

Promoting a World Without Nuclear Weapons

Introduction

During the 2008 Presidential Election, the Democratic Party declared its support for one of our top goals – “...a world with no nuclear weapons.” Three major multi-lateral treaties shape U.S. policy on nuclear weapons:

- **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** – A multilateral treaty that prohibits the testing of nuclear weapons. This measure helps to limit the harmful affect of nuclear weapons on the environment and slows the production of new nuclear arms. The U.S. has signed, but not ratified the treaty.
- **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** – A multilateral treaty that promotes disarmament among nuclear states. The U.S. is party to the treaty and the Obama administration is committed to disarmament.
- **Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)** - A bilateral disarmament treaty between Russia and the United States that has significantly reduced nuclear stockpiles in both nations. In addition, the December 2009 expiration of the START I treaty, which reduces and limits U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles, will provide an opportunity to build political support for new agreements to eliminate these weapons of mass destruction.

In his first press conference, President Barack Obama stated:

What I know is this: that if we see a nuclear arms race in a region as volatile as the Middle East, everybody will be in danger. And one of my goals is to prevent nuclear proliferation generally. I think that it's important for the United States, in concert with Russia, to lead the way on this....I've mentioned this in conversations with the Russian president, Mr. Medvedev, to let him know that it is important for us to restart the conversations about how we can start reducing our nuclear arsenals in an effective way.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)

President Obama supports ratification of the CTBT and is interested in plans to reduce the number of nuclear weapons worldwide. The United States has signed the Treaty, but Congress never ratified it.

Ratifying the CTBT is unmistakably in the U.S. national security interest. According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, lawmakers can be confident that the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile will remain safe and reliable without explosive nuclear testing far into the foreseeable future. U.S. leadership on the CTBT will be crucial for gaining the international support that is needed to tackle other nonproliferation problems. It comes at a low cost, since the U.S. has been voluntarily complying with the provisions of the Treaty since 1992 and there is no political support for a return to explosive nuclear testing in the near future. As CTBT advocates work to provide Senators with the best scientific evidence on the Treaty issues, the administration can send important signals to the international community by continuing to publicly convey its support for the Treaty.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

During the early 1960's, President Kennedy and his successors reached out to other nations to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. This created a network of laws and diplomatic relations, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that entered into force in March, 1970. The treaty states that the five nuclear powers (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and the People's Republic of China) will pursue nuclear disarmament, the non-nuclear states will not pursue a nuclear weapons program, and states have the right to use nuclear energy for civilian purposes such as providing energy.

Current US policy does not comply with its disarmament obligation. According to the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review, the US plans for maintenance of large and modernized nuclear forces for the indefinite future and for expansion of options for use of nuclear weapons. The Obama administration has agreed to crack down on nuclear proliferation by strengthening the NPT so that countries like North Korea and Iran that break the rules will automatically face strong international sanctions.

Finding a Successor to START I

The START I treaty is a bilateral treaty proposed by President Ronald Reagan and initially signed with the former USSR. After the fall of the USSR the treaty, agreements were carried over to the new governments of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. As a result of the treaty Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine have gotten rid of all nuclear weapons. In 1991 the US and Russia successfully reached START I requirements of no more than 6,000 warheads. Since 1991, the treaty has allowed verification regimes to maintain confidence that both sides are remaining in accordance with the treaty.

The two nations signed subsequent START treaties to further limit nuclear proliferation. However, if the START I treaty sunsets without a new treaty to replace it, the verification process will be shutdown. In December 2009, the START I will expire. The Obama administration hopes to move beyond the START treaty language to adopt bolder steps to further nuclear proliferation. Vice-President Joe Biden speaking at the 45th annual Munich Security Conference, outlines the Obama-Biden administration's priorities on nuclear proliferation and the importance of the START treaty series:

Cooperate to secure loose nuclear weapons and materials and prevent their spread...renew the verification procedures in the [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] and then go beyond existing treaties to negotiate deeper cuts in our arsenals.

Policy Suggestions:

1. **Ratify CTBT:** The May 2009 NPT PrepCom and the September 2009 Article XIV Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT offer timely opportunities for the U.S. to send positive messages about its intention to ratify the Treaty.
2. **Update START I Treaty Mandates:** The United States must extend the START I treaty in order to maintain current verification procedures that help maintain the current level of nuclear weapons.

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