

# What Nonproliferation Policy?

by Ben Sanders

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The proliferation of nuclear weapons is a worldwide problem which calls for global approaches. To be effective, measures against nuclear proliferation need broad international support, which is given only to measures that are devised, discussed, adopted and carried out in a multilateral, cooperative framework. The major component of that framework is the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

An observer outside the Washington Beltway has difficulty discerning, let alone describing, the Clinton Administration's nonproliferation policy. One hears relatively little about such a policy, which gives reason to wonder if it exists as a coherent element of international cooperative action, rather than as a series of ad-hoc reactions to specific problems that are felt to affect the United States.

Government spokespersons maintain that nonproliferation is a high-priority item in US foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> That is understandable, since the Clinton Administration came to power at a time when a number of nuclear proliferation problems were causing great international concern and demanding Washington's urgent attention. In the aftermath of the Iraq crisis, the question was how to keep that country from reviving its nuclear-weapon program. North Korea's nuclear intransigence--its unwillingness to grant inspection access to two sites suspected of holding evidence of clandestine plutonium production, and its subsequent withdrawal from the NPT--imperiled the integrity of the nonproliferation regime in East Asia, and threatened to set off a nuclear arms race in the region. Ukraine seemed farther than ever from fulfilling its promise to accede to the NPT, and was claiming the strategic nuclear weapons on its territory as its patrimony. Conditions in the former USSR raised concern about the control of nuclear material, facilities and technology there. South Africa surprised the world--and the CIA--with the announcement that it had produced and dismantled six nuclear warheads. The nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan continued to threaten South Asian security. And suspicions grew about the nuclear ambitions of other countries, such as Iran.

The new government seems to tackle these sudden, new problems as they arise, ad hoc and one by one. In this it follows the reactive policies of its predecessor, rather than addressing the problems out of a general, cohesive, clearly formulated multilateral policy. The government expresses interest in means of controlling fissile material and ways to prevent the stockpiling of excess plutonium from reprocessed fuel and dismantle Soviet warheads. It lets it be known that it will adhere to the commitment of the Bush Administration to buy large amounts of surplus enriched uranium from Russia. It states that - like the previous Administration - it sees the export of dual-use items as an issue of concern and it continues to support the work of the Nuclear Suppliers Group in this regard. Above all, it emphasizes its special interest in some of the more immediately worrisome areas, such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea, and it seems to have done excellent work in deterring the last-mentioned country from taking the ultimate step of quitting the NPT. It has also made the more general statement that is it putting great emphasis on nuclear proliferation as an issue of national security.<sup>2</sup> But neither these statements nor the limited success in keeping talks going with North Korea constitute a coherent policy. True, the medium-level specialists who should work out such a policy do not yet seem to be in place, and it may therefore be premature to complain about the policy's absence. Meanwhile, however, the impression is created and reinforced by statements like the ones referred to that the present approach to non-proliferation is haphazard, fundamentally US-oriented and carried out mainly along unilateral and bilateral lines, almost to the exclusion of multilateral action. There is a strong perception abroad that the action the new Administration has taken so far, and the policy statements its officials are making, signal a low priority for multilateral approaches and therefore for nonproliferation as a global issue. The Secretary of State's assurance that the United States will "if necessary" act in a multilateral framework cannot dispel that impression.<sup>3</sup>

This is bad. The current nuclear proliferation problems cause as much concern to other states as to the United

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States; the United States cannot solve them by unilateral action. Even more importantly, perhaps, the apparent lack of interest in multilateral approaches and solutions, reflected in the present American attitude, bodes ill for the preparations for the conference which in 1995 must decide on the extension of the NPT. Unless the Administration can convince the many critics of the NPT and its implementation that the US government remains seriously committed to its obligations under the Treaty, and is willing to go all out to ensure its long survival, there is little hope of a favorable outcome of the 1995 conference.

In this time of growing criticism of the NPT, preparations for its extension should receive the highest possible priority. However, the US government has demonstrated lack of consideration for the views of the international community by its proposal of a multilateral agreement to end production of high-enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium for use in nuclear weapons. The agreement would allow IAEA-safeguarded production of these materials for peaceful purposes in every country except North Korea, India, Israel and Pakistan. Early analyses show that the double standard evidenced by this move will hurt rather than help the cause of the NPT in 1995.

President Clinton's declaration of July 3 that the United States will not be the first to resume nuclear testing, is an immensely important move in the right direction, but its wording clearly couples US action to that of other states. The issue of extending a testing moratorium is straightforward: either Washington decides that it must continue testing in an effort to enhance safety or develop new weapons, or it decides not to test. Clinton's statement indicates that the United States feels there is no need to test. Thus, it is unclear why the United States would allow a resumption of tests to be determined by the actions of other states. Once again, Washington gives the impression that it has no clear idea how it should go

about extending the NPT and thereby salvaging a threatened world-wide nonproliferation regime. Resuming nuclear testing now would have a devastating effect on world opinion and on the future of the NPT.

As we have seen at the July G-7 Summit Meeting in Tokyo, indiscriminate calls for an "indefinite extension" of the Treaty cannot convince even staunch supporters like Japan. They are all the less likely to sway critics of the Treaty, who choose to make their support dependent on the advantages they expect the NPT to give them. If by 1995 there is no early prospect of a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT), non-aligned nations will not support even a relatively long, let alone indefinite, extension of a Treaty whose promise of a CTBT they see as going unfulfilled. As long as Israel's nuclear policy is not somehow restrained, Arab nations are not likely to promise eternal nuclear abstinence. If by early 1995, the situations in Iraq, in North Korea or in Ukraine have not been settled in clear favor of the NPT, many countries will wish to wait before committing themselves to a lengthy extension of the Treaty. Governments critical of the way the Treaty has been implemented prefer to retain the leverage which a limited extension gives, and the louder the call for unlimited extension, the stronger is the concern that an indefinite extension means the continuance of present problems and little chance for further improvement. The United States should realize this and take it into account in its nonproliferation approaches.

In matters of nuclear non-proliferation the United States is the single most powerful and influential country. The whole world knows that the effectiveness and the very survival of the global nonproliferation system depends on the way the United States uses its power and its influence. Only Washington does not seem to be aware of it.

#### Notes

1. Cf. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, interviewed by Robin MacNeil of the MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour on PBS, June 1, 1993.
2. See news briefing of May 12, by Robert Gallucci, assistant secretary of state for politico-military affairs, in Nuclear Fuel, May 24, 1993.
3. Op. cit., interview with Secretary of State, Warren Christopher.