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Time to get rid of our nukes

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For well over 30 years, the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other with the horror of mutually assured destruction. By the inverse logic of the Cold War, the tens of thousands of nuclear warheads, poised to be launched by Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, as well as nuclear bombs from aircraft, actually helped to create peace. Not only did the two superpowers not attack each other, but the rest of the world, with the exception of only six other countries — the United Kingdom, France, China, Israel, India and Pakistan — were content to be non-nuclear bystanders.

Today, with the breakup of the Soviet Union some fifteen years ago, this situation is beginning to unravel. Already North Korea and possibly Iran are developing nuclear weapons, and it is not difficult to see other countries following in their wake.

What is to be done? As the world's super nuclear power, the United States can take a number of steps to reverse this trend.

First, the United States should stop threatening other nations and so creating the incentive for them to acquire nuclear weapons. Proclaiming North Korea and Iran members of the "axis of evil" and threatening military reprisals have created results that should teach us not to do this again.

Second, equally destructive has been the doctrine of the preemptive use of force, rather than the use of force only as a last resort and in self-defense, as prescribed by Article 51 of the U.N. Charter. Such a doctrine cannot help but induce other countries to acquire nuclear weapons.

Third, the United States should immediately desist from developing new nuclear weapons, as it is currently doing with bunker busters, and thereby edging toward a point where these weapons must be tested, thus breaking the standing moratorium on nuclear testing. We cannot demand that other countries adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 if we are developing new nuclear weapons ourselves.

Fourth, as we rightly pressure non-nuclear states to adhere to the NPT, we should adhere to it ourselves. Under the NPT, non-nuclear states agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons, but the nuclear signers agreed over time to give up their nuclear weapons.

To date, the United States has made little effort to do this. The 2002 Moscow Treaty, officially the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, between the United States and the Russian Federation, does stipulate major nuclear reductions to a level of 1,700 to 2,200 warheads by 2012, but with no schedule and no inspections, and is subject to virtual immediate withdrawal.

Rather than such a hollow treaty, the United States should attempt to achieve a genuine worldwide denuclearization treaty, including the acceptance by us and other signatories of intrusive inspections.

At this point, there is nothing to be gained by our possession of nuclear arms provided other nations give theirs up. We are not ourselves subject to a national attack and, in any case, we can handily defend our territory and vital interests with the sophisticated conventional arms we possess.

But beyond this, by cutting off the nuclear option, we can literally save the world from a nuclear holocaust that will appear increasingly likely as nuclear powers and alliances proliferate. We can

also save the world, and ourselves, the tens of billions of dollars that presently maintain nuclear weapons at a time when our economy is in jeopardy.

By saving the \$15 billion to \$20 billion that go into nuclear arms every year, and the tens of billions more which go into obsolete Cold War weapons, we could redress the effects of poverty at home and deal decisively with the poverty of the world. Today, we spend only a meager \$16.5 billion on foreign aid or 0.16 percent of our present economy. With the military savings suggested above, we could work with other developed nations to launch a Marshall Plan for the world that would be far more effective against terrorism than our present posture of dominance and nuclear belligerency.

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