

UNITED STATES ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY

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THE DIRECTOR

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Letters

Nuclear treaty lets us all breathe easier

I fundamentally disagree with the assertion in your June 10 editorial "Nuclear illusions" that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has "outlived its usefulness."

The NPT is a central, and in my view, indispensable, element of the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. The NPT has never been as critical for global security as it is today. For this reason, the United States is committed to making every effort to obtain the treaty's unconditional, indefinite extension in 1995.

The NPT and its member states have indeed faced tough challenges in the past few years. Iraq's violations of the NPT and its pursuit of a clandestine nuclear weapons program stunned the world but galvanized the international community into an unprecedented response to this new threat. The International Atomic

Energy Agency (IAEA) and the U.N. Security Council have responded firmly in support of the international effort to convince North Korea to remain in the NPT and to honor its obligations under the treaty. This reaction by the international community provides convincing evidence of the strength of the NPT. It also demonstrates that efforts to strengthen the IAEA safeguards system, including special inspections of undeclared sites, have been effective.

As the international response to recent proliferation threats revealed, an effort to acquire nuclear weapons, rather than enhancing one's international stature, invites international reproach and can trigger stiff penalties.

Without the NPT and IAEA safeguard, there would be no standard of behavior against which to

measure the actions of states. There would be no barrier — political, legal or technical — to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by states that currently do not have them. Efforts by existing nuclear-weapon states to reduce their nuclear stockpiles and to adopt other nuclear disarmament measures would be jeopardized. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy and international nuclear commerce would be seriously curtailed.

Since your editorial ran, North Korea has decided to suspend its withdrawal from the NPT. I believe that the strength of the international consensus against nuclear proliferation, as embodied in the NPT, contributed to this decision.

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