

## What is the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)?

During the early 1960's, President Kennedy and his successors reached out to other nations to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. This created a network of laws and diplomatic relations, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which convinced many countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Japan, South Africa, and South Korea to become non-nuclear states. The treaty entered into force in March 1970, the same month the U.S. ratified the treaty, and provides a framework to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and pursue nuclear disarmament. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the U.S. and the international community persuaded countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine that possessed nuclear weapons, to give up their nuclear weapons. Only 8 countries today have nuclear weapons. Of the 189 states that have ratified the treaty, five have nuclear weapons. The states fall under two categories:

- a) Nuclear weapon states (NWS): which includes the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. They are required to commit to general and complete disarmament.
- b) Non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS): according to the treaty, all other states are required to abandon the pursuit of developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. However, they are allowed to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes under strict regulations.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty is reviewed every five years in Review Conference Meetings. In 1995, at a Review Conference meeting, the States party to the treaty decided to extend the Review Conference indefinitely and without conditions. The three central components of the NPT are non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The three countries that have not signed onto the treaty are India, Pakistan, and Israel. India first tested an explosive nuclear device in 1974. India and Pakistan then conducted "tit-for-tat" nuclear tests in May 1998. Israel has not publicly conducted a nuclear test but has never admitted or denied possessing nuclear weapons. However, it is believed that Israel does possess nuclear weapons based on how much fissile material (highly enriched uranium and plutonium) the country is known to have produced. Fissile material is an essential component in the creation of nuclear weapons.

The two countries under immediate proliferation scrutiny are North Korea and Iran. North Korea withdrew from the treaty on January 10, 2003. There is no definite legal opinion whether the country is party to the NPT because it is debated whether North Korea provided the amount of time required to withdraw from the treaty. Iran is not known to possess any nuclear weapons or adequate fissile material to build any. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – the UN organization in charge of ensuring states do not build nuclear weapons illegally - concluded in 2003 that Iran had tried to establish the capacity to build fissile material. Iran's nuclear program is under continuing investigation by the IAEA.

Current US policy does not comply with its disarmament obligation. According to the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review, the US plans for maintenance of large and modernized nuclear forces for the indefinite future and for expansion of options for use of nuclear weapons. The Obama administration has agreed to crack down on nuclear proliferation by strengthening the NPT so that countries like North Korea and Iran that break the rules will automatically face strong international sanctions.

*Citizens for Global Solutions would like to credit the Arms Control Association for much of this information.*

For more information, please contact Abigail Long, Programs Coordinator, at [along@globalsolutions.org](mailto:along@globalsolutions.org), or (202) 546-3950 x105; Don Kraus, [dkraus@globalsolutions.org](mailto:dkraus@globalsolutions.org), or (202) 330-4103.