

BEYOND NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION

2015 IS CRUCIAL FOR A NUCLEAR WEAPON FREE WORLD

NEWSLETTER FOR STRENGTHENING AWARENESS OF NUCLEAR ABOLITION | WITH OCTOBER 2015 ARTICLES

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Photo: Saudi Arabia attended the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague | Credit: www.kacare.gov.sa

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Nuclear-Weapons-Free Africa Keen To Harness Atomic Energy

By Jeffrey Moyo



Photo: High-level Panel on Blix Commission's Report Weapons of Terror meeting on October 21 at UN in New York. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

HARARE (IDN) - Nuclear disarmament is a non-issue in Southern Africa. Because no African country possesses nuclear weapons. In fact the 38-nation African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (ANWFZ) Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Pelindaba, signed in 1996, established a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Africa. The treaty came into effect on July 15, 2009.

According to experts, rather than focussing on nuclear weapons, energy should be expended on seeing how the region may utilise nuclear power amidst rampant electricity deficits that have seen most of the countries in the region thrown in incessant darkness.

The experts' focus on electricity availability here coincides with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7 to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all".

"Countries in the Sub-Saharan region must be permitted to utilise nuclear energy as this may be an answer to electricity shortfalls here, however taking into cognisance the long-term effects of nuclear waste that endangers human life," Happison Chikova, an independent environmentalist and nuclear energy expert based in the Zimbabwean capital, Harare, told IDN.

Nuclear waste is radioactive and an extremely toxic by-product of nuclear fuel processing plants, nuclear medicine and nuclear weapons industries. Nuclear wastes remain radioactive for thousands of years and have to be buried deep on land or at sea in thick concrete or lead and stainless metal containers.

Despite the hazards associated with nuclear energy, hard-hit with power woes, even ordinary people in this region agree with many experts like Chikova. ➡

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“I personally don’t care where electricity would come from even if authorities would harness it from nuclear energy, which many fear is often used in manufacturing dangerous war weapons, but with the layman’s knowledge that I have about nuclear energy, it is cheaper if it can be used to generate electricity,” Mevion Chimedza, a resident in Highfield, a high density suburb in Harare, the Zimbabwean capital, told IDN.

But to climate experts here, emphasis on civilian instead of military use of nuclear power in this part of Africa is an answer to dire climate change effects.

“It will help in the mitigation of climate change impacts and improve agriculture production here, but if it’s a low investment, nuclear should be adopted to help generate electricity, which in this case means with the nuclear activity, we will be able to mechanise our production methods including agriculture,” Zisunko Ndlovu, an independent climate change expert in Zimbabwe, told IDN.

These views are being expressed against the backdrop that, despite raging debate about nuclear disarmament in the world’s military strongholds, no African country here possesses nuclear weapons to this day.

This in spite of the fact that, according to the Arms Control Association, the world’s nine nuclear armed states possess a combined total of roughly 16,000 nuclear warheads, more that 90 per cent belong to Russia and the United States.

Along with China, France and UK, they constitute the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and are also known as the "nuclear-weapon states" under the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In addition, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea are known to be armed with nuclear weapons.

In Southern Africa, only South Africa has at one time possessed nuclear weapons. It became the first nation in the world to voluntarily give up all nuclear arms it had developed before the anticipated changeover to a majority-elected African National Congress government in the 1990s.

The country has been a signatory of the Biological Weapons Convention since 1975, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons since 1991, and the Chemical Weapons Convention since 1995.

“As citizens of South Africa, we are mindful of the South African Government's voluntary and unilateral relinquishing of a nuclear weapons capability in the 1990s,” Mike Kantey, former Chairman of the Coalition Against Nuclear Energy from 2007-2014 and now Director of the Watercourse Media and Development Company, told IDN.

Based on views from anti-nuclear activists and experts like Kantey, countries in this region, particularly South Africa, are aware of the hazards of nuclear energy.

“As anti-nuclear activists and veterans of the Anti-Apartheid struggle, we were privileged to have hosted a delegation from the city of Hiroshima at the beginning of the 21st Century, where we heard an eyewitness account from one of the hibakusha, or survivors of that nuclear holocaust,” added Kantey.

According to Kantey, on that occasion, the Japanese delegation was actively campaigning for the universal nuclear disarmament and was asking South Africans to help in lobbying for an end to nuclear proliferation in South Asia, in the Middle East and in North Korea.

“From a unilateral pledge on the part of the State of Israel and the declaration of a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone in the Middle East, we believe that a greater pressure may be placed on South Asia to do the same, and so lead to a final commitment of the Big Five – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – to commit equally to the global elimination of all nuclear weapons and depleted uranium ordnance,” said Kantey. ☺

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But back to Zimbabwe, in 2012 amid widespread belief that the Southern African nation possessed vast untapped deposits of uranium, critical for both civil nuclear power generation and military nuclear weapons, the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority chief executive officer Josh Chifamba has been on record saying a team of experts here would soon be assembled to look into the feasibility of such a venture in a move likely to attract international attention.

“We will set up a small group to look at the nuclear option. We are looking at the year 2020 and onwards for full-scale nuclear power production,” Chifamba told an International Business Conference in Bulawayo last year (2014).

Zimbabwe possesses unexploited uranium deposits in the Zambezi valley while it is also estimated that Kanyemba Mine in the Zambezi valley holds more than 45,000 tonnes of uranium ore with over 20,000 tonnes extractable.

Iran and China are reported to have expressed a keen interest in Zimbabwe’s uranium deposits, this despite the UN having imposed fresh sanctions on Iran in 2013 after the country refused to halt its uranium enrichment programme.

Apparently eager to harness energy from the atom, the Zimbabwean government seems unperturbed by the dangers nuclear may pose environmentally.

In 2013, Foreign Affairs minister Simbarashe Mumbengegwi told an Iranian news agency that Zimbabwe was willing to work with Iran on extracting uranium resources meant for Tehran’s controversial nuclear programme.

Like Zimbabwe, Namibia sees hope to end its energy deficits through nuclear energy.

Last year (2014) the Namibian government anticipated constructing a nuclear power plant simulator in future to train its citizens on the use of nuclear power, as confirmed by the country’s Mines and Energy Minister Isak Katali then.

