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The world may well be approaching a fork in the road with respect to international peace and stability. Soon a decision may have to be made whether or not to continue with existing policies regarding nuclear weapons that have potentially far-reaching proliferation consequences. With the end of the Cold War and the rapid diffusion of technology, the United States (US) likely can no longer continue the status quo. The United States can no longer maintain a large nuclear weapon stockpile while denying these weapons to most other states. Indeed, the Year 2000 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) could turn out to be a watershed event in the evolution from the Cold War bipolar world to the New World order. The NPT was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. During the 1960s there were predictions that by the end of the 1970s there could be 25-30 avowed nuclear weapon states in the world and by the late 1990s who knows, perhaps twice that many. Not only would this have meant that every conflict would risk going nuclear but also under such a situation with nuclear weapons so widespread it would be virtually impossible to deny them to terrorists, religious cults, violent sub-national groups, criminal conspiracies and the like. From day to day, it would be uncertain whether world civilization as we know it would survive.

Faced with this situation in 1968 and predictions of widespread proliferation in future years, the world community drew a line in negotiating the NPT. No more states would acquire nuclear weapons and those that had them in 1968 would engage in disarmament negotiations aimed at their ultimate elimination. This was the basic bargain agreed to in the NPT. The status of the nuclear weapon states under the NPT was not designed to be a recognition of influence in the world; it simply was where the world was in 1968.* The negotiators hoped to ward off catastrophe by stopping proliferation where it then was and to ultimately reverse it. The negotiating history of the NPT establishes that the five states that possessed nuclear weapons were not being recognized as nuclear weapon states in perpetuity, but rather the objective of the NPT is to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, reverse the process and move toward a nuclear weapon-free world.

In 1995, twenty-five years after entry into force of the NPT, pursuant to its terms, the then 178 Treaty Parties met in New York to consider the extension of the treaty. There was great controversy over the perceived failure, in the eyes of the non-nuclear weapon states, of the nuclear weapons states to live up to their half of the 1968 bargain—the pursuit of negotiated nuclear disarmament, particularly a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

* *Editor's Note: The five nuclear weapon states as established by the NPT are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia and China.*

Nevertheless, going into the 1995 conference, it was the position of the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and many states in Europe and Latin America that the NPT should be made permanent. However, many non-nuclear weapon states were reluctant at the time to agree to indefinite extension of the NPT because of their view that the nuclear weapon states had not fulfilled their disarmament obligations and would not without political pressure being applied to them. As a result, they opposed indefinite extension because they wanted to retain leverage over the NPT, so important to the nuclear weapons states, and thereby maintain pressure on the nuclear weapons states to meet their disarmament obligations.

The compromise worked out during the Conference permitted the NPT to be extended indefinitely without a vote, in effect unanimously. In return, those favoring a permanent NPT, particularly the nuclear weapon states, agreed to a Statement of Principles and Objectives for Non-Proliferation in which they pledged, among other things, to achieve a CTBT in 1996, negotiate a ban on the production of fissile material for weapons, and most importantly to vigorously pursue nuclear weapon reductions in the direction of the elimination of these weapons. They also agreed to a strengthened review process in which progress in meeting the nuclear disarmament obligations in the NPT and in the Statement of Principles could be monitored and a resolution regarding the Middle East passed.

For the most part, developments since the Review and Extension Conference have not been positive. The CTBT was signed in 1996 and it is important for the NPT that as many countries ratify it as soon as possible, especially the United States and Russia. But there is a cloud over the CTBT because, as a result of Russian and Chinese insistence, India and Pakistan are necessary parties for entry into force. There have been indications from India and Pakistan that they will sign the Treaty prior to the September 1999 CTBT Review Conference provided for in the Treaty, but there remains doubt.* Also, the US Senate has refused to take up consideration of the CTBT, and the Russian Duma, to put it mildly, has a poor track record for approving arms control and disarmament treaties.

The non-nuclear weapon states are looking for dramatic and deep reductions involving all five nuclear weapon states, not a continuation of the ponderous strategic arms negotiating of the Cold War. It is imperative that these five states step forward no later than the 2000 Review Conference. They must act to lower the political value of nuclear weapons. They should offer a commitment to negotiate in the medium term (the next 10-15 years) a reduction in total nuclear weapons to perhaps 300 each for the United States and Russia and 50 each for France, China and the United Kingdom. In this context, India, Pakistan, and Israel would roll back their nuclear weapon programs to zero and join the NPT, but they would be permitted to keep the fissile material for weapons that they have in storage on their territory monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as insurance in case the deal should break down. In return, the Non-Nuclear Weapons State

* *Editor's Note: The New York Times of October 1, 1998, reported that at the United Nations during the week of September 21, 1998, India and Pakistan pledged to sign the CTBT, although details remain to be worked out.*

Parties to the NPT would reaffirm their commitment never to acquire nuclear weapons and would agree to take collective action against any state that violates this commitment.

Everyone understands that we do not yet live in a world where the prohibition of nuclear weapons is a practical possibility; the necessary verification and enforcement arrangements to support such a regime are nowhere in sight. It is important that these be addressed at an early date as they will take a long time to achieve and they are necessary to be able to eventually contemplate a Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. But with the Cold War receding there is no reason—save a desire to retain political advantage—that the five nuclear weapon states cannot reduce nuclear weapons to very low levels. The special privileges of the five nuclear weapon states can no longer be maintained. Either the five will move to very low levels of nuclear power or states all over the world will begin to acquire nuclear weapons to off-set the perceived political advantage from nuclear weapons that the five now enjoy.

The NPT is the cornerstone of international security. Without it, nuclear weapons likely would spread to many states with catastrophic results for international stability in particular and humanity in general. With all due respect to Professor Samuel Huntington's thesis that we now live in a world of eight more or less "civilizations," we also live on one small planet as part of one world community. On this question of nuclear weapons and their proliferation the old phrase is truly apt, "Either we all hang together or we will all hang separately."