The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

Mains: *GS II – International relations*

Why in News?

Recently there is a pressure surmounting over Iran to dismantle all the enriched uranium in the country.

What is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)?

- **NPT** – It is a landmark 1970 international agreement designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote peaceful nuclear energy, and achieve global disarmament.
- **Supervision** – It operates as a "grand bargain" overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor compliance.
- **3 pillars –** The NPT balances three main principles:
  - **Non-Proliferation –** States without nuclear weapons pledge not to acquire or develop them.
  - **Disarmament –** States with nuclear weapons pledge to actively pursue negotiations toward total disarmament.
  - **Peaceful Use –** All countries have the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, provided they adhere to IAEA safeguards.
- **Categorization of States –** The treaty divides its 191 member states into two categories:
  - **Nuclear-Weapon States (NWS) –** Defined as those that manufactured and detonated a nuclear explosive device before January 1, 1967.
  - These five states are the **United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom**.
  - **Non-Nuclear-Weapon States (NNWS):** All other signatory parties.
- **Global Participation and Holdouts –** The NPT boasts near-universal membership, but a few key nations operate outside of it:
  - **Never signed –** India, Pakistan, and Israel.
  - **Withdrew –** North Korea signed in 1985 but withdrew in 2003 to pursue nuclear capabilities.

What is the significance of NPT?

- **Preventing Nuclear Proliferation** – The NPT limits the number of nuclear-armed states, preventing catastrophic scenarios where dozens of countries develop nuclear

arsenals.

- **Access to Peaceful Nuclear Tech** – Non-nuclear states gain legal access to peaceful nuclear technology for power generation, agriculture, and medicine under strict oversight.
- **International Safeguards** – The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) uses the NPT to conduct inspections, giving the global community confidence that civil nuclear programs are not being diverted to build weapons.
- **Framework for Disarmament** – The treaty legally commits nuclear-weapon states to pursue negotiations in good faith toward eventual disarmament, historically enabling massive reductions in global stockpiles.
- **Global Stability** – It establishes a predictable international norm against nuclear proliferation, reducing the risk of accidental or intentional nuclear conflict.

What are the issues with NPT?

- **Unequal rules** – The NPT institutionalised a hierarchy rather than dismantling it.
- The NPT is built on a "grand bargain" where non-nuclear states forego weapons, and nuclear states commit to eventually disarm.
- However, major powers continue to modernize their arsenals, and bilateral arms control has deteriorated, raising concerns about a renewed arms race.
- **Noncompliance and Verification** – Certain states (such as North Korea, which withdrew from the NPT, and Iran) have pursued clandestine nuclear programs, challenging the enforcement capabilities of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- **States Outside the Framework** – The NPT's credibility is weakened by the presence of nuclear-armed states that never signed the treaty—India, Pakistan, and Israel—as well as North Korea's withdrawal.
- This creates regional instability and undermines global non-proliferation norms.
- **Peaceful Nuclear Energy vs. Proliferation Risk** – The NPT guarantees states the right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology.
- However, technologies like uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, while legal for civilian energy, can be diverted to weaponization, making oversight difficult.
- **Perceived Double Standards** – Many non-nuclear weapon states argue there is inherent hypocrisy in the system.
- They are expected to limit their nuclear ambitions while recognized nuclear powers face no comparable or binding ultimatum to eliminate their own arsenals.

How to strengthen the NPT?

- **Adopt the Additional Protocol –** Make the IAEA Additional Protocol the universal standard for NPT safeguards, enabling short-notice inspections and greater environmental monitoring to detect illicit nuclear programs.
- **Implement Stricter Withdrawal Consequences –** Establish clear diplomatic and economic penalties, such as the immediate return of nuclear materials and technology, for states that withdraw from the NPT after violating its terms.
- **Fulfill Disarmament Obligations –** Nuclear-weapon states must take concrete, verifiable steps to reduce their arsenals, cease qualitative weapon modernization, and

recommit to arms control treaties.

- **Promote Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs) –** Encourage the establishment of universally binding NWFZs, particularly in highly volatile regions like the Middle East, to reduce local proliferation incentives.
- **Enforce Binding Treaties –** Accelerate the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) to cap the materials available for nuclear weapons.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)
• It is a multilateral agreement that prohibits all nuclear weapon test explosions and any other nuclear explosions, for both military and civilian purposes, in all environments. • **Adopted by** – The UN General Assembly in 1996. • **Enforced by** – The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) via a global monitoring system. • **Signatory nations** – While the treaty has been signed by 187 nations, it has not yet officially entered into force. • This is because the treaty requires ratification by 44 specific "nuclear-capable" states, nine of which—including the United States, China, India, and Pakistan—have yet to do so. • **Current Status and Challenges** – The treaty's path to formal implementation has faced political roadblocks. • It requires ratification from 44 specific states listed in "Annex 2" of the treaty (countries with nuclear reactors or research facilities at the time of negotiation). • As of 2026, nine of these Annex 2 states have not completed ratification: • **States that have not signed or ratified** – India, North Korea, and Pakistan. • **States that have signed but not ratified –** China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, and the United States. • **States that revoked ratification** – Russia (which ratified in 2000 but withdrew its ratification in 2023)

References

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