“We are currently producing uranium, and exporting it raw. Nuclear electricity is cheap and safe,” Katali told reporters then.

Meanwhile, South Africa is the only country in Africa with a commercial nuclear power plant made up of two reactors accounting for around 4 percent of that country’s electricity generation. In fact the South African government has been on record indicating it would encourage a great deal of localisation in the construction and fabrication of nuclear facilities.

This, however, has unsettled nuclear energy experts here.

“South Africa will experience huge quantities of nuclear waste and reactor decommissioning that may become as expensive as construction itself,” Tony Huffing, an independent nuclear energy expert based in South Africa, told IDN.

But last year, South Africa launched the National Radioactive Waste Disposal Institute to assume responsibility for the management and disposal of country’s radioactive waste.

For many nuclear experts like Zimbabwe’s Chikova, with no single country possessing nuclear weapons in Africa, the challenge may not be that of a world free of nuclear weapons.

“There are no nuclear weapons to talk about here in this part of Africa and we need not waste time talking about nuclear disarmament, but rather invest our energies in harnessing nuclear energy without posing harm to the region’s environment,” Chikova said. [IDN-InDepthNews – 30 October 2015] ◆

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UN Plans New Working Groups Aimed at Nuclear Disarmament

By Thalif Deen



*Photo: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (front row, centre right) poses for a group photo with this year's participants of the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme. On his right is Kim Won-soo, Acting UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.
Credit: UN Photo/Evan Schneider*

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) - Against the backdrop of a potential military confrontation between the world's two major nuclear powers – the United States and Russia – the United Nations is taking a significant step towards a hitherto impossible goal: nuclear disarmament.

The 193-member General Assembly, through its Committee on Disarmament and International Security (also known as the First Committee), is expected to establish an open-ended working group — or possibly two such groups — to deliberate or negotiate on effective measures for nuclear disarmament.

One of the draft resolutions, currently in circulation, calls for the Working Group to convene in Geneva in 2016, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and under its rules of procedure.

The Working Group is expected to submit a report, reflecting the negotiations and its recommendations, to the General Assembly at its 71st session in September next year.

This draft resolution, sponsored by Mexico, has several co-sponsors, including Austria, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, Liechtenstein, Ireland, Malta, Nigeria, the Philippines and South Africa. ➡

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A second draft resolution, sponsored by Iran, calls on a second Working Group to transmit its report to the UN's high level international conference on nuclear disarmament to be held no later than 2018, and to the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission.

John Burroughs, Executive Director of the New York-based Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, told IPS: "The relevant resolutions are still under negotiation."

This development, he said, builds on the momentum created by the 2013 open-ended working group to develop proposals for multilateral negotiations; the 2013 and 2014 conferences on humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons in Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna; and the draft final document of the May 2015 NPT Review Conference.

"Regardless of the short-term output of a new working group, its operation would definitely be positive because it would keep the momentum going and create an opening for further steps."

The United States, he pointed out, has shifted its position from its opposition to the 2013 working group, saying that it would support a new working group, though it insists on a consensus procedure and says that a working group should explore all effective measures (e.g. verification) for nuclear disarmament, not negotiate legal measures.

Which other members of the Permanent Five — including Britain, France, China and Russia — will come out, remains to be seen, he added.

"But the U.S. shift is a sign that the environment is changing for the better," said Burroughs, who is also Director of the UN Office of International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms.

Jackie Cabasso, executive director of the Western States Legal Foundation, one of the strongest advocates of nuclear disarmament, told IPS that all resolutions forwarded from the Committee on Disarmament and International Security are overwhelmingly adopted each year by the General Assembly, which is not bound by consensus.

This year, she pointed out, the General Assembly is expected to establish an open ended working group (open to all 193 member states) to take forward proposals to implement nuclear disarmament.

She said a statement made Oct. 21 by a coalition of over 135 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from 19 countries has an unequivocal message: "We call on (member) states to stop fiddling while Rome burns."

In a statement endorsed by the 135 organizations, Cabasso told the First Committee the nuclear-armed countries are edging ever closer to direct military confrontation in conflict zones around the world, from Ukraine to Syria and the broader Middle East to the Western Pacific.

"The danger of nuclear war is growing again on a scale measured in months or years," she said.

And those who rule in the nuclear-armed states appear comfortable approaching disarmament on a time scale measured in generations — and show no interest in taking up the task again anytime soon.

The coalition that endorsed the statement includes Global Action to Prevent War, International Peace Bureau, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Soka Gakkai International, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Project Ploughshares, International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, Israeli Disarmament Movement, Swedish Peace Council, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, CODE PINK, Western States Legal Foundation and Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, among others.

Aaron Tovish, International Director, 2020 Vision Campaign, and Mayors for Peace, told IPS: "Given the ongoing abuse of the consensus rule in the Conference on Disarmament, already back in 2006, Mayors for Peace began promoting the creation of a working group that would operate under UN General Assembly rules of Procedure." ☞

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He said the 2013 Open-Ended Working Group on ‘Taking Forward Multilateral Negotiations on Nuclear Disarmament’ was a successful, albeit too short, exercise.

“It is most timely to revive the Working Group with a stronger mandate.”

“I see nothing wrong with having working groups being held in both Geneva and New York next year. Each venue has strengths and weaknesses, so those prepared to work for nuclear disarmament in good faith, should be willing to contribute to both venues” he added.

Tovish also said: “We are just at the beginning of getting full-fledged negotiations (on establishing a Nuclear Weapons-Free World) underway, so it is too early to be prejudging which way forward will be most productive. It is conceivable that a good division of labour could be agreed upon for two (or more) forums.”

In her statement, prepared by Andrew Lichterman on behalf of the coalition, Cabasso said: “No amount of tinkering with the disarmament machinery can turn it into a vehicle for disarmament progress when those in the driver’s seat have no intention of moving forward.”

She said the new round of conflicts and confrontations, and the resumption of arms racing, are driven by those who have the power to shape policy in the nuclear-armed states.

“Primary responsibility for the continued scourge of industrialized warfare world-wide lies with the military-industrial complexes and national security state elites at the apex of the global war system, and those in the United States above all.”

