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Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the signing of the NPT
Return to the basics of the NPT

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) which opened for signature in July 1968. The NPT is a treaty that designates 5 countries, US, Russia, UK, France and China, as the “nuclear-weapon states (NWSs),” and aims to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to the other “non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWSs).” At the same time, the NPT obligates the NWSs to pursue negotiations in good faith for achieving nuclear disarmament, and affirms the inalienable right of the NNWSs to use nuclear energy peacefully. Nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy are regarded as the three pillars of the NPT.

The NPT has, in particular, performed a significant role in the field of nuclear non-proliferation. In 1963, before the conclusion of the NPT, U.S. President John F. Kennedy had predicted that “by 1970, unless we are successful, there may be 10 nuclear powers instead of 4, and by 1975, 15 or 20.” There is no need to mention the obvious fact that further proliferation of the nuclear weapons could not be completely prevented even after the conclusion of the NPT. India, Pakistan and North Korea have conducted nuclear testing and openly declared the possession of these weapons. Israel, which has neither admitted nor denied the possession of nuclear weapons, is also widely considered to possess them. However, the conclusion of the NPT can be said to have been a prime factor in slowing the pace of the proliferation significantly.

This NPT is currently facing a formidable challenge. The stagnation of nuclear disarmament among the NWSs could wreck the grand bargain between the NWSs and the NNWSs, which constitutes the bedrock of the NPT. Even if the security concerns are taken into account, the existence of over 27,000 nuclear weapons still present in our contemporary world, almost 20 years after the cold war ended, can in no way be justified. The progress towards nuclear disarmament was the prerequisite for the Japan’s accession to the NPT. In depositing the instrument of ratification in June 1976, the Japanese government had made a strong request that the NWSs, which have special

responsibilities under the article VI of the NPT, implement substantive disarmament measures. Nuclear disarmament was also strongly requested in the “Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament,” a decision that was adopted as a package along with the decision to indefinitely extend the NPT in 1995. The lack of effort by the NWSs for a nuclear disarmament may very well shake the non-proliferation obligation of the NNWSs.

The other major problem that the NPT is facing is the non-compliance of the treaty by the states-parties such as North Korea and Iran. After developing nuclear weapons, North Korea has announced its withdrawal from the NPT. Iran is suspected of developing nuclear weapons under the pretense of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. India, Pakistan and Israel are not parties to the NPT, and retain an impregnable resolve towards the possession of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the challenges posed by non-state actors, such as the international terrorist organizations that seek to obtain nuclear weapons or the “nuclear black market” represented by the A.Q. Kahn Network, have gained prominence in recent days.

Amid these circumstances, the proposition that “the NPT which was established during the cold war era became outdated, so we must shift to a new regime which reflects the present circumstances” can often be seen. However, it is not an easy task to create a “new regime” with universality analogous to that of the NPT, which now amounts to 190 state parties. There may even be some countries that try to become a “new nuclear-weapon state” under the “new regime” in a rush.

With the “new regime” building being quixotic on one hand and the need for grappling with the challenges posed against the NPT in order to secure the international peace and security on the other, the only way left is to bolster the existing non-proliferation regimes of which the NPT is the cornerstone. In doing so, the key is the balance between the three pillars of the NPT mentioned above. Of prime importance is, inter alia, the serious engagement towards nuclear disarmament by the NWSs. NPT did not confer the “NWSs” to its position forever. The conclusion of a new treaty pertaining to nuclear reduction between the two nuclear super powers, U.S. and Russia, is a pressing issue, given the expiration of the START in 2009. Also, as was stipulated in the G8 Hokkaido Toyako Summit Leaders Declaration, the reduction of nuclear weapons in a transparent manner is called on all nuclear-weapon states. The importance of the early entry into force of the CTBT and the immediate commencement of

negotiation of an FMCT go without saying, but until this realizes, the NWSs should faithfully maintain the prohibition on nuclear testing and the moratorium of the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

The pressing issue in nuclear non-proliferation is the handling of North Korea and Iran's nuclear problems, and processes towards resolutions of them must be agreed and implemented at an early stage. To close the loopholes of the NPT, we must deal with the problem of non-compliance with the NPT as well as devise measures to prevent the states that violate the NPT from withdrawing from the treaty, along with the adequate implementation of IAEA safeguards for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Here the role that UN Security Council should play in must be readdressed. NNWSs should recall that the NPT acknowledges the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in conformity with the obligation of nuclear non-proliferation.

The possibilities of the non-NPT members, India, Israel and Pakistan, acceding to the treaty at this point in time cannot be said to be high, but continuing to demand accession, and until then, obliging these three countries with the same nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation responsibilities that are incurred by the NWSs is imperative. Likewise, creating regional security environment where these three countries do not require nuclear weapons is desired. When looked at from this perspective, the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement must in no small part be deemed as problematic. Under the current proposed agreement, many are apprehensive that India may test and enhance production of the nuclear weapons even more freely than the NWSs can. At the very least, perhaps a commitment such as the signing of the CTBT or an equivalent public pledge and a moratorium on the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons is a necessity.

The 8th review conference of the NPT will be held in 2010. For this to succeed, we should return to the basics of the NPT. Undertaking in addressing the above mentioned problems as well as continuing substantive reinforcement of the NPT and the nuclear non-proliferation regimes is increasingly needed, in tandem with the international community reconfirming the importance of the NPT in maintaining international peace and security.

This center, CPDNP, has conducted various activities for disarmament and non-proliferation such as research and studies, outreach activities, coordination of

training and exchange programs as well as the implementation of the CTBT International Monitoring System since its inception in 1996. We hope to promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to the best of our abilities through these activities. Your continued support and guidance will be greatly appreciated.