

Overview

This lesson offers a collection of short primary source excerpts and questions for consideration in a discussion or essay.

Length

Flexible, depending on number of documents used

Materials

- Primary Source Collection (below)
- [“The History of Nuclear Proliferation” \(World101\)](#)

Instructional Plan

1. Have students read the document excerpts and consider one or more of the following questions:
 - a. How have concerns about proliferation changed over time?
 - b. What nuclear issues were leaders most worried about during the Cold War? After the Cold War? Why the change?
 - c. How have the strategies for countering proliferation changed over time?
2. Have students conduct an in-class discussion or write an essay responding to one of the questions.

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Primary Documents on Nuclear Proliferation

Document A:

[Preliminary Statement of the Association of Manhattan District Scientists](#),
August 1945 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC03152)

“Under any conditions a large part of the scientific and industrial development of any great power will be directed toward the utilization of nuclear energy. A policy of secrecy is bound to lead to one of suspicion. Scientists of other countries will be spurred to develop atomic bombs of their own in self-defense. . . . The result will be an armaments race, with all its disastrous possibility.

The second large problem raised by the atomic bomb is that of its tremendous destructive possibilities. . . . We have been made strongly aware of the dangers inherent in the mishandling of this tremendous force by the peoples of the world. We have seen in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that one crude, pioneering atomic bomb is sufficient to destroy a city of medium size. It is certain that further development will result in bombs of vastly greater destructive potential. The Pearl Harbor attack which destroyed most of Pacific Fleet may be dwarfed in a future war by a disaster in which as much as a quarter of our population and the major part of our industry will suddenly disappear. This may even be a conservative estimate of the damage that will occur before we are in a position to retaliate, if retaliation be any longer possible. It will be a small consolation to have the largest supply of the world’s best bombs; it may be too late to use them. It is possible that we may not even know who our attackers are.”

Document B:

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, [Letter to Linus Pauling](#), October 27, 1961

“The present policy of the NATO powers leads to a situation where one has

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to fear not just radioactive fallout but the lethal and destructive power of nuclear weapons themselves. This is the actual choice humanity is facing today. We are carrying out experimental tests and perfecting our weapons in order that mankind should never experience the horrors of nuclear war. The fact that nuclear weapons are in possession of the Soviet state serves as a stern warning to all those who resort to threats in connection with the question of signing a German peace treaty. . . . We would be happy to sink the most modern and formidable weapons in the ocean. But if our partners in negotiations do not wish to agree to jointly sink the weapons, then, naturally, we, too, need these weapons. . . .

All this shows clearly that it is the policy of the Western powers—NATO members—that is the source of international tension and arms race. To care for peace and for prevention of nuclear war, means that the efforts of the governments of all peace loving-countries as well as the efforts of the peoples should be aimed at making the Western powers stop saber-rattling and reach an agreement to put an end to the vestiges of World War II.”

Document C:

John F. Kennedy, [Address to the Nation on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#), July 26, 1963

“Eighteen years ago, the advent of nuclear weapons changed the course of the world as well as the war. Since that time, all mankind has been struggling to escape from the darkening prospect of mass destruction on earth. In an age when both sides have come to possess enough nuclear power to destroy the human race several times over, the world of communism and the world of free choice have been caught up in a vicious circle of conflicting ideology and interest. Each increase of tension has produced an increase of arms, each increase of arms has produced an increase of tension.

In these years, the United States and the Soviet Union have frequently communicated suspicion and warnings to each other, but very rarely hope. . .

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Yesterday a shaft of light cut into the darkness. Negotiations were concluded in Moscow on a treaty to ban all nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space, and under water. For the first time, an agreement has been reached on bringing the forces of nuclear destruction under international control—a goal first sought in 1946 when Bernard Baruch presented a comprehensive control plan to the United Nations.”

Document D:

President Lyndon B. Johnson, [Remarks in Seattle on the Control of Nuclear Weapons](#), September 16, 1964

“First, we have worked to avoid war by accident or miscalculation. I believe the American people should know the steps that we have taken to eliminate the danger of accidental attack by our strategic forces, and I am going to talk about that tonight.

The release of nuclear weapons would come by Presidential decision alone. Complex codes and electronic devices prevent any unauthorized action. Every further step along the way—from decision to destruction—is governed by the two-man rule. Two or more men must act independently and must decide the order has been given. They must independently take action.”

Document E:

J. Robert Oppenheimer, director of the Manhattan Project, on [the first successful detonation of an atomic bomb](#), in a film made in 1965

“We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita. Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty and to impress him takes on his multiarmed form and says: ‘Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.’ I suppose we all thought that, one way or another.”

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Document F:

President Ronald Reagan, [Address to the Nation on Strategic Arms Reduction and Nuclear Deterrence](#), November 22, 1982

“What do we mean when we speak of nuclear deterrence? Certainly, we don’t want such weapons for their own sake. We don’t desire excessive forces, or what some people have called overkill. Basically, it’s a matter of others knowing that starting a conflict would be more costly to them than anything they might hope to gain. And, yes, it is sadly ironic that in these modern times it still takes weapons to prevent war. I wish it did not. . . .

Now, while the policy of deterrence has stood the test of time, the things we must do in order to maintain deterrence have changed. . . .

If my defense proposals are passed, it will still take five years before we come close to the Soviet level. Yet the modernization of our strategic and conventional forces will assure that deterrence works and peace prevails.”

