The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty: Promoting Non-Proliferation

"Together we will strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a basis for cooperation. The basic bargain is sound: countries with nuclear weapons will move towards disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them, and all countries can access peaceful nuclear energy."

— President Barack Obama

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) rests on three interrelated and mutually reinforcing pillars: nonproliferation, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and disarmament.

Nonproliferation

As the only legally binding agreement that provides a global barrier to the spread of nuclear weapons, the NPT is the cornerstone of the global nonproliferation regime. It enhances the security of every state, as well as global and regional security. Articles I and II seek to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons. Article III requires non-nuclear-weapon states to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards to verify that nuclear activities serve only peaceful purposes. The NPT encourages regional groups of states to conclude treaties to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons on their territories. Five such treaties have been concluded.

Challenges

Challenges to the NPT's nonproliferation pillar are several and serious. Robust verification of the NPT depends upon the IAEA having the necessary authorities and financial resources to fulfill its obligations. The revelation of the A.Q. Khan network's illicit activities makes clear the potential threat of illicit nuclear supply to states and non-state actors. Concerns are growing about the potential for abuse of the NPT's withdrawal clause, particularly if a Party seeking to withdraw from the NPT is already found to be in violation of its Treaty obligations.

U.S. Actions in Support of the NPT's Nonproliferation Pillar

- Supporting the IAEA's safeguards program and working to ensure that the Agency has the resources it needs to fulfill its safeguards obligations.
- Currently working with eight countries to prepare the infrastructure necessary to effectively implement the IAEA's model Additional Protocol, designed to require more detailed disclosure regarding a state's nuclear program by providing bilateral and multilateral workshops.
- Working to revitalize international safeguards technology and expertise through the U.S. Next Generation Safeguards Initiative.
- Bringing our Additional Protocol into force in January 2009 and encouraging all other states to do likewise.
- Addressing Iran's non-compliance with its NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations and North Korea's announced withdrawal from the Treaty after violating its NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations.
- Working with concerned NPT Parties to identify effective mechanisms to dissuade both violation of the Treaty and subsequent withdrawal.
- Implementing a comprehensive system of export controls for material, equipment, and technology that could be used for nuclear explosive purposes.
- Meeting our obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1540 which, among other things, requires all States to adopt and enforce effective laws prohibiting proliferation, and supporting the efforts of other states to meet theirs.
- Strengthening cooperative international nonproliferation efforts such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and encouraging their growth.
- Having led the initiative to amend the Convention of the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials to cover physical protection of nuclear materials in domestic use, storage and transport and of nuclear facilities.
- Hosting the Nuclear Security Summit in April 2010, as part of President Obama's initiative to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials within four years.
- Signing and ratifying the protocols to the Latin American Nuclear-Weapons- Free Zone (NWFZ) and having signed the protocols to the South Pacific and African NWFZs.

For more information about the NPT, please visit http://www.state.gov/t/isn/npt/index.htm