



# UPDATE ON ISSUES

October 2010

**League of Women Voters of the Houston Area Education Fund**

## **ARMS CONTROL UPDATE**

### LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS POSITION

#### INTRODUCTION

The term “Arms Control” refers to control of the manufacture, distribution and/or use of all weapons of war, primarily biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. Groups of experts, think tanks, and non-government organizations including The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Greenpeace, and many scientific groups, have worked to educate and influence the public and world leaders on arms-related issues. The League of Women Voters has long maintained a position on Arms Control. Recently, the League decided to update and re-publish that position, noting its long-standing support for limitations on arms and its involvement in efforts to reduce the risk of war. The position, as revised, was adopted at the League’s 2010 Convention, and is published on its website.

This paper will give background on various aspects of Arms Control and on the League’s updated position. (See attached.)

#### ARMS CONTROL HISTORY

While controlling biological and chemical weapons is clearly a high priority, a special effort is and has been devoted to the control of nuclear weapons.

#### **Scope of the Nuclear Problem**

The five permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China, and France) were the first to possess nuclear weapons. However, five other States (South Africa, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea) have since armed themselves with nuclear weapons. South Africa, however, destroyed its weapons.

A growing number of less constructive non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, have become involved in arms proliferation. This raises fears that these non-state actors could blackmail states or cause enormous damage. Another threat is posed by individuals who, because

of monetary or political objectives, manage to obtain and market key information, designs, or needed materials to assist others to manufacture bombs.

Even before the atomic bomb was used, scientists had become concerned about it. In July 1944, scientist Nils Bohr wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt saying, “A weapon of unparalleled power is being created which will completely change all future conditions of warfare.” He spoke of the competition by other nations to obtain such a powerful weapon, and most importantly the need to control the materials for making such weapons. In January 1946 the UN General Assembly called for the establishment of a commission to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy, including atomic, chemical and biological arms. The same year the Acheson-Lilienthal Report also discussed control of atomic weapons. But the United States (US) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were engaged in the “Cold War” with many in each country believing such weapons to be an asset providing security for themselves and their allies. Gradually, use of such arms as deterrence evolved into the recognition that such weaponry was MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction).

In October 1986 President Reagan and USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, Iceland following Gorbachev’s proposal for a nuclear-free world, with all sides finally recognizing that deterrence was no longer a viable strategy. Over the years various countries have discussed the possibility of totally controlling nuclear weaponry, from mining ores to production, for both safe use, e.g., medicine and electricity, as well as for weapon production. They came to recognize that total control needed an international agency with the power of inspection, and that safety would ultimately require total nuclear weapon elimination. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has limited control of nuclear power plants and so could not help in meeting this goal. Many in high places in the US think such a goal neither possible nor able to provide our country with security.

### **Attempts to Resolve Nuclear Concerns**

Initial steps to resolve concerns were defensive, such as the development of missile defense systems. Missile Defense Systems are defined as any system designed to protect a country against incoming missiles, and were first introduced in the 1950’s.

In 1972 the US and USSR signed the first treaty on the use of anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs.) That treaty is no longer in force. Through the years, changes were made by each

incoming president until President Bill Clinton signed the National Missile Defense Act in 1999, which made it "the policy of the United States to deploy as soon as technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack."<sup>1</sup> This is the U. S. government's current policy. The stated goal of the United States "has been to prevent an attack on the United States by a rogue state or from nuclear blackmail or nuclear terrorism."<sup>2</sup>

During the George W. Bush administration, long-range missile defense capabilities were built in Alaska and at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. In 2009, the Secretary of Defense "was directed to pursue development, testing, procurement and deployment of an alternative integrated missile defense system to protect Europe from all types of ballistic missiles, conditional on certification that it is consistent with NATO efforts and is cost-effective, technically reliable and operationally available in protecting Europe and the United States."<sup>3</sup>

Questions remain as to the effectiveness of any missile defense system.

### ARMS CONTROL TREATIES

The US is moving in the direction of the new Arms Control position of the League of Women Voters. In April of this year Russia and the United States signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II). It cuts deployed nuclear warheads to 1,550 and deployed launchers to 700. START I, which expired in December 2009, had allowed 6,000 deployed warheads. Also, verification is greatly improved by giving each side 18 short notice on-site inspections. For the very first time, the US will be able to track all Russian strategic delivery systems. Also, the US can continue to improve the interceptors that defend its homeland and proceed with modernizing its nuclear stockpile. Contrary to the League's position, START II will not prevent the US from developing and deploying conventional arms.

Of great benefit, the treaty has the unanimous support of the US military leaders. Other advantages include bringing about a closer US-Russian relationship and endorsing the non-

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Senator Thad Cochran to Congress on March 30, 1998. See <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/clip.php?appid-596753225> .

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Missile Defense Systems, Lois Requist. League of Women Voters background paper, <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=14875>

proliferation position of both countries. The UN Association of the USA urges Senate ratification of the treaty.

Another important treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), bans nuclear testing on the planet. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996, it has been signed by 189 nations, and ratified by 149. The US, China, N. Korea, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Pakistan are among those not signing. The US objects to the following aspects of CTBT: reliability of weapons is in doubt if not tested; others are modernizing their weapons so the US needs to also; the effectiveness of the verification protocols is in doubt. Proponents say ratification would put us in a leadership position to persuade other non-signers, would lower proliferation because new nuclear countries couldn't test to see if new nuclear devices work, and the US has other ways to ensure nuclear capability.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which came into effect in 1970, is a "bargain" between the nuclear "haves" and the nuclear "have-nots". The nuclear weapon states (NWS) - China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US - promise not to assist any non-nuclear weapon state (NNWS) in acquiring nuclear weapons and are committed to negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament. The NNWS, now 184 signatories, gain access to nuclear materials and technology for peaceful uses under IAEA safeguards. Despite the fact that the NPT has more parties than any other arms control agreement, there are continuing concerns regarding the three states that have not signed the treaty, India, Israel and Pakistan, and the one state that withdrew from the treaty, North Korea.

Signatories hold a Review Conference every five years. Only in 1975, 1985 and 2000 was the conference able to adopt a consensus final document. Yet, despite predictions to the contrary, 176 participating countries agreed to concrete action and reaffirmed commitment to non-proliferation at the conclusion of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

The US secured strong language on safeguards, Treaty compliance, and support for the IAEA and President Obama's plan for nuclear disarmament. The consensus final document included a 64-point plan for disarmament, non-proliferation, peaceful uses of nuclear energy and making progress toward a Middle East nuclear-weapons-free zone.

*Prepared by the International Affairs Committee, Marge O'Connor, Chair*