Cabasso said nuclear-armed states account for three quarters of global arms exports; the United States and Russia together for over half.

They provide the kinds of weapons that turn local, low-intensity conflicts into industrial-scale wars that fragment societies, destroy vital infrastructure, and destabilize entire regions.

She said these human catastrophes are used to justify competing armed interventions that raise the stakes even higher, with nuclear-armed militaries operating in close quarters in proxy confrontations that easily could spiral out of control.

A small fraction of humanity benefits in the short run from these high stakes competitions; all of us bear the risk, she declared. (IPS | 28 October 2015) ◆

German Translation (extracts)

Vereinte Nationen wollen nukleare Abrüstung vorantreiben

New York (IPS) – Angesichts der aktuellen Spannungen zwischen den beiden größten Nuklearmächten der Welt – Russland und die USA – haben die Vereinten Nationen Pläne für eine Kampagne zur Abschaffung aller Atomwaffen bekanntgegeben. Am Hauptsitz in New York soll eine neue Arbeitsgruppe eingerichtet werden, die effektive Maßnahmen für die weltweite Abrüstung ausarbeiten soll.

Noch kursieren mehrere Entwürfe für eine entsprechende Resolution. Einer davon wurde vor allem von Mexiko ausformuliert. Unterstützung hat der Entwurf von Österreich, Brasilien, Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, Liechtenstein, Irland, Malta, Nigeria, den Philippinen und Südafrika. Die Unterzeichner schlagen als möglichen Sitz der Arbeitsgruppe Genf vor. Erste Ergebnisse sollen im kommenden September zur 71. Generalversammlung der Vereinten Nationen vorliegen. . . . ◆

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Australia Under Heavy Criticism For Nuclear Agreement with India

By Neena Bhandari



Photo: Ranger Uranium Mine in Kakadu National Park, east of Darwin, Australia. Credit: Stephen Codrington – Wikimedia Commons

SYDNEY (IDN) - Though the Australian Parliament has not yet ratified the Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement signed in 2014, civil society, environment and disarmament advocates caution that sale of uranium to India would fuel a nuclear arms race in the region and undermine Australia's strong credentials as an exponent of nuclear safeguards policies.

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Australia has expressed grave concerns regarding the weak safeguards in the Agreement, the poor safety record at Indian nuclear facilities, and the implications of the Agreement for the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This is the first time the Australian Government would be selling uranium to a country that is not a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

“Nuclear commerce with India on arguably less stringent terms than those applied to NPT signatories compliant with their NPT non-proliferation obligations undermines the purpose, credibility and value of the NPT. The deal with India, which (also) contravenes Australia's obligations under the South Pacific Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, cements Australia as part of the problem of nuclear danger rather than part of the solution,” says Dr Tilman A Ruff, Founding Chair of ICAN Australia. ☞

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Article IV of the South Pacific Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SPNFZ), which entered into force on December 11, 1986, obliges signatories to not supply equipment or material to countries – like India – which are not under full scope safeguards.

Signatories to the Treaty are apart from Australia: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Of the five nuclear-weapon states, France and the Britain have ratified all three protocols while Russia and China have only ratified Protocols II and III. U.S. ratification of all three protocols is pending.

Warning that Australian uranium will further fuel the nuclear arms race in the region, Dr Ruff says, this would happen “either indirectly, by expanding the pool of uranium available, which from domestic sources is insufficient for both India’s military and nuclear power plans; or directly”.

“The enmeshment of India’s military and civilian operations, the lack of an effective independent nuclear regulatory agency, the extremely limited application of safeguards which can be varied by India at any time, and the substantial limitations of the safeguards themselves contribute to these risks,” he adds.

He says that India’s use of a reactor provided by Canada and fuel provided by the U.S to produce the plutonium for its first nuclear explosion in 1974 breached assurances that both would be utilised only for peaceful purposes.

“Meanwhile, Pakistan’s response to the opening up of international nuclear commerce with India has been as alarming as it has been predictable – ramping up its production of fissile materials, and expanding its nuclear arsenal, at a rate currently faster than any other nation”, Dr Ruff, who is also Co-President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), told IDN.

IPPNW was awarded 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for performing “a considerable service to mankind by spreading authoritative information and by creating an awareness of the catastrophic consequences of atomic warfare”.

Signing NPT a precondition

Negotiations for the sale of uranium to India began in 2006 and an agreement was reached in 2014. In its Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement report tabled on September 8, 2015, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) recommended that the Agreement be ratified, but the regulation of nuclear safety and security at Indian nuclear facilities be addressed before the sale of uranium takes place. It called on Australia to commit diplomatic resources to encourage India to make genuine disarmament advances, such as signing the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) wants Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to be mindful of the serious concerns associated with this planned action and respect the highly cautionary approach outlined in the JSCOT report and recommendations.

“We hold deep concerns that the Australia-India uranium deal will increase risk, especially with India’s nuclear industry the subject of continuing and unresolved safety problems and regulatory deficiencies. In 2012 the Indian Auditor General had released a damning report warning of ‘a Fukushima or Chernobyl-like disaster if the nuclear safety issue is not addressed’. The concerns highlighted in this report, including lax regulation, poor governance and a deficient safety culture, remain largely unaddressed,” ACF’s Nuclear Free Campaigner, Dave Sweeney, told IDN.

So is there a real danger that Australian uranium will free up India’s existing uranium stockpiles to be used in its nuclear weapons programme? Sweeney says, “Increasingly likely. India is actively expanding its nuclear arsenal and weapons capabilities through increased uranium enrichment capacity, increased attention to multiple weapons launch platforms and advanced work on improved submarine launch capabilities. ☞

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The proposed treaty action places no practical, political or perception barrier to any of these activities. Instead it effectively gives a green light to India's nuclear weapons ambitions. Such a cavalier approach is not in the best interests of Australia or the region."

Australia has 40 per cent of the world's uranium reserves and it is a significant uranium exporter. A significant portion of Australia's uranium has been sourced over three decades from Mirarr land in the Northern Territory.

