

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Background Information

In the past 20 years, significant diplomatic crises have occurred due to the real or perceived attempts of three nations to acquire nuclear weapons.

Although **Iran** signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, there have been persistent concerns in some nations that Iran is pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. While International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities have not revealed any diversion of nuclear materials for weapons development, the revelation in September 2009 that Iran was constructing a secret underground nuclear enrichment facility and Iran's announcement in February 2010 that it would begin enriching uranium have renewed calls for Iran to fully disclose its nuclear activities. The Iranian government believes that many of these demands are unfair and infringe on the nation's sovereignty.

Iraq's nuclear weapons development program led to an Israeli bombing attack in 1981 that destroyed the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq. During the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq's nuclear facilities were priority targets for Coalition air attacks; postwar, considerable efforts were made to find and dismantle all of Iraq's nuclear weapons facilities. Fears of a resurgent nuclear weapons program also featured prominently in the diplomatic lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. After the Hussein government was overthrown, Iraq was thoroughly searched for any traces of a covert nuclear weapons program.

In the early 1990s, **North Korea** was suspected of using its nuclear reactor and reprocessing facility to produce material for nuclear weapons. Despite a variety of diplomatic initiatives and international sanctions, North Korea continued to prohibit full IAEA inspections of its nuclear sites and withdrew from the NPT in 2003. In 2006, North Korea tested a nuclear weapon, following that up with a second test in May 2009. The North Korean government has claimed that it needs nuclear weapons to provide a deterrent against foreign aggression, especially from the United States and South Korea, since the collapse of the Communist bloc in 1991 removed Soviet guarantees of nuclear protection.