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A Checklist on Vital National Issues

EXTEND THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY WITHOUT CONDITIONS

By Baker Spring



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INTRODUCTION

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), ratified by the United States in 1969, is due to expire at the end of this year. This treaty prohibits all participating countries, except for the five that already possessed nuclear weapons at the time the treaty was adopted, from acquiring nuclear weapons. The 178 nations attending the New York conference will decide whether to continue adhering to the treaty and, if so, for how long.

According to the terms of the NPT, only the U.S., Russia, China, Great Britain, and France may possess nuclear arsenals. While the NPT has curtailed the proliferation of nuclear weapons, other factors have been important as well. America's military alliances, particularly with Germany and Japan, have prevented countries from feeling the need to develop nuclear weapons. So, too, has the U.S. policy of nuclear deterrence.¹ Rogue states, seeing that the U.S. has the capability to respond in kind to a nuclear attack, have a reduced incentive to acquire nuclear weapons.

This broader understanding of proliferation is missing in the Clinton Administration's approach to the NPT extension conference. The NPT has stemmed the spread of nuclear weapons, and it should be extended. But in its desire to obtain the approval of the 90 countries needed to pass an extension agreement, the Clinton Administration is taking steps that would weaken other pillars of a comprehensive counter-proliferation strategy: the U.S. nuclear deterrent and the military capability to defend against ballistic missile attack.

The Administration wants a treaty to ban all nuclear tests. Moreover, it is proposing to renounce the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and is negotiating with the Russians to constrain further the development of missile defenses. This policy of preemptive concessions is being driven primarily by Third World countries that want the U.S. to eliminate its nuclear arsenal. By pursuing such a policy, however, the Administration risks undermining the U.S. nuclear deterrent posture, leaving the U.S., its friends, and its allies vulnerable to nuclear attack and limiting America's options for offensive military actions.

¹ For an explanation of the principles behind a broad-based non-proliferation policy covering biological weapons, chemical weapons, missiles, and space technology, as well as nuclear weapons, see Kim R. Holmes, ed., *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1993), pp. 73-75.

