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Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

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SEE ALSO Dubček, Alexander; Slánský, Rudolf; Zápotocký, Antonín

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Arms control agreement signed by over 160 nations. This treaty seeks to halt the spread of nuclear weapons to nations that do not possess them and thus limit the number of nuclear-armed states. It is formally titled the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The treaty's major objective is to perpetuate the monopoly held by the five declared nuclear-armed states (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China) and thus combat the "Nth nation" problem stemming from proliferation. The assumption is that each new nuclear state increases the likelihood of nuclear war. The treaty was signed by Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States on July 1, 1968, and was initially ratified by forty nonnuclear states before it entered into force on March 5, 1970.

The core of the treaty concerns the transference of nuclear weaponry and technology. Nuclear-armed states and nonnuclear-armed states both have obligations to ensure that nuclear weapons do not proliferate, according to the treaty. The nuclear powers are obligated not to aid nonnuclear-armed states to acquire nuclear weaponry and to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Nonnuclear-armed states are to refrain from manufacturing or acquiring nuclear weapons and to accept the safeguards provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency regarding their peaceful nuclear pursuits.

The basing of nuclear weapons by a nuclear power on a nonnuclear state's territory is not affected by this treaty. The threat of "nuclear blackmail" for the nonnuclear states that sign the treaty is countered by the guarantee of assistance from the nuclear states if such a threat arises. Such assistance has not been specified, however. Any party may withdraw from the treaty by giving three months' notice.

China and France represented the two declared nuclear powers that for decades did not take part in this treaty.

Not until March 9, and August 3, 1992 respectively, did China and France formally adhere to the treaty. On May 11, 1995, the NPT Extension Conference made this treaty permanent by acclamation. The conference also produced a commitment by the nuclear powers to a comprehensive test ban in 1996 and yearly compliance assessments beginning in 1997.

Criticism of the treaty has focused on its inherent inequality. The provisions are tougher on nonnuclear-weapon states than on the nuclear powers. This inherent inequality, it has been argued with limited success, is offset by the good-faith negotiations provision embodied in article 6, which ultimately seeks to establish a comprehensive test ban. Even harsher criticism, however, stems from Western arms control experts who view the treaty as irrelevant to arms control. States such as Liechtenstein and Haiti, which signed the treaty, had no chance of acquiring nuclear weapons anyway, and many nonsignatory states such as Pakistan, India, and Israel have recently acquired nuclear weapons.

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Nuclear Power

In a resolution adopted in 1975 focusing on energy and the environment, the Council of Europe stated that nuclear power was to become one of the principal sources of future energy supply. The council mandated the study of issues associated with the development of nuclear power, such as reactor safety, risks of radiation, release of heat, radioactive waste, and recycling of nuclear fuel. These issues began to be extensively researched starting in 1985 within the European Atomic Energy Commission (Euratom).

The prominent development of nuclear energy in Western Europe started in the early 1970s and intensified in 1973 following the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) decision to place controls on