

An unnecessary pursuit

It is difficult to believe that the world's remaining superpower must sustain its nuclear arsenal indefinitely.

THE NEW WAVE OF nuclear weapons modernization programs—the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) Program in the United States and Trident renewal in Britain—does not show an unwavering commitment to British and U.S. disarmament obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Soon, we can expect to hear arguments that the national security of the three other major nuclear states demands modernized nuclear arsenals.

Middle Easterners have often complained that U.S. foreign policy is duplicitous. Despite constant U.S. calls for controlling the spread of nuclear weapons in the region, Washington ignores requests to disarm itself—deciding instead to maintain an adequate, reliable, and secure nuclear arsenal aimed at delivering enough destructive force to neutralize any enemy. The perception in the Middle East is that the United States is dismantling its Cold War arsenal and building a new arsenal to replace it. This concern is reinforced by the Bush administration's apparent disregard for nuclear arms control.

The main argument put forth by RRW advocates—that the United States has an urgent need to develop far more reliable and safer nuclear warheads—strikes Middle Easterners as ludicrous. The United States asserts that it needs modern warheads

to project force over longer distances, at tremendous speeds, and with greater precision.

Since I live in Iran, which is one of the countries (along with Syria, Libya, North Korea, Russia, and China) designated as targets of U.S. nuclear war planning, it is no comfort knowing

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that future generations of U.S. nuclear warheads will be more destructive.

The NPT is inherently discriminatory and based on the assumption that the original five nuclear weapon states have the right to decide when to disarm. With RRW, the United States will increase the value of nuclear weapons, prompting more and more states in the Middle East and elsewhere to assume that a nuclear weapons capability will guarantee them a prominent place on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Nations that retain their nuclear capability are rewarded, but nations that renounce nuclear weapons do not benefit economically or politically.

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U.S. nuclear deals with North Korea, Pakistan, India, and Israel act as reminders of the political and economic value of nuclear weapons as a means of gaining concessions from the major powers. It is not inconceivable to envision a Middle East in which more than half a dozen countries (such as Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council) go nuclear with or without the help of their allies. The inevitability of nuclear technologies spreading to more countries should provide a strong incentive to stop research and development of new nuclear weapons. By fair or foul means, nuclear aspirants may try to gain access to these new technologies.

It is difficult to accept the argument that the world's remaining superpower with its uncontested military supremacy needs to sustain most of

its nuclear weapons for the indefinite future. It is even harder to see why the United States must continue to develop its nuclear arsenal to protect itself against a potential future adversary. The reliance on new weapons designed for limited nuclear wars might discourage the United States from using peaceful means to solve regional disputes and increase uncertainties about Washington's intentions.

Any devaluation of nuclear weapons in the U.S. national security strategy will help ensure the success of nonproliferation and arms control policies. Hence, RRW is likely to harm, not improve, international security. ✱