

The Quest for Nuclear Disarmament: Strengthening and Expanding the International Network of Grassroots Movements

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We are living in a time of extraordinary nuclear dangers. President Trump's announced intention to withdraw the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is another sign of deepening crisis among the nuclear-armed states. Following the 2002 U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, it imperils the entire structure of arms control and disarmament, including prospects for extension of the START Treaty which expires in 2021, and could lead to new, unpredictable rounds of arms racing.

Earlier this year the U.S. declared that it will no longer implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and will reimpose sanctions on Iran inconsistent with the JCPOA. This is a major blow to international governance and to peace and disarmament in the region and the world.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet leader who signed the INF Treaty with U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1987 has warned: "The United States has in effect taken the initiative in destroying the entire system of international treaties and accords that served as the underlying foundation for peace and security following World War II."¹

During the 1980's, fear of nuclear war was by far the most visible issue of concern to people around the world. A major source of fear was the U.S. deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles to bases in western European countries, stoking fears that Europe would serve as the battleground in a U.S.-Soviet nuclear war. It was this fear that mobilized a massive global anti-nuclear movement, leading to negotiation of the INF Treaty.

On June 21, 1982, at the conclusion of the United Nations (UN) Second Special Session on Disarmament, a million people rallied in New York City's Central Park calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons, and huge solidarity demonstrations took place around the world. That day I was among some 1,500 people arrested nonviolently blocking the gates to the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Laboratory in northern California. The Livermore Lab is one of two U.S. Laboratories that have designed and developed all U.S. nuclear weapons and continue to do so. The other is the Los Alamos Lab in New Mexico, the site of the original Manhattan Project.

Yet following the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons fell off the public's radar screen. It was almost as if the planet itself breathed a huge sigh of relief. Most people believed that the threat of nuclear war had ended. But it hadn't.

Deeply embedded in the U.S. military-industrial complex, military planners and scientists at the nuclear weapons labs conjured up new justifications to sustain the nuclear weapons enterprise. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991 Colin Powell, then-Chair of the U.S. Joint

Chiefs of Staff, declared: “We no longer have the luxury of having a [specific] threat to plan for. What we plan for is that we’re a superpower. We are the major player on the world stage with responsibilities... [and] interests around the world.”

Today, some 14,500 nuclear weapons, most an order of magnitude more powerful than the U.S. atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki— 92% held by the United States and Russia, continue to pose an intolerable threat to humanity, and the dangers of wars among nuclear-armed states are growing.

On January 25, The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the hands of its symbolic Doomsday Clock 30 seconds closer to the end of humanity. It is now set at two minutes to midnight—as close as it’s ever been set since its inception in 1947.

In moving the clock 30 seconds closer to the hour of the apocalypse, the Bulletin cited “the failure of President Trump and other world leaders to deal with looming threats of nuclear war and climate change”, and declared, “the world is not only more dangerous now than it was a year ago; it is as threatening as it has been since World War II.”

On December 22, 2016, President-elect Donald Trump tweeted: “The United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes”.

Last month, claiming that Russia has violated the INF Treaty, President Trump doubled down on his threat. Referring to the U.S. nuclear stockpile he warned: “Until people come to their senses, we will build it up. It’s a threat to whoever you want....it includes China, and it includes Russia, and it includes anybody else that wants to play that game.... We have more money than anybody else by far.... We’ll build it up until they come to their senses.”²

On July 7, 2017, I was at the UN to witness the adoption, by the majority of the world’s countries, of a historic treaty to prohibit the possession, development, testing, use and *threat of use* of nuclear weapons. The vote, by 122 to 1, unambiguously demonstrates—by one measure, that most of the world has indeed come to its senses regarding nuclear weapons. (Note: the majority of the world’s population lives in nuclear-armed countries or countries under the U.S. nuclear umbrella.)

