

foreign policy *in focus*



Interhemispheric Resource Center
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Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

A little more than a decade ago, the earth was home to some 70,000 nuclear weapons. Today, that number is down to roughly 40,000. These weapons contain an explosive power equal to more than 700,000 Hiroshima bombs. Ninety-seven percent of the nuclear weapons in the world are in the U.S. (15,000) and Russia (24,000), with the other 3% held by Britain, France, and China. In addition, Israel, India, and Pakistan are believed to have, at minimum, the ability to assemble and deliver nuclear weapons should they so desire. Due to unilateral initiatives and the two Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and II), the worldwide arsenal is expected to shrink to roughly 21,000 by the year 2003, with the U.S. and Russia each maintaining some 10,000 deployed and stored, long- and short-range nuclear weapons.

Key Points

- Over the last decade, nuclear weapons have been reduced from 70,000 to 40,000. The U.S. and Russia hold 97% of these remaining nuclear weapons.
- A number of states have given up their nuclear weapons, and there are five nuclear-free zones.
- In September 1996, the UN adopted a historic Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that will only become law when ratified by all 44 nations with nuclear reactors.

The number of states that either possess nuclear weapons, or would like to, has decreased. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus have given up the nuclear weapons that they inherited following the collapse of the Soviet Union. They join South Africa as the world's only former nuclear weapons states. Other countries that have canceled their programs include Argentina, Brazil, Romania, and North Korea.

As a result of international treaties, there are now five nuclear weapons-free zones (NWFZ): Antarctica (signed in 1959), Latin America and the Caribbean (1967), the South Pacific (1985), Southeast Asia (1995), and Africa (1996). The U.S. is party to the Antarctic Treaty and has signed the relevant protocols to all but the Southeast Asia Treaty.

In July 1996 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) released an advisory opinion stating that "the threat and use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict and particularly the principles and rules of humanitarian law." The ICJ also found that the nuclear

weapons states have "an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all aspects under strict and effective international control." This obligation is rooted in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in which the nuclear weapons states agreed "to pursue negotiations" aimed at achieving "nuclear disarmament." Many of the states that have voluntarily agreed to forgo nuclear weapons, charge that the five nuclear weapons states have failed to live up to their end of the bargain.

To assuage the nonnuclear weapons states and assure the indefinite extension of the NPT, the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, and China recommitted themselves in May 1995: to the achievement of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), to the pursuit of a "convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons," and to the "determined pursuit" of "systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate aim of eliminating those weapons."

After 2,046 nuclear explosive tests and more than forty years of talking about a test ban, a CTBT was overwhelmingly adopted at a special session of the U.N. in September 1996. For this treaty (which bans all explosive nuclear testing) to enter into force and become law, all 44 nations with nuclear reactors must sign and ratify. This includes India, which refuses to give up its program unless the nuclear weapons states commit themselves to a timetable for the elimination of their arsenals, and Pakistan, which will not sign unless India does. Although the enter-into-force provision may prevent the treaty from becoming law anytime soon, Article 18 of the Vienna Law of Treaties, which outlaws conduct that might jeopardize bringing a treaty into force, may deter signatories from conducting explosive tests.

The U.S. sends out mixed messages about nuclear non-proliferation. While claiming to seek the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the Clinton administration, like those before it, plans not only to retain thousands of nuclear weapons but also to preserve the heart of the nuclear complex, including the ability to design and build new nuclear weapons far into the future.

Although President Clinton was first in line to sign the CTBT and supports a fissile material production ban, the Clinton administration has not proposed deeper cuts in nuclear weapons. This is due in part to the belief that the U.S. must be prepared in the event of a reversal of free market and democratic reforms in Russia. Failure to pursue deeper reductions and to make real progress toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons may undermine the NPT; it already prompted India to reject the CTBT. Furthermore, if one of the world's sole military superpowers claims to need nuclear weapons for its security, nations can rightfully use the same argument to seek nuclear weapons of their own, or at minimum, the poor person's version—chemical and biological weapons.

The Clinton administration bought the national laboratories' support of a CTBT with the Science Based Stockpile Stewardship (SBSS) program, which will cost taxpayers some \$40 billion over the next ten years. Under this program the Department of Energy plans to construct nine new facilities, all of which have nuclear weapons design capabilities. One such program is the National Ignition Facility (NIF). Scientists will be doing radiation-effect studies and these studies could be used to design new nuclear weapons with greater reliability, survivability, and lethality.

Scientists also plan to conduct subcritical tests in the Nevada desert. In these underground nuclear tests, the fissile material pit is replaced by a mechanically equivalent hollow sphere with very low levels of nuclear material so that a self-sustaining chain reaction will not start. Although neither the NIF nor subcritical tests will violate the letter of the CTBT because no explosive yield will be generated, SBSS activities are widely viewed as a violation of the spirit of the treaty. While most nations would need to conduct explosive tests to improve their nuclear arsenals, nations with sophisticated nuclear weapons technology could use these types of laboratory and computer-simulated tests not only to maintain first-strike confidence in an aging arsenal but also to design new nuclear weapons.

To the consternation of the nonnuclear weapons states, the Clinton administration seems to be backing away from other treaty commitments. To ensure the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation

Treaty in the spring of 1995, the U.S. promised not to use nuclear weapons against nonnuclear weapons states that were party to the treaty. One year later, upon signing the relevant protocols to the Treaty of Pelindaba (which established the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone), the White House stated that its pledge not to use nuclear weapons against any party to the treaty did not apply if a party used chemical or biological weapons.