Document G:

Hans Bethe, Former Director of the Theoretical Division, Los Alamos National Laboratory, [Letter in Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists](#), November/December 1995

“Today we are rightly in an era of disarmament and dismantlement of nuclear weapons. But in some countries nuclear weapons development still continues. Whether and when the various Nations of the World can agree to stop this is uncertain. But individual scientists can still influence this process by withholding their skills.”

Document H:

President George W. Bush, [Graduation Speech at West Point](#), June 1, 2002

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“The gravest danger to freedom lies at the perilous crossroads of radicalism and technology. When the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, along with ballistic missile technology—when that occurs, even weak states and small groups could attain a catastrophic power to strike great nations. Our enemies have declared this very intention and have been caught seeking these terrible weapons. They want the capability to blackmail us, or to harm us, or to harm our friends—and we will oppose them with all our power.

New deadly challenges have emerged from rogue states and terrorists. . . . The nature and motivations of these new adversaries, their determination to obtain destructive powers hitherto available only to the world’s strongest states, and the greater likelihood that they will use weapons of mass destruction against us, make today’s security environment more complex and dangerous.”

Document I:

A. Q. Khan, Pakistani nuclear scientist, [Letter to his wife](#), 2003

“Darling:

If the government plays any mischief with me take a tough stand:

(1) You know we had cooperation with China for 15 years. We put up a centrifuge plant at Hanzhong. . . . We sent 135 C-130 plane loads of machines, inverters, valves, flow meters, pressure gauges. Our teams stayed there for weeks to help and their teams stayed here for weeks at a time. . . .

(2) The Chinese gave us drawings of the nuclear weapon, gave us kg50 enriched uranium, gave us 10 tons of UF₆ (natural) and 5 tons of UF₆ (3%). Chinese helped PAEC [Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission] in setting up UF₆ plant, production reactor for plutonium and reprocessing plant.

(3) Probably with the blessings of BB [Benazir Bhutto] & Gen [Aslam] Beg,

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Gen Imtiaz asked Hashmi [former colleague] and me to give a set of drawings and some components to the Iranians. We had no direct contact and we never sent anybody or received anybody. The names and addresses of suppliers were also given to the Iranians.

(4) Gen Jehangir Karamat took \$3 million through me from the N Koreans and asked me to give them some drawings and machines. . . .

Tell them the bastards first used us and now playing dirty games with us. . . .

They might try to get rid of me to cover up all the things (dirty) they got done by me in connection with Iran, Libya and N. Korea.

This is just to forewarn you.”

Document J:

[Text of North Korea’s Statement on NPT Withdrawal](#), January 10, 2003

“Under the grave situation where our state’s supreme interests are most seriously threatened, the DPRK government adopts the following decisions to protect the sovereignty of the country and the nation and their right to existence and dignity: firstly, the DPRK government declares an automatic and immediate effectuation of its withdrawal from the NPT, on which ‘it unilaterally announced a moratorium as long as it deemed necessary’ according to the 11 June, 1993, DPRK-US joint statement, now that the US has unilaterally abandoned its commitments to stop nuclear threat and renounce hostility towards the DPRK in line with the same statement.

Secondly, it declares that the DPRK withdrawing from the NPT is totally free from the binding force of the safeguards accord with the IAEA under its Article 3.”

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Document K:

Ambassador Chris Sanders, [Statement](#) on behalf of the European Union in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, October 18, 2004

“The illicit trade related to weapons of mass destruction, in particular the trade in highly sensitive nuclear equipment and technology is a matter of serious concern. The reality of that illicit trade became clear with the revelation of clandestine networks supplying elements for conversion and centrifuge programmes. We fully endorse the call of the Director General of the IAEA for full cooperation from all IAEA member States in identifying the supply routes, sources of technology and related equipment. . . .

There are concerns about the nuclear programmes of a number of countries. These relate in particular to civilian nuclear programmes which might be misused for military ends. In that context, the EU notes with interest the ongoing discussion on measures to strengthen control over the most sensitive parts of the fuel cycle. . . .

The EU continues to deplore the announcement by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in January 2003 of its intention to withdraw from the NPT. The EU will not cease to urge the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to completely, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle any clandestine nuclear weapons programme. The EU restates its firm resolve to contribute to the search for a peaceful solution, through negotiations, to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea nuclear issue and particularly welcomes the dialogue within the framework of the six-party talks.”

Document L:

IAEA Board of Governors, [Resolution](#) on Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008) and 1835 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, November 27, 2009

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“(g) Also noting with serious concern that Iran has constructed an enrichment facility at Qom in breach of its obligation to suspend all enrichment related activities and that Iran’s failure to notify the Agency of the new facility until September 2009 is inconsistent with its obligations under the Subsidiary Arrangements to its Safeguards Agreement, . . .

(i) Underlining that Iran’s declaration of the new facility reduces the level of confidence in the absence of other nuclear facilities and gives rise to questions about whether there are any other nuclear facilities under construction in Iran which have not been declared to the Agency,

(j) Noting with serious concern that, contrary to the request of the Board of Governors and the requirements of the Security Council, Iran has neither implemented the Additional Protocol nor cooperated with the Agency in connection with the remaining issues of concern, which need to be clarified to exclude the possibility of military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear programme, . . .

(l) Noting that the Director General has repeatedly declared that he is unable to verify that Iran’s programme is for exclusively peaceful purposes, . . .”