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), opened for signature at UN headquarters in New York on September 20, 2017. Once 50 nations have ratified or acceded to it, it will enter into force for those countries. So far, 69 countries have signed; 19 have ratified. A resolution supporting the TPNW³ was adopted on November 1 in the First Committee of the UN General Assembly by a vote of 122 yes, 41 no, and 16 abstentions. (The U.S., Russia, the U.K., France, China, India, Israel Pakistan, Japan and the ROK voted no. The DPRK abstained.)⁴

But we stand at a nuclear crossroads, in a sharply divided world. While the TPNW represents the total repudiation of nuclear weapons by most of the states that don’t possess them, the U.S. and the eight other nuclear-armed states boycotted the negotiations, along with Japan, Australia, South Korea and all but one of the 28 NATO member states – all countries under the

U.S. nuclear umbrella. In a joint statement following the vote, the U.S., France and the United Kingdom declared: “We do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to [the Treaty].” This is another manifestation of their ongoing violation of Article VI of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Meanwhile, nuclear tensions have risen to levels not seen for decades.

In recent months our attention has been focused on the Korean Peninsula. While the Singapore and inter-Korean Summits appear to have greatly reduced immediate tensions, let us not forget that just last year, U.S. and North Korean leaders were making ominous threats and counter-threats of military strikes.

Fortunately, due largely to the skillful leadership and vision of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, with strong grassroots support from the Candlelight Revolution, a new diplomatic opening has appeared. Hopefully the North-South and U.S.-DPRK Summits will in the long-term lead to a diplomatic resolution of the 68-year crisis on the Korean Peninsula, including denuclearization *on all sides*. But the path ahead is very uncertain.

Korea isn't the only nuclear flashpoint. Derek Johnson, executive director of Global Zero, has assessed today's nuclear threat as “an unprecedented moment in human history. The world has never faced so many nuclear flashpoints simultaneously. From NATO-Russia tensions, to the Korean Peninsula, to South Asia and the South China Sea and Taiwan — all of the nuclear-armed states are tangled up in conflicts and crises that could catastrophically escalate at any moment.”

An alarming trend is the increased scale and tempo of war games by nuclear-armed States and their allies, including nuclear drills. Ongoing missile tests, and frequent close encounters between military forces of nuclear-armed states including the U.S. and Russia and the U.S. and China, exacerbate nuclear dangers. In the last month, both Russia and NATO have conducted some of the largest military exercises since the end of the Cold War: in Russia's case, with the participation of Chinese troops; in NATO's case, with the participation of Sweden and Finland — two non-NATO members.⁵ And risky close encounters between Russian and U.S./NATO forces have increased dramatically in the Baltic region and Syria.

In late September, amidst rising tensions, the U.S. flew two B-52 nuclear-capable bombers over disputed islands claimed by China. The bombers, escorted by Japanese fighter jets, flew near the Senkaku Islands which are controlled by Japan, but claimed by China.⁶ Just a week later a U.S. Navy destroyer narrowly avoided a collision with a Chinese warship in international waters in the Spratly Islands.⁷

The Trump Administration's January 2018 National Defense Strategy portrays a shift from the “war on terrorism” to “great power competition,” with a focus on China and Russia as strategic competitors.

Donald Trump *entered* office with the U.S. poised to spend an estimated 1.2 trillion dollars over the next 30 years to maintain and modernize its nuclear bombs, warheads and delivery systems,

and the infrastructure to sustain the nuclear enterprise indefinitely. This enormous estimate has already gone up to \$1.7 trillion dollars and is growing.

Trump's Nuclear Posture Review, released in February, sets forth in some detail plans to maintain, upgrade, and diversify the U.S. nuclear arsenal. It carries forward existing plans for the replacement and upgrading of submarine-based, land-based, and air-based nuclear forces, while adding a new sea-based cruise missile. It also calls for near-term deployment of some low-yield warheads on submarine-based missiles. And it describes how nuclear weapons might be used in response to attacks of a non-nuclear nature, including cyber-attacks against critical U.S. infrastructure. In its entirety this program, which envisions U.S. reliance on extensive and diversified nuclear forces for decades to come, is an *anti-disarmament* program.