Aboriginals caution

The representative organisation of the Mirarr people, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation's Chief Executive Officer Justin O'Brien says, "Traditional Owners have long held concerns regarding the impacts of uranium once it is exported and its potential to be used in nuclear weapons. The Mirarr are worried by the lack of enforceable safeguards to ensure uranium intended for nuclear power is not diverted to nuclear weapons and these appear to be even weaker than usual in this proposed Agreement."

For Australia, the uranium deal could increase exports and employment opportunities. The deal could bring in an extra 1.75 billion Australian dollars (about 1.27 billion U.S. dollars) worth of exports to the economy and create up to 4,000 jobs.

Friends of the Earth Australia National nuclear campaigner Jim Green, however, expresses doubts. "Uranium sales to India will do very little or nothing to boost Australia's export revenue or employment in remote and Indigenous communities. Uranium sales to India would boost Australia's uranium revenue by a negligible 3 percent and create just a few dozen jobs."

For India, the uranium sale deal could help the emerging economic power meet its energy needs. But as Dr Sue Wareham, Vice-President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) says, "Nuclear power cannot address the issue of climate change. Even if there is further development of nuclear power, it will be far too slow because it takes 10 to 15 years to get a nuclear power plant at a point of producing electricity. Particularly important also is the link with weapons. We know there are definite links between the civilian and military fuel cycles, and that is a particular problem that will remain as long as nuclear power is there".

Nuclear energy's share of global commercial electricity generation has remained almost stable (-0.2 percent) in 2013 compared to the previous year, but declined from a peak of 17.6 percent in 1996 to 10.8 percent, according to the World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2014.

She points out that there is also the problem of nuclear waste. "The technological and practical reality is that we don't have any way of reliably and permanently separating nuclear waste from the environment. The world really needs to put serious and significant funding into further promotion, development and implementation of renewable energies – solar, wind, geothermal and biofuels, which have been underused and under-resourced", Dr Wareham told IDN.

A detailed report by WWF-India and TERI - The Energy and Resources Institute had mapped out how India could generate as much as 90 percent of total primary energy from renewables by 2050.

Australia is in an interesting situation because as a country it doesn't have any nuclear weapons, but subscribes to the doctrine of extended nuclear deterrence under the U.S. alliance.

ICAN is calling on the Australian Government to support a diplomatic process to negotiate a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons as the best next step towards achieving their complete elimination. [IDN-InDepthNews – 26 October 2015] ◆

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Saudi Nuclear Blustering Remains Hollow – for Now

By Emad Mekay*



Photo: Saudi Arabia attended the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague | Credit: www.kacare.gov.sa

CAIRO (IDN) - When the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal was announced in July, the image in state-controlled Saudi media was of Western powers caving in to a new powerful neighboring foe. The usually reticent Saudi officials paid the usual diplomatic lip-service to the agreement but social media, academia and state-owned news outlet all portrayed a different picture; profound Saudi anxiety that included statements that the oil-rich country can use its wealth to go nuclear.

“The kingdom can only look to itself to protect its people, even if it means implementing a nuclear program,” wrote Nawaf Obaid, Senior Fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies. A nuclear Iran, he said, “represents a state of extreme danger to multiple nations, but few more so than Saudi Arabia, which has long been Iran’s primary opponent in the Middle East power balance.” ➡

**Emad Mekay is Middle East correspondent and Middle East Bureau Chief of International Press Syndicate and its flagship IDN-InDepthNews.*

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Ironically, the deal that alarmed the Saudis was designed to produce a different result. The framework would in fact gradually lift sanctions on Tehran for its agreement to cut back its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 percent for 15 years and reducing its installed centrifuges. Yet, Saudi Arabia and other regional Gulf Arab allies saw the deal as nothing short of a dramatic shift of the balance of regional power.

Iran can use new streams of revenue to improve its conventional armament and expand its regional influence without losing any of its scientific, technological or nuclear edge over its over-indulgent wealthy Arab neighbors. After all, Arab capitals have long blindly trusted U.S. guarantees of Gulf security to the point where they neglected investment in scientific development and relied heavily on massive arms purchases from the U.S. that sat to collect dust in storage houses.

Iran's unprecedented projection of military power and influence in neighboring Iraq and Syria along with Iranian backing of Yemeni Houthi rebels only vexed the Saudis more. Little wonder more Saudi pundits are screaming at the top of their voice they can and will go nuclear. To seal it all, the Obama administration appears to them as if Washington is renegading on its security pledges.

"I think the Obama Administration has done a terrible job of creating a regional security strategy," said Jeffrey Lewis, professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. "It is not surprising that allies and partners would be expressing discomfort with what they see as strategic drift. Most Saudis are alarmed at the deterioration in regional security and believe that the Obama Administration is inept."

"I am reluctant to conclude that the current unease is permanent until we see how the next Administration handles the regional and bilateral relationship," he added.

For Middle East experts, the Saudis rarely vent their frustration publicly preferring to work behind the scene or clandestinely. But this time the Saudi media responded to the deal with stories upon stories describing Saudi Arabia's missile forces in striking detail as well as its nuclear ambitions.

Riyadh already has a nuclear programme. In 2011, it announced plans for the construction of sixteen nuclear power reactors over the next twenty years at a cost of more than 80 billion dollars. These would generate about 20 percent of Saudi Arabia's electricity, while other, smaller reactors were envisaged for desalination.

Recently, the French and the Saudis announced feasibility studies to secure contracts for two nuclear reactor facilities to be built by Areva, a French company. Deals with Hungary, Russia, Argentina and China are in the pipeline towards building reactors costing around 2 billion dollars each.

The King Abdullah Atomic Energy City (KACARE) has taken most matters into hand and it is said to be manned by young researchers imbued with an ideology that sees Iran as the ultimate threat to their nation's existence.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is in close cooperation with Riyadh in developing a peaceful nuclear power programme and cancer treatment facilities at the King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center.

But despite the newly-found motivation and initial endeavour, many Middle East experts agree that Saudi officials can wish all they want but they really cannot build a nuclear weapon. All they are doing is just dabbling in early nuclear energy research and making "noise".

