

# No Progress on Nuclear Weapons Control - As Planned. Disarmament isn't Happening...

US leadership vetoes steps toward nuclear weapons-free world

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Global Research, June 04, 2015

[Reader Supporter News](#)

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*Worst case scenario: the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference](#) of 2015 has failed to make progress in controlling nuclear weapons.*

Best case scenario: the nuclear non-proliferation conference has [failed to make progress](#) on controlling nuclear weapons, increasing the odds that the worst case scenario is, if not already a reality, an ever-present possibility.

In either case, Saudi Arabia has again floated hints that it will [get a Saudi bomb, by buying it from Pakistan](#) if necessary. Or maybe it's a done deal already.

In a world where six of the world's [nine nuclear-armed states](#) are already directly or indirectly engaged in armed conflict, even the [best case scenario is a disaster](#). The nuclear-armed US and Russia are facing off over Ukraine. The nuclear-armed US, UK, France, and Israel are supporting Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen, with nuclear-armed Pakistan weighing its options. The only nuclear-armed states engaged in relative peace are China, India, and North Korea.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Another Ideal Lost to Reactionaries

[Nuclear weapons-free zones](#) might seem to be a no-brainer to some. Currently five treaties have established nuclear weapons-free zones in South America, Central America, Africa, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific (including Australia). These zones have been promoted by the United Nations, outlining principles that provide for consultation with nuclear-armed states and for peaceful use of nuclear science, as well as the principle that:

The initiative to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone should emanate exclusively from States within the region concerned and be pursued by all States of that region.

Egypt first proposed a [nuclear weapons-free zone](#) for the Middle East in 1990. In 1974, the UN General Assembly voted for such a zone as proposed by Egypt and Iran (and passed again in 1980 and every year after). When Egypt again proposed working toward such a zone, supported by a large majority of participating states in the 2015 NPT conference, the United States vetoed the proposal. The Egyptian proposal called only for a meeting of the region's states to discuss the possibility. The US vetoed even the possibility of discussion in order to [protect Israel's undeclared arsenal](#) of nuclear weapons (estimated at up to 400).

Israel is not a party to the non-proliferation treaty, participating for the first time in the 2015 conference as an observer. Israel officially neither confirms nor denies that it is the nuclear-armed state in the Middle East. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed [gratitude to the US](#) for preventing any forward movement toward a nuclear weapons-free Middle East.

[The US veto](#), supported by UK and Canada, is just one more betrayal of a treaty that has been betrayed time and again by nuclear-armed states. In the rest of the world, the treaty's principles of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament retain political vitality for reasons expressed by the South African delegate on May 16:

If for security reasons the [P5 (US, Russia, UK, France, China)] feel that they must be armed with nuclear weapons, what about other countries in similar situations? Do we think that the global situation is such that no other country would ever aspire to nuclear weapons to provide security for themselves, when the five tell us that it is absolutely correct to possess nuclear weapons for their security?

South Africa is one of four nations that has given up its nuclear weapons. The other three were formerly part of the Soviet Union: Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

Nuclear proliferation has slowed, disarmament isn't happening

When the non-proliferation treaty came into full force in 1970, it recognized five nuclear-armed states, which are also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Of those, the US, UK, and the Soviet Union (now Russia) had signed the treaty, along with 40 non-nuclear states. In 1992, nuclear-armed France and China acceded to the treaty. Today there are [191 parties to the treaty](#), 189 [UN member states](#) plus the Vatican and Palestine.

As described by the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#) (NPT) has three basic and contradictory purposes:

The NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament. The Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the IAEA, which also plays a central role under the Treaty in areas of technology transfer for peaceful purposes.

After 45 years, the number of nuclear-armed states has less than doubled. The two major nuclear-armed states, the US and Russia, have reduced their nuclear arsenals to about 5,000 each, while other nuclear arsenals have stabilized or continue to grow. Peaceful use of nuclear energy is an ambiguous and mixed bag in which increased use of nuclear reactors to generate energy looks less and less beneficial in the wake of Fukushima.

And as the Washington Post reports, all the original nuclear-armed states are expanding and improving their weapons:

The United States has embarked on an overhaul of its nuclear arsenal and infrastructure, a commitment that may cost \$1 trillion over the next 30 years, [according to the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies](#).

China's new generation of mobile missiles are outfitted with multiple warheads and penetration aids, [the Pentagon reported](#) to Congress in April.