Mirroring the U.S. stance, Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a March 2018 speech, boasted about new "invincible" Russian nuclear weapons, and gave a detailed description, complete with video animations, of an array of new nuclear weapons delivery systems, including a nuclear-powered cruise missile and an underwater drone.

All of the nuclear armed states are engaged in nuclear weapons modernization programs.

U.S. national security policy has been remarkably consistent in the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras – despite dramatically changed geopolitical conditions and very different Presidential styles. "Deterrence," *the threatened use of nuclear weapons*, has been reaffirmed as the "cornerstone" of U.S. national security by every President, Republican or Democrat, since 1945, when President Harry Truman, a Democrat, oversaw the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In October 2016, President Obama's UN Ambassador, Robert Wood, condemned the TPNW in the General Assembly: "Advocates of a ban treaty say it is open to all, but how can a state that relies on nuclear weapons for its security possibly join a negotiation meant to stigmatize and eliminate them".

We must keep both realities – the promise of the TPNW *and* growing dangers of nuclear war – fully in mind as we develop strategies to accomplish the urgent goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The TPNW grew directly out of a long history of efforts by governments and civil society to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The NPT represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-armed States. Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty entered into force in 1970. At that time there were five nuclear weapon states: the U.S., the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, France, and China. Since then, India, Israel, Pakistan and the DPRK have development nuclear weapons. These four States are the only countries outside the Treaty. More countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement. Article VI spells out the disarmament obligation: "**Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation**

of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

The NPT’s initial duration was 25 years. In 1995, in connection with the Treaty’s indefinite extension, the States parties reaffirmed their pledge to undertake **“the determined pursuit... of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons.”**

At the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, non-governmental organizations from around the world formed the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons – still going strong, which in its founding statement called upon *all States* to: “Initiate immediately and conclude negotiations on a nuclear weapons abolition convention that requires the phased elimination of all nuclear weapons within a timebound framework, with provisions for effective verification and enforcement.”

The Abolition 2000 statement inspired an international consortium of lawyers, scientists, disarmament experts and activists, to draft a Model Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) that was submitted to the UN by Costa Rica in 1997 and circulated to member States as an official UN document. The Model NWC prohibits the use, threat of use, possession, development, testing, deployment and transfer of nuclear weapons and provides a phased program for their elimination under effective international control. The Model NWC was updated in 2007 and submitted to the UN by the governments of Costa Rica and Malaysia.

In July 1996, the International Court of Justice, the judicial branch of the United Nations and the highest court in the world on questions of international law, issued an historic advisory opinion on the illegality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. The Court unanimously concluded: **“There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.”** This is now the authoritative interpretation of Article VI.

In response to the ICJ opinion, the UN General Assembly in 1996 adopted a resolution, calling for early commencement of “multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat or use of nuclear weapons and providing for their elimination.”¹¹⁵ countries voted in favor. This resolution has been adopted annually since, with a citation to the Model NWC added in 2007. This year’s resolution welcomes the adoption in 2017 of the TPNW.⁸ It was adopted on November 1 in the First Committee by a vote of 131. (It is interesting to note that more countries voted in support of this resolution than the TPNW resolution, which adopted by a vote of 122.)⁹

The United States has introduced a proposal called “Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament”, arguing that unspecified conditions must be met in order for the international security environment to improve before disarmament can take place. But the U.S. has it backwards. I advocate an approach I’m calling “Creating the Conditions for International Peace and Human Security”, which envisions real progress on nuclear disarmament as contributing to

international peace and human security. “International Peace” refers to relations among states, whereas “Human Security” refers to the universal, indivisible security of all people everywhere.

Implementing the NPT’s nearly 50-year old disarmament obligations would be an excellent way to start rebuilding mutual trust and confidence in the global order. These include not only the obligation to negotiate “effective measures” in good faith for the elimination of nuclear weapons, but to seek as well the “cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date.”