"So far that noise has not translated to anything concrete above and beyond talk, sometimes a loud talk," said Avner Cohen, a researcher with the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

Other obstacles remain before a Saudi nuclear programme. Saudi Arabia controls 16 percent of the world's known oil reserves yet it remains an authoritarian developing nation that lacks the educational and technological skills to develop nuclear warheads or ballistic missile technology. ➡

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The Al-Saud family-run regime has long preferred to spend on the welfare state and pamper its citizens with luxury items rather than on developing profound scientific or personal skills.

"Saudi Arabia possesses only a rudimentary civil nuclear infrastructure, and currently lacks the physical and technological resources to develop an indigenous nuclear weapons capability," said a recent report from the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a Washington-based NGO that works towards reduction of nuclear weapons.

To compensate for its lack of indigenous knowledge-based infrastructure, Riyadh, which routinely deploys its wealth to win international favours, had also assumed that forming an alliance with a nuclear power, such as Pakistan, would offer "purchased" protection. By showing generosity to the Pakistani or the Egyptian military, Riyadh can tap into the Pakistani nuclear programme and order bombs when it wants to, the theory went.

Shortcomings in Saudi largesse

But a recent development showed the shortcomings of Saudi largesse. Pakistan balked at sending ground troops to fight in Yemen alongside the inexperienced Saudi soldiers; an episode that embarrassed Riyadh and showed the limits of its money-based security strategy.

Many nuclear arms experts who monitor the Middle East say that Saudi nuclear weapons "on order" is an allegation that has not been substantiated in any way.

"It can be done, but it seems very unlikely," said Lewis. "Most experts doubt that Pakistan would set aside nuclear weapons for transfer to Saudi Arabia or participate in a nuclear sharing arrangement."

Saudi allies, particularly the U.S., will not tolerate Saudi going nuclear as their over-zealous media and some in the regime would like to claim.

Washington has talked about offering Riyadh a "nuclear umbrella" that would purportedly protect Gulf states including Saudi Arabia against a nuclear Iran. If it was to go ahead, the deal would in fact limit Saudi nuclear ambitions.

Under the proposal Saudi Arabia would be negotiating a civil nuclear cooperation agreement. It is expected to include language whereby Saudi Arabia voluntarily refrain from enrichment and reprocessing. Heavy investments in the King Abdullah Center for Atomic and Renewable Energy would be scaled back and plans for city-sized research center would be shelved. The money would be going to US coffers instead.

The nuclear blustering in the Saudi media can also prove hollow on other counts. This month (in October) the IMF said that Riyadh suffers low oil prices and a budget deficit that could erode reserves quickly.

Worse, in their zeal to spread its regional hegemony, the Saudi royal family took on large foreign expenditure as well. It contributed some 6 billion dollars to the military coup in Egypt that toppled the country's first elected president for fear democracy could spread to the conservative kingdom. It later started a costly bombardment campaign on the Shiite Houthi Group in Yemen in March 2015 on top of its bankrolling some Syrian rebel groups fighting for the fourth year.

The Iran deal may have indeed alarmed the Saudi regime into unleashing its propagandists into nuclear grandstanding but the country had missed the opportunity of a real nuclear programme a long time ago. Re-opening that window again can and will take many more years. [IDN-InDepthNews – 25 October 2015] ◆

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International Partnership Updates on Nuclear Disarmament Verification

By Fabíola Ortiz

NEW YORK (IDN) - An effective verification of atomic arsenals as well as that of nuclear material and other military activities is a pre-condition for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons, experts told IDN. They were participating in a briefing to update on International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV) at the UN Headquarters in New York.



The establishment of the IPNDV goes back to December 4, 2014, when the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller announced a new initiative to develop the tools and technologies in the quest to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.

The IPNDV channels, as the U.S. Department of State says, expertise from both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states to address the complex challenges involved in the verification of nuclear disarmament.

The inaugural meeting was held in Washington, DC in March 2015. Ahead of the IPNDV plenary on November 16-18 in Oslo (Norway) to finalize the terms of reference, the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) and the United States Mission to the UN co-hosted on October 14 a public side event at the United Nations in New York, 'Building a Path Forward: Update on the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification'.

An important participant in the event was Jørn Osmundsen, senior adviser on Global Security and Disarmament at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway. Explaining the rationale behind the Partnership initiative, he said: "In order to dismantle nuclear weapons, we need tools to make verifications. Being able to verify disarmament is a pre-condition for reaching a world without nuclear weapons."

"The whole purpose of the meeting was to . . . give countries an update on the progress that we have made since the initial kick-off meeting of the international partnership (IPNDV). We wanted to raise awareness of what we are doing," Andrew Bieniawski, the vice-president of the NTI, told IDN.

According to him, the main benefit of this international partnership is that it includes countries both with and without nuclear weapons. There are currently more than 25 states involved in the partnership.

"It is not just trying to get as large a number of countries as possible, but it is getting the right set of countries that have expertise that can provide value and input into the process," he emphasized, referring to countries like Norway, Britain, Australia and Poland that include those knowledgeable in the field.

"We are working to provide as much confidence as possible but at the same time protect sensitive information. There is a balance between studying the technologies and learning lessons from on-sight inspections to building as much confidence as possible. But we have to do it in a safe and secure manner complying with safety and security regulations," he said. ➡

Image: Cropped Web Banner IPNDV

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According to NTI, there are still a lot of technical issues that need to be resolved on way to an effective verification system.

Following the inaugural meeting in Washington DC, the Partnership countries agreed to set up three working groups: on monitoring and verification objectives co-chaired by The Netherlands and Italy; on-site Inspections that will be the responsibility of Australia and Poland; and the third working group related to technical challenges and solutions, chaired by Sweden and United States.

The three groups are now reviewing the drafts and terms of reference to determine the charter to be finalized and approved in Oslo.

“We have been putting a lot of work into this partnership. Countries have different levels of expertise and understanding on this complicated issue,” NTI vice-president Bieniawski said.

In coordination with the U.S. State Department and the Department of Energy, NTI has built a comprehensive library of articles, reports and studies on a range of verification and monitoring topics with the relevant work completed to date.

“There are more than 200 documents that are now available at the NTI website. They are free and unclassified. We want to build a body of knowledge and increase the capacity of the partnership. This shows the partnership is already active underway even though it is a multi-year process,” explained Bieniawski.

