Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty

United States Department of State

Introduction

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a cornerstone of global arms control and nonproliferation efforts. The principal aim of the NPT is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and, with 189 parties, it has become the most universal treaty in the history of arms control and non-proliferation.

In addition to constraining non-nuclear weapons states from obtaining or possessing nuclear weapons, the NPT imposes disarmament-related obligations on the five nuclear weapons states, as well as all non-nuclear weapons states. These disarmament-related obligations are spelled out in Article VI of the Treaty. Article VI consists of only one sentence, which states:

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

The United States is fully meeting its obligations under Article VI. The United States has taken numerous and extensive steps in this regard, unilaterally, bilaterally with the Russian Federation, and multilaterally within NATO. Despite the new challenges posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism that are threatening international peace and security, both the United States and Russia are continuing to reduce their numbers of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery.

A Lowered Nuclear Posture

The end of the Cold War has provided the opportunity for the United States to move beyond the old strategic doctrines that relied so heavily on nuclear weapons. The Cold War nuclear arms race is over, and the prospect of a massive nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia is at its lowest level in over 50 years. While nuclear deterrence remains a necessary fact of life, the United States has been reducing its nuclear forces and nuclear weapons stockpiles in a consistent fashion through both unilateral and bilateral initiatives, most recently under the Moscow Treaty.

The United States has taken numerous steps to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons. For example: U.S. strategic bombers are no longer on alert. The United States no longer targets any country with nuclear weapons. NATO no longer maintains nuclear contingency plans and associated targets for its non-strategic nuclear weapons. U.S. dual-capable aircraft no longer operate on a high-alert basis, and their readiness requirements now measure in weeks and months, rather than minutes.

When President Bush came into office, he ordered a further, fundamental reexamination of the role of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War world. That reexamination, aimed at developing a U.S. security strategy for the 21st century, led to the December 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). The NPR, consistent with the changed international environment, embraced a radical departure in U.S. thinking about what is required to protect national security; one that foresees the potential for a further reduced role for nuclear weapons.

Prior to the NPR, when the United States spoke about the "triad", it meant the "triad" of nuclear weapons delivery systems: heavy bombers, ICBMs, and submarine launched ballistic missiles. Reflecting the United States' reduced reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence, the NPR proclaimed a new triad of capabilities that includes:

- nuclear and non-nuclear offensive strike systems;
- active and passive defenses, including ballistic missile defenses; and
- a revitalized and reshaped defense infrastructure that will provide the ability to promptly respond to emerging threats.

New non-nuclear capabilities and defensive systems offered the prospect that the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons might be further reduced. A revitalized infrastructure that can respond quickly to changes in the security environment can also permit reductions in the stockpile of non-deployed nuclear weapons.

The evolving United States security strategy offers the promise that nuclear weapons will play a smaller role in national security than at any time in the nuclear age, and that the United States will continue to fully meet its Article VI commitments. There is also abundant hard evidence that the United States has made great strides in meeting this commitment, whether one looks at numbers of nuclear weapons, launchers and delivery systems, or fissile material inventories, or the U.S. production infrastructure.

Reduced Numbers of Nuclear Systems

The United States has reduced its nuclear weapons stockpile by more than 13,000 nuclear weapons since 1988. Consistent with the Moscow Treaty, the United States is now in the process of drawing down its operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to the level of 1,700-2,200, about one-third of the 2002 level. When the Treaty is fully implemented in 2012, the United States will have reduced by about 80 percent the number of strategic nuclear warheads it deployed in 1990.

The Moscow Treaty has been criticized by some because it does not require the destruction of nuclear warheads and they fear the United States weapons stockpile reserve will remain at Cold War levels. In fact, no strategic arms control agreement negotiated between the United States and Russia has ever required the destruction of nuclear warheads. Historically, operationally deployed nuclear forces have always been supported by a warhead stockpile reserve. In actuality, the U.S. nuclear stockpile is also dramatically shrinking as operationally deployed forces are reduced. In May 2004, President Bush approved a stockpile plan that will cut the current U.S. nuclear stockpile almost in half. By 2012 the U.S. stockpile will be the smallest it has been in several decades. The realization of a more responsive U.S. defensive infrastructure may offer the opportunity for the United States to further reduce the nuclear stockpile.

Responsive Nuclear Weapons Infrastructure

The risks associated with a stockpile reduction of the magnitude contemplated by the United States — a reduction of almost one half by 2012 — are acceptable only if the United States continues to make progress in creating a responsive nuclear weapons infrastructure as part of the new triad called for in the NPR.

