

# U.N. Nuclear Weapon Ban May Be Last Exit Before Extreme Tolls for Humanity

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Theme: [Militarization and WMD, United Nations](#)

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*In just a few weeks from now, the first hints of a new spring will emerge in a thawing U.S. metropolis as diplomats seek shelter from chilly winds and collectively brainstorm on how to ward off the threat of a winter that has no end.*

The first installment of a 2017 international forum aimed at banning humanity's worst doomsday weapon will happen in late March as the United Nations General Assembly convenes in New York City's United Nations Headquarters.

There have been unsuccessful attempts over the past 72 years since the first test of the atom bomb to ban it. The late 1940s saw a surge of efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons, including calls to put sole custodial possession of it in the hands of the United Nations (in the event some powerful nation state aimed to destroy civilization). Subsequent ban the bomb uprisings followed, yet no effort has succeeded to put into force a legal ban, effect full disarmament, or even apply a universally-sanctioned stigma of a weapon that has the power to wipe us out in a blip of geologic time.

The 21st century's first attempt to ban the atom bomb—an 'invention' of the United States in 1945, intended to counter the threat of a much-feared, alleged, but largely nonexistent German Manhattan Project—was birthed just before the United States' presidential election last year.

Twelve days before America's Election Day, a preponderance of countries at the United Nations—123 in all—voted to adopt a resolution to proceed with talks to figure out how it can be done—how to decide on a 'legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.' The effort by the U.N. Assembly, a legislative majority vote structure akin to the U.S. House of Representatives (which disallows vetoing by any nation—including a nuclear weapons state), is spearheaded by a diverse collective of nations, including Brazil, Austria, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa and Nigeria, and has been enabled by an optimistic crowd of non-governmental organizations, most notably a coalition named ICANW, short for International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons.

Banning the bomb is a commonsense solution to the stark threat posed by them. Yet, too often we don't hear enough about the precise threat nor entertain the logical end-result of not acting on a ban.

There are two maxims concerning nuclear weapons that are difficult to argue with. One, there is little hope that in the event of a global nuclear war anything resembling civilization will endure. Major cities will be obliterated from direct nuclear attacks, and the rest of our

planet will suffer a tailspin of ecological doom—unprecedented continent-wide fires, reactor meltdowns, and crop-killing-sun-blocking overcast, polluted skies allowing harmful descending fallout and penetrating cosmic radiation will turn Earth into a throwback of its inhospitable early Hadean days.

Makers of nuclear bombs in the 1940s and today exploit a unique chemical property of billion-years old uranium—found in ores located beneath the Earth’s skin—to initiate a ‘runaway chain reaction’ that allows for a scale of destruction from nuclear energy release capable of destroying anything; not just the biggest cities, but entire planets, suns, even solar systems; all can be obliterated if enough of this uranium—and its man-made cousin, plutonium—is collected and assembled into a bomb.

Despite efforts by lunatic scientists like Edward Teller to create a ‘clean’ or fallout-less bomb, nuclear weapons retain and will always retain the qualities of biological weapons. Why? The same chemical process that allows for big nuclear explosions creates, and inexorably spews, radioactive elements and energies at levels that will prevent life from thriving. Days ago, operators of the Fukushima Daiichi complex, the site of three nuclear reactor meltdowns in 2011, estimated radiation levels in the Unit 2 reactor of more than 50,000 Rems (500 Sieverts) per hour near a [hole](#) that formed from radioactive lava-like nuclear fuel burning through the reactor containment. The radioactive levels were obscenely high; exposure to 500 Rems in 60 minutes is enough radiation to kill one in two people. Hydrogen nuclear bombs used in war would spew and disperse large amounts of similar radioactivity across the Earth, creating lethal hotspots and severely contaminating food supplies across the globe.

The second maxim about nuclear weapons is that as long as they exist, they *will* be used. In a future war, everything will be thrown at a hated enemy, including the kitchen sink. It’s inevitable. The recipient of the hurled sink will undoubtedly throw their own sink in retaliation, or in anticipation—that is if they even have one. (The possession of nuclear weapons by the few tempts non-nuclear weapon states to pursue them for military necessity.) Our world is overwhelmingly brimming with organisms with immune systems that never evolved to withstand the powerful effects of nuclear radiation. Nuclear weapons are like big sinks with global life-killing ‘germs.’

Nuclear mutually-assured destruction is a matter—as the saying goes—of ‘not if, but when’... Thus, global nuclear war will happen, and global biological catastrophe awaits us in a gloomy future, as long as these things aren’t banned.

But, despite these maxims, and our overwhelming human instincts for survival and wanting our children to do the same, humanity hasn’t responsibly, successfully dealt with this looming threat.

The time for action is nigh. According to the original experts, we don’t have much distance left between us and the toll bridge. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists last week brought the ‘[Doomsday Clock](#)’—a tool ‘that conveys how close we are to destroying our civilization with dangerous technologies of our own making’—to two and a half minutes to midnight. No action, and we edge closer to a threshold that inevitably, and possibly sooner than we all think, will incur a devastating toll.

As diplomats soon face major negotiating decisions, they will be confronting more than the

chilling winds of an early spring in New York as they rush to enter a shelter for a historic anti-nuclear pow-wow. The chillier winds of dissuasion will be felt.

Einstein once posited that the control of atomic energy release represents the greatest revolutionary force brought into the world since prehistoric discoveries of fire. Certainly, nukes meet the test of a possession worth protecting at all costs, at least to the kind of person or culture attracted to that sort of thing.

We should never underestimate the compelling power of mental and defensive tactics used by persons and cultures throughout history for the protection and preservation of deeply coveted—and dark—possessions! Related to this point, much has been obscured from the views of both citizens and global leaders—and even scientists—about the biological threats posed by nuclear weapons, the result of careful corruption of knowledge and thought about such effects by seemingly credible and concerned sources.

The writing of the evolutionary last chapters of Earth's social mammalian creatures with high intelligence will be determined by how international forums counter tactics that get in the way of clear logic and navigate global political games that appear to have no clear goal posts.

The ink is still wet. There is an exit to this road trip to madness marked 'Ban.' As we depress the turn signal, and move boldly in a direction towards a ban, the headwinds of resistance will in turn rise to a great gale force and threaten this effort, but humanity will deem it no greater a toll than the one it faces through inaction.

*Andrew Kushner is an anti-nuclear author and activist.*

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