In his view, the reaction from the countries attending the public side event at the UN was positive. “There were very good insightful questions. It is clear that the audience knows a lot about this issue. One of the main things we emphasize is that we are trying to be as transparent as possible.”

The senior program officer at the NTI for Material Security and Minimization and the Nuclear Security Project, Kelsy Hartigan, who also attended the meeting at the UN, said the Partnership is intended to gather and share know-how among countries.

“States do have a lot of technical expertise in related areas that can be applied to disarmament verification. This will be a long term and sustainable partnership. One of the main goals is focused on capacity building and connecting the dots between technical experts who work on other aspects central to Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and disarmament issues,” he told IDN.

The next meeting in Oslo is awaited with great expectations. By the time, the three working groups co-chaired by the six countries will have agreed on a charter to put into practice.

“This work is very technical and it takes time. We cannot rush. We have taken the time to develop the terms of reference of the three working groups. And this is one of the objectives of the Oslo meeting, to finalize those terms of reference,” explained Jørn Osmundsen of the Foreign Ministry in Oslo.

Norway has shown a solid record on disarmament becoming a priority in the Government’s foreign polic, he said. It played an active role in the negotiations on the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions.

In response to the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament negotiations, the Norwegian government co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution in October 2012 that established a new process to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations (the so-called Open Ended Working Group).

In March 2013, Oslo hosted the first Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, a wake-up call for nuclear abolition. Since then, two further conferences have taken place in Nayarit (Mexico) in February 2014, and in Vienna (Austria) in December 2014. [IDN-InDepthNews – 19 October 2015] ◆

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EU Gives Additional Funds to Promote Entry into Force of Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

By Jaya Ramachandran



CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo and Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and member of the CTBT Group of Eminent Persons (GEM)

BERLIN (IDN) - With a view to promoting entry-into-force of the nuclear test ban treaty, the European Union (EU) has decided to increase its support to the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) by contributing an additional amount of 3 million euros (about 3.9 million dollars). This brings the bloc's voluntary financial contributions since 2006 to a total of some 19 million euros (nearly 21.5 million dollars).

As a group, all 28 EU Member States have signed and ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The EU Member States' regular contributions amount to around 40 percent of the CTBTO's budget.

The CTBT plays a central role in underpinning the international non-proliferation regime and the efforts of the European Union (EU) towards global disarmament. "The EU is, therefore, strongly committed to the entry into force and universalisation of the CTBT," the delegation of the European Union to the international organizations in Vienna stated in a press note on October 19, 2015. These contributions are in line with the EU Strategy against Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the note said.

"The overarching aim of the European Council's decision of October 12, 2015 is to further promote the universalisation and entry-into-force of the Treaty, which are two of the key objectives of the EU Strategy, but also contribute to the operation and sustainability of the CTBTO verification system as well as the development of its operational capabilities," the press note explained. ➡

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A pertinent example that clearly demonstrates the relevance of the Treaty and the constantly improving performance of its verification regime, the EU added, can be seen in the detection of the nuclear tests by North Korea during the last years, and the prompt action of the CTBTO in this regard.

“Furthermore, the Organisation has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to effectively monitor compliance with the Treaty and to provide the international community with independent and reliable means to ensure compliance with it, once it enters into force,” the European bloc stated. Responding to the EU decision, CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo said: “I believe that without the European Union's support we could not have reached the current well-advanced status in the build-up and operational capabilities of the CTBT verification regime.”

This, he added, includes the EU's help to developing countries to build capacities in CTBT verification technologies, thus getting buy-in from these countries into the world's largest and most sophisticated multilateral verification system, referred to by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry as one of the great achievements of the modern world.

“As we prepare to mark 20 years since the opening for signature of the CTBT, the strong political and financial support of the EU are vital in ensuring continued progress toward achieving entry into force,” Zerbo declared.

Building on previous EU voluntary contributions, the new EU Council Decision provides support to the CTBT verification regime in three main areas, CTBTO explained in a web posted note on October 19, 2015.

1. Sustaining the International Monitoring System Network

The first part of the contribution aims to support the CTBTO's network of monitoring stations the International Monitoring System (IMS). This includes assistance to countries hosting auxiliary seismic stations that need support (unlike for all other types of CTBTO monitoring stations, the upkeep and maintenance of this type of station is the financial responsibility of the host State).

Another project aims at enhancing the IMS capabilities to detect radon, a radioactive noble gas emitted by nuclear explosions, but also by legitimate civilian activities such as medical isotope production. The contribution will fund both studies of global radon background levels and developing a system to trap radon emissions at the source.

Other projects under this heading include upgrades to the VDeC system, a portal that allows external researchers to access IMS data and International Data Centre Products, as well as upgrades to IDC software for analysing waveform (seismic, infrasound and hydroacoustic) data.

2. Upgrading on-site inspection capabilities

To further the CTBTO's on-site inspection capabilities, the contribution will allow for the purchase of multispectral imaging equipment for use from aircraft as was used in the last comprehensive on-site inspection exercise, the IFE14 in Jordan in last 2014. The contribution will also allow for the acquisition of a laser distance measuring system, also for use on an airborne platform, to support a range of on-site inspection techniques.

3. Outreach and country-level capacity building

The contribution will allow the CTBTO to continue its capacity building programmes in developing countries, which has been an integral part of all previous EU voluntary contributions.

This support allows these countries to establish and maintain a National Data Centre, which is the data centre maintained in each CTBT Member State to receive monitoring data and products and to advise its government on events of interest. The capacity building efforts will focus on the NDC-in-a-box standard software package and on the regions of Middle East and South Asia, as well as Southeast Asia, the Pacific and Far East. [IDN-InDepthNews – 19 October 2015] ◆

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Nuke Disarmament Groups Ask Obama and Putin to ‘Reduce Nuclear Risks’

By Ramesh Jaura



Photo: Tupolev Tu-160 | Credit: Wikimedia Commons - Alex Belyukov

BERLIN (IDN) - Major nuclear disarmament groups are deeply concerned over speculations whether a Russian Tupolev Tu-160 supersonic bomber, intercepted late September in British airspace, was planning to attack the country and unleash World War 3. They have urged Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama to agree to “an immediate reduction in nuclear risks”.

