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## FOCUS

### The World is a Safer Place, Thanks to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy warned that as many as twenty-five countries might be on the path to acquiring nuclear weapons by the end of the 1970s. Imagine the world today if many more nations had been able to develop nuclear weapons. This, without a doubt, would have greatly increased the risk of regional conflicts escalating to nuclear war. Thanks in large part to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), this did not happen.

On May 2, 2017, the NPT marked the first meeting of the five-year cycle leading to its tenth Review Conference in 2020, the year that marks the 50th anniversary of the treaty's entry into force. This milestone provides an opportunity for all parties to reflect on the benefits they derive from the Treaty, celebrate the goals they have achieved as partners, and further commit to work together to sustain global security.

Despite predictions of a cascade of proliferation that would have made catastrophic nuclear escalation much more likely around the world, global nonproliferation efforts based on the NPT have limited the number of states that possess nuclear weapons. Moreover, NPT Parties work closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency to make sure international safeguards are in place to verify that nuclear material is not diverted from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons.

These protections have enabled the expanding use of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy that diagnose and fight diseases, develop new crops, manage scarce water resources, and broadly

apply nuclear science and technology that meet United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Nuclear commerce is also thriving, providing clean electric capacity around the world.

The maintenance of a strong nonproliferation regime grounded in the NPT also helped create a more secure and stable security environment conducive to progress on nuclear disarmament. The Cold War nuclear arms race ended decades ago, U.S. nuclear stockpiles have fallen by 85 percent from their peak during the Cold War, and under the "New START" Treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation, stockpiles will reach low levels not seen since the 1950s. Any proliferation of nuclear weapons would upset the prospects for further reductions, and would increase the risks of a nuclear war. It could also increase the likelihood of nuclear escalation, miscalculations, and accidents, as well as the chances that non-state actors such as international terrorists might themselves acquire nuclear weapons.

However, as the threat from North Korea grows, the NPT is at a critical moment. This treaty sets an international norm supportive of peaceful uses of nuclear energy in conformity with strong international nonproliferation standards. The NPT also helps isolate unlawful and provocative behavior such as North Korea's illicit plutonium and uranium production and development of nuclear weapons. Such actions create instability and threaten the security of millions of people, including those in the United States.

***The NPT is a tool that we need now more than ever.***