These obligations, enshrined in Article VI, have been reiterated and reinforced by agreements made in connection with the 1995 Extension Decision, the 2000 and the 2010 Review Conferences, and the International Court of Justice’s 1996 Advisory Opinion.

After an all-too brief post-Cold War lull, with its missed opportunities for more meaningful and irreversible disarmament progress, arms racing has resumed among the nuclear-armed States, this time mainly qualitative in nature. As a step towards reducing tensions and demonstrating good faith, the accelerating cycle of replacing aging nuclear weapons systems with new ones – in some cases, with enhanced military capabilities – should cease. Instead, the cycle of retiring and dismantling nuclear warheads should accelerate. Concrete actions like this would help to create the conditions for negotiations on reduction and elimination of nuclear arsenals.

To be successful, these conditions likely must also include cessation of the growing arms race in strategically significant *non-nuclear* weapons systems. This competition makes confrontations among nuclear-armed states more dangerous, and its uneven development leads in some instances to more, rather than less, reliance on nuclear weapons.¹⁰

Both the U.S. and Russia accuse each other of violating the INF Treaty. Wherever the truth lies, the solution is not to pull out of the Treaty, but to redouble diplomatic efforts to resolve the allegations. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has stated that Russia is ready to renew dialogue with the U.S. In a recent interview he warned that a lack of dialogue with the U.S. on arms control using diplomatic channels which are currently “frozen” is simply “unacceptable.” According to Lavrov, negotiations must deal with all aspects of strategic stability including U.S. missile defense systems and should include serious dialogue aimed at preventing the militarization of space, a danger underlined by President Trump’s announcement in June, directing the U.S. Defense Department to establish a Space Force as a new branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.¹¹

In an October 22 statement, former U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz and former Senator Sam Nunn warned: “If the United States gives formal notice and withdraws from the [INF] Treaty in six months, a cascade of negative consequences for the United States, Europe and the world could be triggered.” Echoing Lavrov, they declared: “To turn this potential mistake into an opportunity, Presidents Trump and Putin should follow through on their commitment at Helsinki last summer to begin a new dialogue on strategic stability focused on nuclear dangers.... Broadening the aperture of engagement to include forward-deployed U.S. and Russian nuclear

weapons in and near Europe, missile defense, “prompt-strike” forces, cyber and space is also essential for reducing nuclear risks.”¹²

It is unlikely any of the other nuclear-armed powers will be willing to engage in negotiations to control or eliminate nuclear weapons if the U.S. and Russia are abandoning arms control and moving in the opposite direction.

The international community must demand that the Trump Administration reverse its decision to leave the INF Treaty and engage in nuclear arms negotiations with Russia encompassing the full range of interconnected issues.

A viable international order requires the good-faith execution of agreements whether considered political or legal. It is therefore deeply disturbing that the U.S., a permanent member of the Security Council, has chosen to renounce its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and to disregard a closely integrated legally binding Security Council resolution. Civil society and States together should support the continuing implementation of the JCPOA. That is indeed the position of the JCPOA’s other parties – the UK, France, Russia, China, Germany, the EU and, of course, Iran. However, in its General Assembly resolution this year, Japan did not even mention the JCPOA.

On the Korean peninsula, due in large part to the determination of the people and government of the ROK, the potential exists for a solution linking peace, development, and disarmament. All efforts must be made to achieve that outcome. An essential element is the elimination of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and associated capabilities. But that must come in the context of ending reliance on nuclear weapons by all concerned parties in the region. One constructive step would be ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by the U.S., China, and DPRK. Again, concrete steps towards halting and reversing the arms race now resuming among the original nuclear-armed states are essential to creating the conditions globally for peace and security. This is particularly the case where nuclear-armed States claim to act in the cause of non-proliferation.