Of the many new NPR concepts, one of the most important is recognition that a robust defense research and development industrial base — including a responsive nuclear infrastructure — is as important as strike forces or defenses in achieving the overall defense goals of the United States.

"Responsive nuclear infrastructure" refers to the ability of the United States to respond to unanticipated events or emerging threats, anticipate innovations by an adversary, and counter them before the U.S. deterrent is degraded. At the same time, the U.S. must be able to continue to carry out the day-to-day activities in support of the stockpile. The United States must be able to maintain the expertise, science and technology base, facilities, and equipment to adapt to whatever type of security environment emerges. By ensuring that a responsive nuclear infrastructure is in place, the United States can reduce the number of deployed nuclear warheads, and can further reduce non-strategic warheads to achieve President Bush's vision of the smallest stockpile consistent with national security.

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Launchers and Delivery Systems

From 1994 through 1997, the United States eliminated nearly 1,000 strategic nuclear missiles and bombers, and reductions continue.

Since 1997, the United States has:

- eliminated 64 heavy bombers by severing them into pieces;
- eliminated 150 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) silos by destroying or dismantling them;
- taken out of strategic service four ballistic missile submarines by removing the submarine-launched ballistic missiles and modifying the submarines so that they can no longer carry such missiles; and
- retired and removed 37 Peacekeeper ICBMs from silos by January 2005, with the remaining 13 scheduled for deactivation by October 2005.

These systems are not being replaced. U.S. defense spending on strategic nuclear forces has declined from seven percent of the Defense Department's budget during the Cold War to less than three percent today. In the last fifteen years, the United States has terminated a number of strategic nuclear weapons modernization programs, including mobile ICBMs, and limited the production of the B-2 heavy bomber.

Even more dramatic reductions have been achieved with respect to non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW). In total, the United States stockpile of NSNW has been reduced by nearly 90 percent since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The United States has removed nuclear weapons from all surface ships and attack submarines, and NATO has reduced the number of types of nuclear systems in Europe from five in 1991 to just one today. The number of NATO storage sites for NSNW has been reduced by 80 percent. The United States has withdrawn worldwide and eliminated more than 3,000 tactical nuclear warheads, consisting of artillery shells, warheads for short-range missile systems, and Navy depth bombs. Completing fulfillment of the U.S. commitments made under the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs), the last of these 3,000-plus warheads was dismantled in 2003.

Fissile Material

The United States does not produce fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, and has not done so since 1988. The United States has not produced highly enriched uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons since 1964, and production of plutonium for nuclear weapons was halted in 1988. The United States has removed 34 tons of plutonium and 174 tons of highly enriched uranium from its military stockpile, placed some of this material under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and converted approximately 60 tons of this material to civil reactor fuel.

There has been a corresponding reduction of U.S. fissile material facilities. All U.S. plutonium production reactors at Hanford and Savannah River have been shut down. The Oak Ridge K-25 plant was completely closed in 1987. The United States ceased HEU production for any purposes at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant in 1992. The overall U.S. nuclear weapons production infrastructure has been significantly downsized since the end of the Cold War.

"New" Nuclear Weapons: A Case of Misperception

The NPT does not prohibit nuclear weapons states from modernizing their nuclear forces. All of the nuclear weapons states have continued to modernize their nuclear weapons stockpiles during the period in which the NPT has been in effect. Given this history, it would be a novel and unfounded interpretation of the NPT to argue that such modernization is problematic under the NPT.

Still, there has been much confusion and misperception about U.S. nuclear policy. Although the United States has no specific plans to develop new, low yield nuclear weapons, the NPR did highlight the importance of being able to respond to changes in the security environment and to adjust to changing deterrence requirements. In response, the United States has initiated two studies. The first is a modest research effort to look at possible advanced concepts to meet potential or emerging requirements. This effort will investigate new ideas, not necessarily new weapons. Second, an improved earth-penetrating bomb, the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), is being studied. This study is to determine whether an existing warhead can be adapted to improve the ability of the United States to hold at risk deeply buried facilities.

The United States has not embarked on the development of any new nuclear weapons. At this stage, only concepts are being studied. Any development of new types of nuclear weapons beyond conceptual and feasibility studies would require Presidential approval and the authorization and appropriation of funds by the Congress.

