

The Doomsday Clock is Ticking: Veterans Call on U.S. to Sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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Veterans For Peace

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In-depth Report: [Nuclear War](#)

On July 7th, 2017, the United Nations (UN), in a historic decision, approved a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons, the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#). Months of negotiations involving over 130 countries began in March of this year, culminating in a final draft endorsed by 122 countries. The treaty marks a significant milestone to help free the world of nuclear weapons.

The treaty emphasizes “the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons.” It forbids participating states “to develop, test, produce, manufacture, otherwise acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” Additionally, it explains that the complete elimination of nuclear weapons from international arsenals “remains the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances.”

In keeping with a history of being unwilling to relinquish its massive nuclear arsenal, the U.S. refused to enter treaty negotiations and used its status as the sole remaining international superpower to organize a boycott that influenced approximately 40 countries.

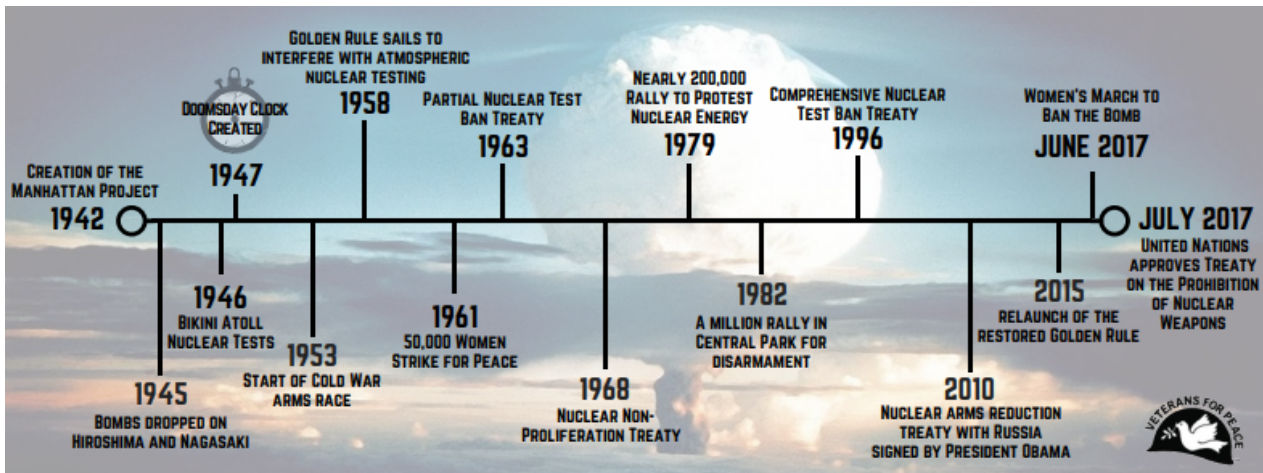
U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki R. Haley defended the absence of the U.S. from the negotiations, stating,

“There is nothing I want more for my family than a world with no nuclear weapons, but we have to be realistic. Is there anyone who thinks that North Korea would ban nuclear weapons?”

Veterans For Peace (VFP), a nonprofit working since 1985 to abolish war and nurture peace and the only veterans non-governmental organization (NGO) represented at the UN, released a [statement](#) in response, strongly criticizing the U.S.’s refusal to participate, noting that the discussions were a “series of missed opportunities by the United States to use its position as the world’s undisputed military power to change the course of history ... and end the danger and peril that nuclear weapons pose to the world.”

Humanity has been at the brink of a nuclear exchange on multiple occasions since the end of World War II, including times when the decision to launch was seconds from happening. An urgent question, then, is why these close calls, as well as the brutal and unnecessary annihilation of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that preceded them, failed to

convince all governments that nuclear weapons represent an existential threat to humanity, thus nuclear disarmament must be a top priority?



Source: Veterans for Peace

The Doomsday Clock, maintained since 1947 by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, is a symbol of the risk of a human-caused global catastrophe, specifically of the rate of climate change and the potential for a nuclear exchange. It is reset periodically depending on global conditions. Presently, the Clock is at 2 minutes and 30 seconds, the closest to midnight it has been since 1953, the start of the arms race between the U.S. and former Soviet Union.

Certainly, the possibility of nuclear war was heightened with the unpredictable brinksmanship of President Donald Trump, who, in reference to nuclear weapons, once asked,

“If we have them, why can’t we use them?”

This is the sort of irrational thinking to which Albert Einstein, whose theory of relativity gave rise to the atomic bomb, may have been referring when, in 1946, a year after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he warned the world of the tragedy nuclear technology would bring:

“The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.”

Previous global action to prevent the use of nuclear weapons has included the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963, which curtailed nuclear testing but did not eliminate it. The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) of 1996 would have prohibited “any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion.” However, despite signing the treaty, the U.S. and other nations, such as India, North Korea and Pakistan, never ratified it. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, which was signed by nearly all nations, including the U.S., mandated that all participants pursue nuclear disarmament “in good faith.” Despite the relative effectiveness of the NPT and the end the Cold War of reducing a sizeable portion of the global stockpile, an estimated fifteen thousand nuclear warheads are still held by nine nations. Two of these nations — the U.S. and Russia — possess over ninety percent of the total.

The world now has the first-ever treaty to ban all nuclear weapons, and the U.S. remains steadfast in their contempt of the possibility of peace. In a statement released by the U.S., UK, and France, the three nations asserted that they “do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it” alleging that “this initiative clearly disregards the realities of the international security environment.”

The most significant threat to human survival and the biodiversity of our shared planet, apart from climate change, is a world in which nuclear weapons continue to exist. Yet, instead of negotiating in good faith to reduce and eventually eliminate its nuclear arsenal, the U.S. continues to develop new, more accurate, and more lethal nuclear weapons, while deploying “missile defenses” that make a nuclear first strike more possible and more likely.

The ongoing U.S. wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East, particularly in Syria, along with the confrontational U.S. military posture toward Russia, China and North Korea, are creating conditions that could all too easily trigger a catastrophic nuclear war. Veterans For Peace remains committed to transforming U.S. nuclear, military and foreign policy from global dominance to global cooperation. This work includes convincing the U.S to recommit itself to the UN Charter which forbids military intervention and requires respect for the sovereignty of all nations.

One of the founding principles of Veterans For Peace is a call to end to the arms race leading to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. VFP’s Nuclear Abolition Campaign is a feature of this effort. Several notable manifestations of this campaign include a [statement](#) released last year calling for nuclear disarmament in our lifetime. Earlier this year, VFP endorsed the [Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2017](#), introduced by Sen. Markey (D-Mass.) and Rep. Lieu (D-Calif.). Support for the historic [Golden Rule](#) antinuclear sailboat, a national project of VFP, continues with the boat’s current voyage down the West Coast, which is dedicated to supporting the UN Treaty. VFP also participated in the [Women’s March to Ban the Bomb](#), held last month in New York City and worldwide.

The next hurdle, getting all remaining nations to sign and ratify the treaty. The treaty will be open for signature to all States on September 20th, 2017 at the UN General Assembly. It will go into effect within 90 days of ratification by 50 countries.

These are dangerous times indeed, but such dangers can focus the collective mind and create new possibilities for real change, if activists and organizers are prepared to seize the moment.

Let this be the generation that will finally ban nuclear weapons. It’s not just about peace and justice; it’s about the survival of all life on earth.

Brian Trautman and Gerry Condon serve on the Board of Directors of Veterans For Peace (VFP) and Samantha Ferguson is Program and Event Coordinator with VFP’s National Office. To learn more about VFP, visit <https://www.veteransforpeace.org/>.

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