In a letter addressed also to Congressional Committees, Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs as well as other policy makers, the nuke disarmament groups warn of “the risks of catastrophic unintended consequences arising from possible clashes between NATO and Russian forces during a number of recent exercises”.

The letter made public on October 7 points out that in September, a Russian Tupolev Tu-160, a strategic bomber and a missile carrier that was intercepted by NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces during an incursion into the British airspace, was discovered to have started the countdown to arm a nuclear bomb.

Human Survival Project (HSP) and People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND) – both based in Australia – coordinated the letter. HSP was “adopted” by the Council of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPACS) ➔

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at Sydney University in June 2012 as a joint initiative of CPACS and PND. The latter has been active in Australia since 1960 and has a significant presence in the international disarmament movement.

HSP and PND say that both Russian and NATO forces have recently conducted a number of exercises that were 'mirror-imaged' by the other side in close proximity to each other. "Nuclear-armed forces on both sides may have been involved. The potential for catastrophic miscalculation is obvious," they say.

The letter initiated by HSP and PND, supported by several nuclear disarmament organizations is one of a series of communications that have been written over the last few months on this issue, including one by Generals Cartwright and Vladimir Dvorkin, responsible for the operation respectively of the U.S. and Russian nuclear forces.

Signatories of the letter include: the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), awardee of 1985 Nobel Peace Prize; Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision Campaign, comprising cities from around the world; the Middle Powers Initiative, the World Future Council – WFC; and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. Several members of various parliaments have signed the letter.

The letter points to "apocalyptic" stakes. The use of the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals, constituting some 90-95 percent of total global nuclear stocks, would completely destroy all that we now call 'civilisation' in less than 90 minutes, nuclear disarmament groups say.

"The burning of large numbers of cities, itself encompassing the deaths of up to half of all humans,(depending on targeting) would give rise to catastrophic global climatic consequences, affecting even countries that had no involvement in the initial conflict, and resulting in temperatures colder than the last ice-age," warns the letter. It adds: "This would mean that most of those still left would either starve or freeze in the darkness of a nuclear winter."

Three nuke risk reduction measures

Nuclear risk reduction measures that disarmament groups are urging, include: (1) lowering nuclear alert levels so that decision-makers are no longer faced with the necessity to take utterly apocalyptic decisions in time frames measured in a few short minutes based on inadequate information; (2) the sharing of launch data; and (3) the avoidance of provocative military exercises and postures.

In order to stress point 1, the letter draws attention to a number of UN General Assembly resolutions urging a lowering in operational readiness, such as the resolution on 'Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems' sponsored by New Zealand, Switzerland, Sweden, Chile, Malaysia and Nigeria, and India's 'Reducing Nuclear Dangers' resolution.

As regards point 2, the letter recalls U.S.-Russian agreement in 1998 to establish a Joint Data Exchange Center. It followed a 'near miss' in 1995, when a weather research rocket was mistaken for a U.S. SLBM (submarine-launched ballistic missile). That agreement has been reaffirmed a number of times, most recently in 2010. But the Joint Data Exchange Center has yet to be set up.

Referring to point 3, the letter says: "A series of measures concerning nuclear posture, notably 'no first use' doctrines and a decision to no longer target cities (as noted above cities are the most prolific source of the black smoke that brings about nuclear winter) would also make a vast contribution to the reduction of the risk of nuclear catastrophe."

Addressing the Russian and U.S. Presidents, the disarmament groups "strongly echo and endorse" the concern – "if not alarm" – expressed by Generals James Cartwright and Vladimir Dvorkin, former commanders of American and Russian missile forces, from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), and from faith leaders worldwide, at the possibility that tension between Russia and NATO may spiral out of control with a catastrophic outcome. ➡

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De-alerting nukes

In fact a related study on “de-alerting” (increasing the time gap between order to launch nuclear weapons and actually launching these) by Global Zero headed by Generals Cartwright and Dvorkin says: “Tension between Russia and the West over the Ukraine crisis has brought the parties one step closer to the precipice of nuclear brinkmanship, the point at which nuclear risk skyrockets,” and “it has flared to the point that it is producing dangerous misunderstandings and action-reaction cycles with strong escalatory updrafts.”

The signatories of the letter take note of the fact that on the 40th anniversary – on September 16 – of the signing of the Helsinki Document establishing the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution which “Expressed deep concern at increased nuclear threats arising from the deteriorating relationship between Russia and NATO”, and “Called on all OSCE States with nuclear weapons or under extended nuclear deterrence relationships to reduce the risks of a nuclear war by taking nuclear weapons off high-alert, and by adopting no-first use policies”.

Like the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, signatories of the letter are deeply alarmed over the direction in which the confrontation over the borders of the Ukraine may be going.

“What is placed at risk, in the very worst case, is civilization itself, and potentially, human survival. This is not of course to say that a completely ‘apocalyptic’ event sequence is what WILL take place, or even that this is the most likely outcome of such a sequence.”

The signatories “hope and pray” that nothing of the sort takes place and that a peaceful negotiated settlement of issues arising from the 2014 Ukraine crisis will be eventually reached by all parties, including Russia.

However, in their view, the likelihood of a catastrophic outcome is by no means zero. “The record of history – especially of August 1914 – shows that even where national leaders are confident that they have everything in hand, events can spin out of control with consequences that are completely out of proportion to anything that might initially have been at stake.”

The letter continues: “Confrontational attitudes and actions, (particularly between militaries), no matter who initiates them or who is to ‘blame’, can as the European Leadership Network points out, all too easily lead to accidental conflict or even to just plain catastrophic accident.

“If this were to lead to deeper and prolonged military conflict between two parties (such as in the Baltics) there is no telling where it would stop, or if it could be stopped at all without spiraling (as in 1914) into a conflict that no-one actually sought, but which no-one did enough to prevent.”

The safest nuclear weapon by far is one that does not exist at all. The majority of the world’s governments and parliaments, not to mention NGOs, see the elimination of nuclear weapons not as something it might be ‘nice’ to do ‘in some century’, but as an urgent existential priority.