There are other misperceptions as well:

Nuclear Testing: One misperception is that work on "new" types of nuclear weapons will necessarily lead to a resumption of nuclear testing. The United States is not planning to resume nuclear testing, nor improving its test readiness posture in anticipation of testing in connection with the development of new nuclear weapons in the future. The RNEP study is examining whether an existing warhead can be adapted to hold at risk deeply buried targets. Adapting an existing warhead for this purpose would not require nuclear testing. As a matter of policy, the United States continues to observe a nuclear testing moratorium and encourages other states not to test. The United States has gone to great expense to develop a Stockpile Stewardship Program to help ensure the safety and reliability of the United States nuclear weapons stockpile without testing. The United States does not support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and will not become a Party to it, but does support the work of the CTBT Organization (CTBTO) Preparatory Commission and its Provisional Technical Secretariat with respect to the International Monitoring System (IMS).

Maintaining the Nuclear Threshold: Another misperception is that, were U.S. research programs to lead to lower yield weapons, this would blur the line between conventional and nuclear weapons and make nuclear weapons use more likely. The United States has had low-yield nuclear weapons in its stockpile since the 1950s. Other nuclear weapons states also possess such weapons. There is no historical evidence that the possession of such weapons has made the use of nuclear weapons more likely. No President would be inclined to employ nuclear weapons, regardless of their yield, except in the gravest of circumstances. Simply stated, the nuclear threshold for the United States will always be very high.

United States Cooperation with States of the Former Soviet Union

Not only is the United States meeting its own obligations under Article VI of the NPT, it is also assisting Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union in dealing with the nuclear legacy of the Cold War. Since 1992, the United States has provided more than $9 billion in nonproliferation and threat reduction assistance to the states of the former Soviet Union. The United States also played the leading role in establishing the G-8 Global Partnership in 2002. Under this partnership, G-8 Leaders pledged to raise up to $20 billion dollars over ten years to fund the elimination of WMD stockpiles and other programs designed to keep these weapons and related material and technology from falling into the hands of terrorists or states that support them. The U.S. commitment is for $10 billion, half of the goal. The U.S. and its G-8 partners have also worked successfully to expand participation in the Global Partnership to donor countries beyond the G-8 and to expand assistance beyond Russia to other countries, beginning with the recognition of Ukraine in 2004.

U.S.-Russian Cooperation
With the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia have been able to move past an era of adversarial relations into an era of cooperative action.

Three areas, in particular, demonstrate this positive trend:

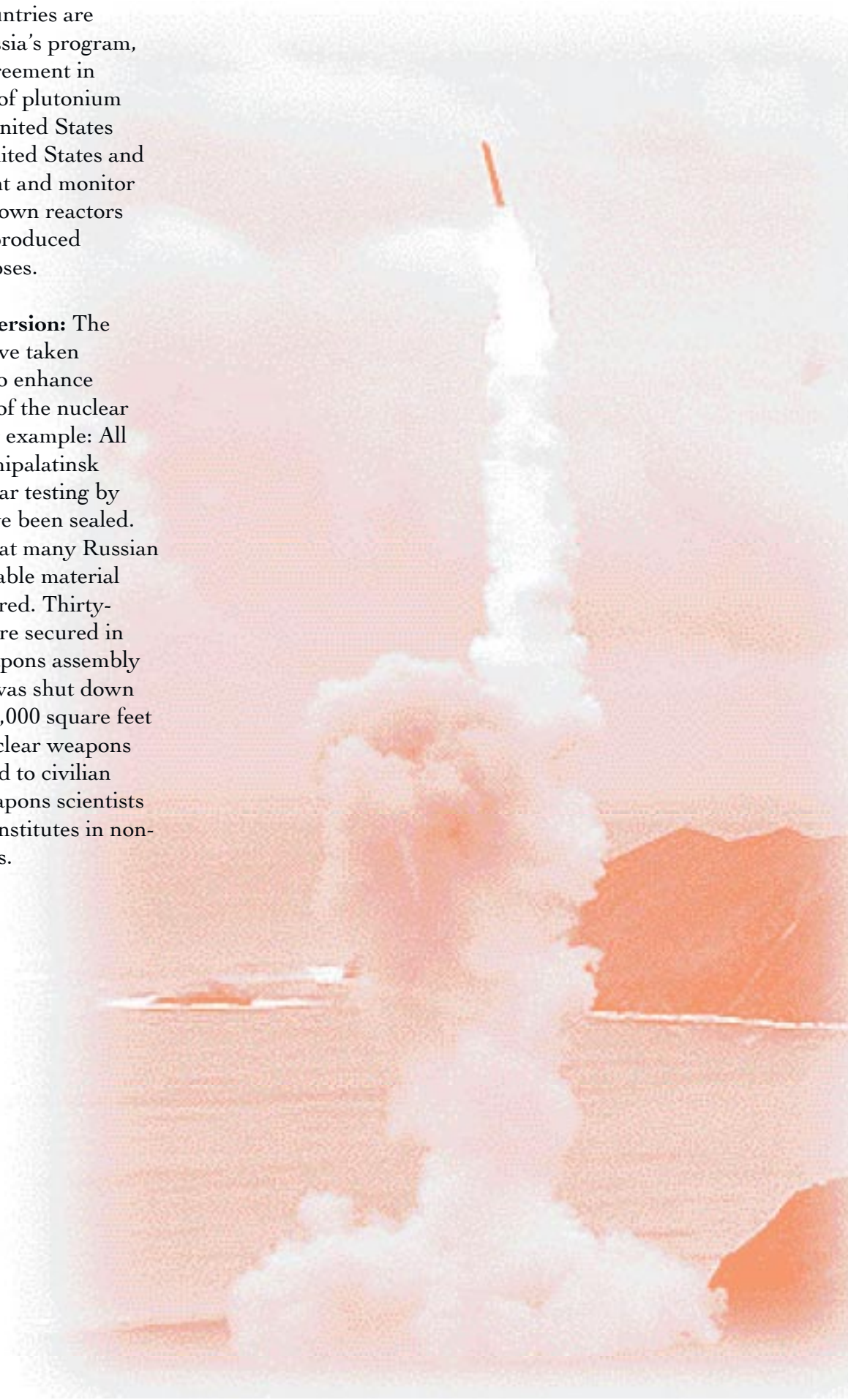
- further strategic arms reductions;
- the disposition of fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapons; and
- the conversion of nuclear facilities and enhancing the safety and security of those that remain.

