

## **What Happened to Mexico at the 1995 NPT Conference?<sup>1</sup>**

Miguel Marín Bosch

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has been signed and ratified by 189 countries. Only India, Israel and Pakistan have remained outside the NPT and the DPRK has withdrawn from it. More nations are parties to the NPT than any other multilateral disarmament or arms control instrument.

Completed in 1968, the NPT entered into force in March of 1970. It was the product of a widespread fear that more and more nations would go nuclear (the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons) and that those that already had them would continue to compete with each other in order to produce more and more powerful weapons (vertical proliferation). The testing of nuclear weapons was (and is) considered the key to vertical proliferation. Therein lies the importance of the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). If you do not test, it is difficult, but not impossible, to improve a weapon's design.

The NPT is a pact between countries that have nuclear weapons and those that do not, the so-called nuclear-weapon States (NWS) and the non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS). The deal was very simple: the NNWS undertook to remain just that and the NWS agreed to get rid of their nuclear arsenals. Who are the NWS? The NPT defines them as those nations that have built and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear device before January 1, 1967. That means that it explicitly recognizes as NWS the United States (first explosion in 1945), the Soviet Union (1949), the United Kingdom (1952), France (1960) and China (1964).

The negotiation of the NPT was very complicated. Many nations did not believe that the NWS would disarm. Moreover, France and China refused to take part in the negotiations of the NPT. In order to assure the NNWS of their good intentions, the U.S., the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. accepted two unusual provisions in the NPT. First, they agreed that the parties to the Treaty would meet every five years to review the functioning of the Treaty, the so-called RevCon, a provision that has since then been incorporated into many disarmament treaties. Second, they agreed that the NPT, unlike most other international treaties, would not remain in force indefinitely. The Parties would meet twenty-five years after its entry into force in order to decide whether to extend it indefinitely or for another fixed period.

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The NPT's first RevCon was held in 1975 and the others in 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2005. The 1995 RevCon was combined with the meeting to decide on whether or not to extend the NPT indefinitely. The conferences work on the basis of consensus, that is, a general agreement that no country opposes openly. This means that each Party has a veto.

In recent decades many of the countries that were reluctant to join the NPT have done so. These include Spain in 1987, Saudi Arabia (1988), France and China in 1992, Argentina and Chile in 1995, Brazil (1998) and Cuba (2002).

This year's RevCon, held in New York from 2 to 27 May, failed to agree on common language regarding horizontal and vertical proliferation. On some occasions, notably 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2000, there was success in the sense that an agreed text was adopted. The NPT was extended indefinitely in 1995.

In 1990 (as in 1980) the parties disagreed on the importance of concluding a CTBT. At that conference, there appeared to be agreement regarding a CTBT. However, at the last moment, the United States refused to go along. The alternate text proposed was acceptable to the U.S. but not to many delegations, including Mexico.

Long before the 1990 conference I sent a memorandum to Foreign Minister Fernando Solana. In it I described how these conferences work and underlined the importance of getting an unequivocal commitment to conclude a CTBT. I insisted that Mexico should accept nothing less, but warned him that if the government was going to have second thoughts, he should tell me in time (my words were "si nos va a temblar la mano, dímelo con tiempo"). Solana replied by telephone that he agreed with me ("duro y a la yugular"). I was pleasantly surprised, especially in light of the NAFTA negotiations. The Mexican delegation refused to go along with the watered down text regarding a CTBT and no agreement was possible.

In 1994 negotiations finally began on a CTBT and I had the honor to chair them that year. The CTBT was concluded in 1996. President Clinton signed it and the U.S. delegation to the 2000 RevCon accepted (along with everyone else) a series of commitments to ensure nuclear disarmament. President Bush opposes those commitments, as well as the CTBT signed by his predecessor.

On the eve of the 1995 review and extension conference, Ernest Zedillo became president and was immediately forced to devalue the peso, the so-called "error de diciembre" of 1994. Mexico was financially strapped and needed funds. Clinton was very forthcoming (more to ensure that U.S. investors did not lose out than because he wanted

to help Mexico) and Zedillo sent several members of his cabinet to the capitals of the richest countries to obtain more funds. In January he sent the his foreign minister, José Ángel Gurría, to Tokyo. At the end of his visit Gurría gave a press conference in which he dealt mostly with the state of the Mexican economy. There was, however, one question on the upcoming NPT review and extension conference. He was asked whether or not Mexico supported the indefinite extension of the NPT. Having read the papers I had prepared for him when he took office, he replied that Mexico supported the indefinite extension on condition that a CTBT was concluded. There was outrage in Washington and Gurría had much explaining to do when he returned to Mexico. Zedillo never fully understood what was at stake if the NPT was extended indefinitely and unconditionally. He was concerned with the economy and was in no mood to have to answer Clinton's questions regarding the NPT. Things seemed to have calmed down. But in April (a month before the NPT conference) an article appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* which was soon the subject of a telephone conversation between the White House and Los Pinos.

Gurría told me that Washington had requested to exclude me from the delegation to the 1995 NPT conference. He said that was out of the question. But I ended up in fifth place in the delegation's hierarchy.