

Controlling Fissile Materials Worldwide: A Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty and Beyond

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Over the last decade of futile efforts to get negotiations underway on a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), the United States has viewed an FMCT as a modest arms control measure of limited scope that could codify the existing de facto moratorium on fissile material production for nuclear weapons by the five NPT nuclear weapon states and cap the fissile material weapons stocks of the three nuclear powers that never joined the NPT. Those goals remain valid, especially now that India and Pakistan appear poised to ramp up their bomb-making capabilities.

But current circumstances—including the fear that terrorists could get their hands on the wherewithal to build nuclear bombs and the growing quantities of excess fissile materials now being created as a by product of reductions in U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals—provide grounds for taking a more ambitious approach toward controlling fissile materials. Instead of only banning the production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons, an FMCT should also prohibit the production of highly enriched uranium (HEU) for civil purposes and either phase out or adopt a long-term moratorium on the production of HEU for naval propulsion.

Moreover, while the scope of an FMCT itself should focus only on the production of fissile material after entry into force, the treaty should be accompanied by parallel steps initially of a voluntary char-

acter—under a multilateral framework that might be called a Fissile Material Control Initiative (FMCI)—that would also address the challenges posed by pre-existing fissile materials and, over time, help monitor, manage, and reduce existing stocks of fissile materials around the world.

Taken together, the FMCT and FMCI would not only address critical problems posed by vast and growing stocks of fissile materials; they would also establish an essential foundation for moving toward a world with few or no nuclear weapons. But building the necessary international support will not be easy. Some key states may not be prepared to forgo future production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons as required by an FMCT, and some may resist the transparency, verification, and disposition measures called for under an FMCI. Strong leadership by the U.S. will be needed to get the growing problem of fissile material stocks under control.