

# Extending the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty:

## The Middle East Debate

Feb 1, 1995



In-Depth Reports

**E**xtending the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty: The Middle East Debate Executive Summary The debate in the Middle East over the possible extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) at the April 1995 review conference has emerged as one of the key determinants of whether the treaty will be extended. Egypt ratified the NPT in 1981 but now suggests that it will not support an indefinite extension of the treaty unless Israel agrees to join the NPT.

Israel, however, has refused to sign the NPT and is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. Its formal position on the nuclear issue is that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. As a non-signatory to the NPT, it will not be directly involved in the review conference or other negotiations regarding the treaty's extension.

The United States favors an indefinite extension of the NPT and is urging all states to support it. There are as yet no indications that the Clinton administration is willing to accept anything less than an indefinite extension.

Under these conditions, a number of developments are possible. First, an American perception that Egypt's position is becoming a central obstacle to the NPT extension could prompt a major crisis in U.S.-Egyptian relations.

Second, Israel may be encouraged to provide some "statement of intent" regarding its future approach to the NPT in order to make it easier for Egypt to support the treaty's indefinite extension. Third, the United States may suggest that Egypt and its supporters might continue to oppose an indefinite extension of the NPT but remain signatories if a majority of the other signatories vote for an indefinite extension.

Fourth, the administration may decide that the NPT can sustain the withdrawals of Egypt and other Arab states, just as the refusal of these same states to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has not prevented it from evolving into a robust arms control treaty. In this case, the Clinton administration may nevertheless insist that these states maintain all their separate agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), thereby ensuring that their nuclear facilities continue to be safeguarded.

Finally, the United States may reverse its course and conclude that a further extension of the NPT for a limited but significant period-another twenty-five years, for example-may not necessarily undermine the viability of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Egypt and other states might be persuaded to accept such a compromise by remaining signatories to the treaty.

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