.wagingpeace.org)

For more information on the Non-Proliferation Treaty, please visit:

<http://www.wagingpeace.org/menu/resources/publications/index.htm#back-to-basics>.

For more information on the international community's efforts on NPT Article VI, read "Key States Reaffirm Ridding the World of Nuclear Weapons" by James Wurst of the Global Security Institute at:

http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2006/03/05_mpi_key-states-reaffirm.htm

To take action to support H.Res. 373, please visit:

<http://capwiz.com/wagingpeace/issues/alert/?alertid=8814911&type=CO>.

To take action on the US-India nuclear deal, please visit:

<http://capwiz.com/wagingpeace/issues/alert/?alertid=8820721&type=CO>