Non-nuclear weapon States have long asserted that the nuclear-armed States have failed to make good on their nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT. On October 22, China, France, Russia, the UK and the U.S. made a joint statement in the First Committee reaffirming their commitment to the NPT “in all its aspects”, claiming: “We support the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons...” and “We are committed to working to make the international environment more conducive to progress on nuclear disarmament.” Remarkably, they added: “It is in this context that we reiterate our opposition to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.... “The TPNW fails to address the key issues that must be overcome to achieve lasting global nuclear disarmament. It contradicts and undermines the NPT”. They concluded: “We will not support, sign or ratify this treaty. The TPNW will not be binding on our countries, and we do not accept any claim that it contributes to customary international law; nor does it set any new standards or norms”.¹³

Even though they are edging ever closer to nuclear war with each other, these countries would rather band together to assert their right to possess and threaten nuclear weapons while denying them to other countries, than to actually implement their NPT disarmament obligations.

The nuclear-armed States and their allies and the non-nuclear States *must* find a way to start talking *with* each other – rather than *past* each other. One approach would be for the nuclear-dependent states to recognize the TPNW as *strengthening* the NPT and the nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime more broadly. The TPNW compellingly articulates principles and aspirations for a nuclear-weapons free world – a world which nuclear-dependent States *claim* to seek.

The TPNW's unambiguous prohibition of *threat of use* is an essential point for the peace movement and civil society in the nuclear-armed and nuclear-dependent states to highlight in our public education and advocacy. The ideology of nuclear deterrence *must* be delegitimized and stigmatized to make progress on abolishing nuclear weapons, and *our* task is to change the discourse – from the bottom up.

To achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons and a global society that is more fair, peaceful and ecologically sustainable, we will need to move from the irrational fear-based ideology of deterrence to the rational fear of an eventual nuclear weapon use, whether by accident, miscalculation or design. We will also need to stimulate a rational hope that security can be redefined in humanitarian and ecologically sustainable terms that will lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons and dramatic demilitarization, freeing up tremendous resources desperately needed to address universal human needs and protect the environment.

In this time of multiple global crises, our work for the elimination of nuclear weapons must take place in a much broader framework, taking into account the interface between nuclear and conventional weapons and militarism in general, the humanitarian and long-term environmental consequences of nuclear war, and the fundamental incompatibility of nuclear weapons with democracy, the rule of law, and human wellbeing.

Nuclear disarmament should serve as the leading edge of a global trend toward demilitarization and redirection of resources to mitigate climate change and meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Notes

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² <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/22/politics/donald-trump-russia-china-inf/index.html>

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⁴ http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com18/votes/1Nov_L24.pdf

⁵ “[NATO, Russia Prep Biggest War Games Since Cold War](https://breakingdefense.com/2018/09/nato-russia-prep-biggest-war-games-since-cold-war/)”, by Paul Mcleary, Breaking Defense,, September 4, 2018, <https://breakingdefense.com/2018/09/nato-russia-prep-biggest-war-games-since-cold-war/>

⁶ “US B-52s fly near contested islands amid China tensions” by Ryan Browne, CNN, September 27, 2018 https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/26/politics/us-b52s-china-tensions/index.html?utm_source=CN+Five+Things&utm_campaign=a2860814ea-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_09_27_03_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6da287d761-a2860814ea-83792333

⁷ “A look at the US military’s close calls with China, Russia in the air and at sea”, by Luis Martinez, ABC News, October 2, 2018 <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-militarys-close-calls-china-russia-air-sea/story?id=58239230>

⁸ <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com18/resolutions/L57Rev1.pdf>

⁹ http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com18/votes/1Nov_L57Rev1.pdf

¹⁰ “A circle that can’t be squared: Broad-spectrum arms racing and nuclear disarmament” by Jacqueline Cabasso and Andrew Lichterman, Western States Legal Foundation, in *Rethinking General and Complete Disarmament in the Twenty-First Century*, UNODA Occasional Papers No. 28, October 2016, pps. 64 - 74 <https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/assets/publications/occasionalpapers/en/op28.pdf>

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¹² <https://www.nti.org/newsroom/news/statement-ernest-j-moniz-and-sam-nunn-us-withdrawal-inf-treaty/>

¹³ http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com18/statements/22Oct_P5.jpg