The administration's promotion of NATO expansion may also undermine progress made on the nuclear front over the past ten years. Enlargement of the alliance, widely viewed as an attempt to encircle Russia, may force Moscow to rely more heavily on its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, NATO expansion may bring the stationing of hostile nuclear weapons close to Russian soil. For example, NATO's September 1995 *Study on NATO Enlargement* maintained that "it is important for NATO's force structure that other Allies' forces can be deployed, when and if appropriate, on the territory of new members." Any attempt to station troops or nuclear weapons next door to Russia, such as in Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, would be highly provocative and would likely elicit a negative response (see *In Focus: NATO Expansion*).

U.S. budgetary priorities are similarly misplaced. The U.S. spends roughly \$27 billion annually to prepare to fight a nuclear war (including SBSS activities and the procurement, operations, and maintenance of weapons systems), while it spends only \$2.2 billion (roughly the price of one B-2 bomber) to prevent nuclear war. These preventive measures include arms control and nonproliferation agreements, support for the International Atomic Energy Agency, and assistance to the former Soviet Republics to help them dismantle nuclear weapons and safeguard nuclear materials. Yet, while Washington views the spread of weapons of mass destruction to other nations or subnational groups (so-called "rogue states" and terrorist groups) as the primary threat facing the U.S. today, the Pentagon's budget is largely devoted to big-ticket, cold war weapons such as the F-22 fighter plane and the Seawolf submarine.

Key Problems

- Despite signing the CTBT, the Clinton administration continues to preserve and expand the heart of its nuclear complex. This may undermine international treaties and makes other states reluctant to disarm.
- The U.S. spends ten times more preparing for (\$27B) than it does preventing (\$2.2B) nuclear war.

Global Focus: A New Foreign Policy Agenda 1997-1998

Edited by Tom Barry (IRC) and Martha Honey (IPS)

This collection of policy briefs describes current U.S. foreign policy, examines its problems, and prescribes alternative policies.

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The U.S. must stop giving mixed signals about its commitment to nuclear disarmament. It should take the lead in pursuing, with Russia and the other nuclear weapons states, a clear course toward completely dismantling nuclear arsenals. Rather than clinging to thousands of nuclear weapons as a "hedge" against possible changes in Russia, Washington should focus on eliminating the real risk—the weapons. The security interests of the U.S. would be better served by living up to its treaty obligations to work in concert with the other nuclear weapons states to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Positive steps that the U.S. administration and Congress need to take include:

- Accepting the International Court of Justice's ruling that the use of nuclear weapons is contrary to international law.
- Reducing the alert status of all nuclear weapons, including physically separating warheads from delivery vehicles.
- Ratifying the Chemical Weapons Convention and the CTBT.

Key Recommendations

- The U.S. should take the lead in nuclear disarmament treaties and programs.
- The U.S. should unilaterally reduce its nuclear stockpile to 1,000 sea-based weapons.
- The U.S. should close the Nevada test site and halt most of its stockpile stewardship activities.
- The national laboratories should concentrate on cleaning up and safely storing nuclear materials.
- The U.S. should withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe.

Washington could also jump-start talks aimed at further reducing nuclear arsenals by unilaterally reducing the U.S. stockpile to some 1,000 strategic nuclear weapons based at sea. In addition to achieving a START III Treaty with Russia and START IV with all the nuclear weapons states, the U.S. should pursue the elimination of all tactical nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, the U.S. and Russia need to reach agreement on a treaty requiring the dismantling of all warheads (not just delivery systems) affected by previous

treaties. To accomplish this, Russia will likely require additional monetary and perhaps technical expertise through the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, which is assisting former Soviet Republics

to dismantle their nuclear weapons and safeguard their nuclear materials.

Washington should build on the successes of the CTR by giving it increased funding and expanding it to additional sites in Russia. Similarly, it is imperative that the U.S. administration and Congress continue to support other efforts and agencies aimed at preventing or rolling back proliferation. For example, Clinton should defend the embattled Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) in the face of those Senate Republicans who distrust arms control and should insist that the U.S. pay its dues to the UN so that organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) can continue to safeguard nuclear materials and technology.

It is also important for the U.S. to close the test site in Nevada and to halt the majority of its stockpile stewardship activities. While it is important to assure that warheads do not detonate accidentally, research intended to allow for warhead improvement, modification, and even replacement contradicts the U.S. commitment to the "determined pursuit" of "systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate aim of eliminating those weapons." Instead of costly experiments designed to perpetuate the nuclear era, the national laboratories could be tasked with cleaning up the cold war's toxic mess and designing safe and efficient methods of storing and disposing of nuclear materials.

It is imperative that no nuclear weapons be based outside their country of origin. Therefore, the U.S. should withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe. It is also crucial that U.S. policy with regard to European security and NATO not undermine a decade's worth of arms control treaties. Hedging U.S. bets by expanding NATO and clinging to thousands of nuclear weapons in case Russian democracy fails may well be provoking the Russians, pushing them closer to the nuclear button. The U.S. and its allies should instead attempt to promote a unified, cooperative European community, not one that is more divided and confrontational.

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World Wide Web

Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers

<http://www.stimson.org/pub/stimson/coalition/index.html>

InfoManage International: Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

<http://infomanage.com/nonproliferation/default.html>

The Internet Guide for Elimination Research

<http://www.stimson.org/pub/stimson/zeronuke/tiger/>

Plutonium on the Internet (Nuclear Control Institute)

<http://www.nci.org/nci/>

Todd's Atomic Homepage

<http://neutrino.nuc.berkeley.edu/neutronics/todd.html>

U.S. Nuclear Weapons Cost Study Project

<http://www.brook.edu/fp/projects/nucwcost/weapons.htm>

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