

Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance

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At the dawn of the nuclear age, the United States hoped to maintain a monopoly on its new weapon, but the secrets for making nuclear weapons soon spread. Four years after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear device. The United Kingdom (1952), France (1960), and China (1964) followed. Seeking to prevent the nuclear weapon ranks from expanding further, the United States and other like-minded states negotiated the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968. In the decades since, several states have abandoned nuclear weapons programs, but others have defied the NPT. India, Israel, and Pakistan have never signed the treaty and possess nuclear arsenals. Iraq began a secret nuclear program under Saddam Hussein before the 1991 Persian Gulf War. North Korea claims to have nuclear weapons and announced its withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003. Iran and Libya have pursued secret nuclear activities in violation of the treaty's terms. Still, nuclear nonproliferation successes outnumber failures and dire forecasts decades ago that the world would be home to dozens of states armed with nuclear weapons have not come to pass.

Nuclear-Weapon States:

The nuclear-weapon states (NWS) are the five states—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States—officially recognized as possessing nuclear weapons by the NPT. Although the treaty legitimizes these states' nuclear arsenals, it also establishes that they are not supposed to build and maintain such weapons in perpetuity. Article VI of the treaty holds that each state-party is to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament." In 2000, the five NWS committed themselves to an "unequivocal undertaking...to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals." But for now, the five continue to retain the bulk of their nuclear forces. Because of the secretive nature with which most governments treat information about their nuclear arsenals, the adjoining figures are best estimates of each nuclear-weapon state's nuclear holdings, including both strategic warheads and lower-yield devices referred to as tactical weapons:

China: More than 100 warheads.

France: Approximately 350 strategic warheads.

Russia: 4,978 strategic warheads,¹ approximately 3,500 operational tactical warheads, and more than 11,000 stockpiled strategic and tactical warheads.

United Kingdom: Less than 200 strategic warheads.

United States: 5,968 strategic warheads,¹ more than 1,000 operational tactical weapons, and approximately 3,000 reserve strategic and tactical warheads.

De facto Nuclear-Weapon States:

Three states—India, Israel, and Pakistan—never joined the NPT and are known to possess nuclear weapons. Claiming its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes, India first tested a nuclear explosive device in 1974. India and Pakistan both publicly demonstrated their nuclear weapon capabilities with a round of tit-for-tat nuclear tests in May 1998. Israel has not publicly conducted a nuclear test, does not admit to or deny having nuclear weapons, and states it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Israel is universally believed to possess nuclear arms. The adjacent arsenal estimates are based on the amount of fissile material—highly enriched uranium and plutonium—that each of the states is estimated to have produced. Fissile material is the key element for making nuclear weapons. India and Israel are believed to use plutonium in their weapons, while Pakistan is thought to use highly enriched uranium.

India: 45 to 95 nuclear warheads. The Pentagon projects that New Delhi has a relatively small stockpile of nuclear weapons components that could be assembled and deployed "within a few days to a week."

Israel: Between 75 to 200 nuclear warheads.

Pakistan: 30 to 50 nuclear warheads. The Pentagon believes Islamabad stores its weapons in component form and could assemble weapons "fairly quickly."

States of Immediate Proliferation Concern:

Despite its denials, Iran is generally perceived as secretly trying to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. In contrast, North Korea has the material to produce nuclear weapons, announced its withdrawal from the NPT, and declared itself a nuclear power. Yet, North Korea has never conducted a nuclear test and uncertainty persists about whether it possesses actual nuclear weapons.

Iran: No known weapons or sufficient fissile material stockpiles to build weapons. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN body charged with verifying that states are not illicitly building nuclear weapons, concluded in 2003 that Iran had undertaken covert nuclear activities to establish the capacity to indigenously produce fissile material. The IAEA is continuing its investigation and oversight of Tehran's nuclear program.

North Korea: One to two nuclear weapons, according to CIA estimates. Pyongyang also possesses enough spent nuclear fuel that could be reprocessed into fissile material for as many as six nuclear weapons.

U.S. officials sometimes name **Syria** as covertly seeking nuclear weapons. Syria has forsworn nuclear weapons as a state-party to the NPT and its nuclear research reactor is subject to IAEA monitoring. The Pentagon stated in 2001 that Syria is not pursuing nuclear weapons. However, the CIA cautioned in late 2003, "broader access to foreign expertise provides opportunities to expand its indigenous capabilities and we are looking at Syrian nuclear intentions with growing concern."

States That Had Nuclear Weapons or Nuclear Weapons Programs at One Time:

Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine inherited nuclear weapons following the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse, but returned them to Russia and joined the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states. **South Africa** secretly developed and dismantled a small number of nuclear warheads and also joined the NPT in 1991. **Iraq** had an active nuclear weapons program prior to the 1991 Persian Gulf War, but was forced to verifiably dismantle it under the supervision of UN inspectors. The U.S.-led March 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent capture of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein definitively ended his regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons. **Libya** voluntarily renounced its secret nuclear weapons efforts in December 2003. **Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan** also shelved nuclear weapons programs.

NOTE

1. START I limits the United States and Russia to 6,000 "accountable" strategic warheads each. Figures are based on START counting rules, as negotiated between Washington and Moscow and specified in the treaty text. Thus, numbers do not necessarily reflect those weapons systems that are operationally deployed. These warhead totals were what the two states reported as of January 31, 2004.

Sources: Arms Control Association, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Central Intelligence Agency, Congressional Research Service, U.S. Department of Defense, Institute for Science and International Security, International Atomic Energy Agency, and Natural Resources Defense Council.
