

## Focus: On the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

*Focus is our column for secondary school students.*

The recent risk of war in the Persian Gulf has drawn the world's attention to the danger that more and more countries may be acquiring weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Articles in this *Bulletin* have looked at Canada's efforts to speed the negotiation of a treaty banning chemical weapons (the Chemical Weapons Convention). They have also reported on the Missile Technology Control Regime, as well as the conference to review the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT). This article will look further at nuclear proliferation and the NPT.

### What is proliferation?

Proliferation means to spread or increase in number. In the arms control and disarmament world, proliferation usually refers to the spread of nuclear weapons.

There are two types of proliferation. Horizontal proliferation means the spread of nuclear weapons to countries that don't already have them. Vertical proliferation means the increase in numbers of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of countries that already do. Used on its own, "proliferation" usually refers to horizontal proliferation.

### What is the matter with proliferation?

Since the end of the Second World War, the United Nations has tried to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and encourage disarmament. These efforts have been based on two beliefs:

- the greater the number of countries that have nuclear weapons, the more likely it is that nuclear weapons will be used on purpose or by accident;
- the greater the number of countries that have nuclear weapons, the more difficult it will be to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.

It is generally agreed that increasing the number of countries that have nuclear weapons will not increase

security. In fact, it is likely to make the world a more dangerous place.

### What is the NPT?

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was signed in 1968. It grew out of the concerns mentioned above, and is based on the idea that countries that have nuclear weapons should not give control of such weapons to countries that don't have them. At the same time, the NPT is designed to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to encourage negotiations towards general nuclear disarmament.

The NPT has eleven main parts, known as articles, five of which are key to the Treaty:

Article I - calls on states that have nuclear weapons (known as nuclear-weapon states) not to transfer nuclear weapons or control of nuclear weapons to states that don't have them (known as non-nuclear-weapon states). They are also not to encourage or assist non-nuclear-weapon states in acquiring their own nuclear weapons.

Article II - calls on non-nuclear-weapon states not to acquire or manufacture nuclear weapons, or to take control of nuclear weapons.

Article III - calls on non-nuclear-weapon states to accept the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on their nuclear activities. Safeguards are the measures and procedures the IAEA uses to make sure that nuclear material and equipment intended for peaceful uses are not being used to make weapons.

Article IV - calls on all states to assist cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Article VI - calls on all states to carry out negotiations with the purpose of ending the nuclear arms race and achieving nuclear disarmament, leading to a treaty on general and complete disarmament.

For the purposes of the NPT, a nuclear-weapon state is any state that

manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967. There are five nuclear-weapon states: the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France and China.

### Why is the NPT important?

Over 140 states have signed the NPT, which is more than have signed any other arms control treaty in existence. Of the five nuclear-weapon states, three have signed the NPT: the US, the Soviet Union and the UK. Although France has not signed the Treaty, it has a policy of behaving as if it were a signatory. China has said that it will not help other states to acquire nuclear weapons.

The NPT has done a great deal to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. No signatory has ever been found in violation of the Treaty. No signatory has ever withdrawn from the Treaty. It has been estimated that without the NPT, there could be as many as 30 nuclear-weapon states by the year 2000, rather than the present five. Just as important, the NPT has helped to create an international standard, or norm, against the spread of nuclear weapons. This makes it more difficult even for countries that have not signed the NPT to proceed with any plans to develop or acquire nuclear weapons.

In addition to curbing nuclear proliferation, the NPT has played a central role in encouraging other arms control and disarmament efforts. If countries thought that all other countries were free to acquire nuclear weapons, they would want to keep their own weapons' options open. They would be very unlikely to agree to treaties limiting conventional, chemical or biological weapons. In particular, the nuclear-weapon states would not be likely to agree to treaties that limited their own nuclear weapons.

### What are the problems with the NPT?

Several states that are thought to have nuclear weapons, or the capability to build them, have not signed the NPT.