The Moscow Treaty: The 2002 Moscow Treaty entered into force on June 1, 2003. Under the Treaty, the United States will reduce its operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to between 1,700-2,200 by December 31, 2012. Russia will reduce its strategic nuclear warheads to the same level by the same date. These levels, for which the required reductions are already being implemented, are nearly two-thirds below 2002 levels in operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads, and are the lowest level ever mandated by a strategic arms control treaty.

Fissile Material: Under bilateral agreements, fissile material that is no longer required for military purposes is being rendered unusable for nuclear weapons. More than 200 tons of Russian HEU have been converted to low enriched uranium (LEU) fuel for U.S. civil reactors, and an additional 300 tons are slated for conversion. By October 2004, approximately 56 metric tons of surplus U.S. HEU have been down-blended to LEU in the United States. In addition to disposing of HEU, the United States and Russia have each agreed to dispose of 34 metric tons of surplus weapon-grade plutonium, enough for thousands of nuclear weapons, and fabricate it into mixed oxide (MOX) fuel for irradiation in nuclear reactors.

Negotiations among G-8 countries are proceeding on financing Russia's program, with the goal of reaching agreement in 2005 to enable construction of plutonium disposition facilities in the United States and Russia to begin. The United States and Russia continue to implement and monitor a 1997 agreement shutting down reactors in both countries that have produced plutonium for military purposes.

Facility Security and Conversion: The United States and Russia have taken numerous and varied steps to enhance the security and conversion of the nuclear infrastructure in Russia. For example: All 194 tunnels and holes at Semipalatinsk (Kazakhstan) used for nuclear testing by the former Soviet Union have been sealed. Security has been upgraded at many Russian locations where weapons-usable material and nuclear weapons are stored. Thirty-five tons of such material were secured in FY 2003 alone. Nuclear weapons assembly at Russia's Avangard plant was shut down ahead of schedule. Over 550,000 square feet of floor space in Russia's nuclear weapons complex have been converted to civilian use. Over 13,000 former weapons scientists have been employed at 180 institutes in non-military, commercial pursuits.



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Conclusion:

The United States is in full compliance with all of its NPT obligations, including Article VI. The Cold War era nuclear arms race is over; significant numbers of U.S. nuclear forces are being reduced, and large numbers of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems have been, and continue to be, eliminated.

A gradual, step-by-step process toward nuclear disarmament is the proper and most effective course to pursue. The United States is on that course, and is making real strides toward that end.

However, the NPT is under growing stress from violations of the Treaty by states parties that are seeking to develop nuclear weapons in violation of their solemn nonproliferation commitments, as well as the growing concern that terrorists will acquire WMD. These developments make it all the more vital that all NPT parties insist on full compliance with the nonproliferation obligations of the Treaty.

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