Between [March 2014](#) and [March 2015](#), both Russia and the United States slightly increased their numbers of deployed warheads, and both countries are working on new [long-range strike bombers](#). France is developing a new cruise missile and [Britain will decide](#) in the near future whether to replace its fleet of nuclear-armed submarines.

Media coverage of the month-long conference: scant, but unedifying

Given the stakes, with nuclear-armed states in confrontations of unpredictable intensity around the world, mainstream media performing actual journalism would presumably have covered the NPT Review Conference in some detail. Obviously that didn't happen. There was little coverage even of the month-long event, and most of that coverage was unenlightening. The Washington Post summed up the nuclear weapons conference as a "failure ... as international delegations squabbled over a long-sought goal of establishing a ban on weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East" but offered little insight as to the reasons for the "failure."

The NPT Review Conference operates by consensus decision-making, giving each participant a veto. The veto by the US (and its allies) spiked the entire final report of the conference even though the US articulated only one objection, to the Middle East nuclear weapons-free zone procedure and process. The US explained this in a final-day speech by the US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, speaking for the Obama administration.

That under secretary is the [notorious Rose Gottemoeller](#), whose job seems to be to go around trying to minimize the likelihood of nuclear war while, at the same time, working to maximize its availability. [Gottemoeller blamed](#) "Egypt and other Arab League states" for failing to be flexible, by which she meant: failing to agree with the US:

Unfortunately the proposed language for a final document did not allow for consensus discussions among the countries of the Middle East for an agreement on the agenda and the modalities of the conference and set an arbitrary deadline for holding the conference. We attempted to work with other delegations - in particular, Egypt and other Arab League states - to improve the text; but a number of these states, and in particular Egypt, were not willing to let go of these unrealistic and unworkable conditions included in the draft text. In the end, the proposed final document outlined a process that would not build the foundation of trust necessary for holding a productive conference that could reflect the concerns of all regional states.

This is a Catch-22. The US position is that it will only support a nuclear-free zone process in which Israel has a veto, knowing full well that Israel would almost surely veto any such process. This is beyond disingenuous. This is dishonest.

But this is the result the US chose. The once and future client state of Egypt once again put forward the quaint notion of having the Middle East become a nuclear weapons-free zone, since no Middle East states are declared nuclear-armed states. Of course this put Egypt at odds with a higher-ranking American client state, Israel, which is an undeclared nuclear-

armed state. As a demonstration of US commitment to eliminating nuclear weapons, the US protected the Israeli arsenal by vetoing the Egyptian proposal to talk about any nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. This prompted Saudi Arabia to float hints that the Saudis would get a bomb from Pakistan in order to defend itself from the nuclear threat from Iran having no bomb.

Some call that diplomacy.

When confronted by a stonewall, some choose to go around

Blocked by the US from making serious progress at the NPT conference, [107 other nations](#) have now signed a document called the "[Humanitarian Pledge](#)," which seeks to emphasize that using nuclear weapons is a war crime, to make nuclear weapons morally unusable, and "to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks."

Under Secretary Gottemoeller even paid lip service to the Humanitarian Pledge when she said, ungrammatically, condescendingly, in passing, without naming the document, "We acknowledged the sincere and shared concern of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons." No, the US is not one of the 107 nations that has signed the Humanitarian Pledge. Unsurprisingly, neither are China, France, GB, Russia, Israel, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Turkey, most of Europe, and [many other "nuclear weasels."](#)

The signers include South Africa, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Palestine, Qatar, Yemen, and Iran.

Even less-reported than the NPT conference results is the appearance of a [groundswell of resistance](#) among the Humanitarian Pledge signer nations and [like-minded NGOs](#). It's way too early to know how great the swell will get, but the first measure will be this August as the world commemorates the 70th anniversary of the atomic annihilations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Referring to organizing around the Humanitarian Pledge, the delegate from Costa Rica said in [her closing statement](#): "The humanitarian conferences demonstrate that democracy has come to nuclear disarmament, even if democracy is yet to come to the NPT." She concluded:

Despite what has happened at this Review Conference, there is no force can stop the steady march of those who believe in human security, democracy and international law. History honors only the brave, those who have the courage to think differently and dream of a better future for all. This is not the time to lament what has happened here, as lamentable as it may be. Now is the time to work for what is to come, the world we want and deserve. Let us all, boldly and finally, give peace a chance.

In the real world, the majority does not rule, and the majority has little chance of ruling – unless the majority can change the real world.

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