The nuclear disarmament groups, therefore, urge the nuclear weapons states to move toward “the complete and total elimination of nuclear weapons, as mandated by the Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty (NPT) itself, as an urgent existential priority”. [IDN-InDepthNews – 07 October 2015] ◆



<http://www.peoplesdecade.org/>

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What Others Say

Nuclear Power Plants on the Rise – UN Agency Concerned

By Ranjit Fernando



UNITED NATIONS (IDN) - The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency ([IAEA](#)), which is mandated to promote the safe, secure and peaceful uses of nuclear technologies, says the global nuclear landscape continues to change – amidst a rise in power plants worldwide.

“More countries were considering or already preparing to build new nuclear power plants,” Tracy Brown, the acting representative of the IAEA Director-General, told delegates on October 19.

The power plants, largely for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, are operational in over 25 countries, both nuclear and non-nuclear states, including the U.S., France, China, Britain, Russia, Argentina, South Korea, Belgium, Iran, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Finland, Spain and Sweden.

The safeguards, since their inception, had continually evolved, taking into account changes in technology, she said.

The IAEA has engaged extensively with member States on the conceptualization and development of safeguard implementation at the national level.

Brown said the Agency also stood ready to contribute to the certification of the dismantlement of nuclear weapons programmes and, upon request, to international verification of arms control and disarmament agreements.

Since 1995, the IAEA’s member States had reported nearly 2,800 incidents involving radioactive material escaping regulatory control.

“A relatively small amount of radioactive material could be combined with conventional explosives to produce a dirty bomb,” Brown told the [UN Committee on Disarmament and International Security](#).

Such a weapon, she pointed out, could be capable of killing many people, contaminating large urban areas and sparking mass panic.

“Responsibility for ensuring nuclear security lay with national Governments, but there was wide recognition of the Agency’s central role to help strengthen the global nuclear security framework.”

The most important area of unfinished business in nuclear security was the need to bring into force the amendment to the [Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material](#), which had been adopted 10 years ago. ➡

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Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), told delegates that nuclear weapons and nuclear testing had a dangerous and destabilizing impact on global security, as well as a negative impact on the environment.

A staggering one billion dollars have so far been invested in the most sophisticated and far-reaching verification regime ever conceived.

He said significant national security decisions were made in good faith, with the expectation that the Treaty would become legally binding, in line with international law. Countries should finish the job done by experts.

The challenges of disarmament and non-proliferation required bold ideas and global solutions, as well as the active engagement of stakeholders from all corners of the world.

Equally important was building capacity among the next generation of experts, who would carry the endeavours forward

In the current millennium, there had only been one country that had violated the moratorium on nuclear testing, namely North Korea (which conducted three nuclear tests between 2006 and 2013 triggering sanctions by the UN Security Council).

South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) reported on October 20 "it believed that North Korea was preparing for another nuclear test, but not in the near future."

The NIS briefed South Korean legislators at a closed door parliamentary session.

Zerbo said action was still needed to secure the future of the Treaty as a firm legal barrier against nuclear testing and the nuclear arms race.

Michael MØLLER, Secretary General of the Conference on Disarmament, complained about the "limited progress" of the Geneva-based body. The ongoing stalemate was damaging for its image and an "affront" to the millions of people around the world who were looking to the United Nations for action on that "primordial issue".

"There was little reason for optimism on multilateral disarmament, with the inability of the recent Review Conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to reach an outcome, and the non-entry into force of the CTBT after 20 years," he noted.

The Conference on Disarmament, he said, could play a pivotal role in disarmament as it was the only standing multilateral forum on that topic, and if it was abolished, it would be difficult to reinvent it in the current climate.

He also expressed concerns about the future of the Geneva-based UN Institute for Disarmament Research ([UNIDIR](#)).

The "Institute punches far above its weight", and he was concerned at its financial difficulties. The Institute's funding could no longer be postponed. [IDN-InDepthNews – 23 October 2015] ◆



TOWARD A
NUCLEAR
FREE WORLD



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NEWSLETTER FOR STRENGTHENING AWARENESS OF NUCLEAR ABOLITION | WITH OCTOBER 2015 ARTICLES

What Others Say

The Complex Game of Counting U.S. and Russian ‘Warheads’

By Hans M. Kristensen*

WASHINGTON, DC (FAS | IDN) - ([FAS](#) | IDN) - The number of U.S. strategic warheads [counted](#) as “deployed” under the New START Treaty has dropped below the treaty’s limit of 1,550 warheads for the first time since the treaty entered into force in February 2011 – a reduction of 263 warheads over four and a half years.

Russia, by contrast, has increased its deployed warheads and now has more strategic warheads counted as deployed under the treaty than in 2011 – up 111 warheads.

Similarly, while the United States has reduced its number of deployed strategic launchers (missiles and bombers) counted by the treaty by 120, Russia has increased its number of deployed launchers by five in the same period. Yet the United States still has more launchers deployed than allowed by the treaty (by 2018) while Russia has been well below the limit since before the treaty entered into force in 2011.



These two apparently contradictory developments do not mean that the United States is falling behind and Russia is building up. Both countries are expected to adjust their forces to comply with the treaty limits by 2018.

Rather, the differences are due to different histories and structures of the two countries’ strategic nuclear force postures as well as to fluctuations in the number of weapons that are deployed at any given time.

Deployed Warhead Status

The latest warhead count published by the U.S. State Department lists the United States with 1,538 “deployed” strategic warheads – down 60 warheads from March 2015 and 263 warheads from February 2011 when the treaty entered into force.

But because the treaty artificially counts each bomber as one warhead, even though the bombers don’t carry warheads under normal circumstances, the actual number of strategic warheads deployed on U.S. ballistic missiles is around 1,450. The number fluctuates from week to week primarily as ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) move in and out of overhaul. ➡

** Hans M. Kristensen is the director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists where he provides the public with analysis and background information about the status of nuclear forces and the role of nuclear weapons.*

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Photo above: Warheads from the last MIRVed U.S. ICBM are moved to storage at Malmstrom AFB in June 2014. The sign “MIRV Off Load” has been altered from “Wide Load” on the original photo. Image: US Air Force.

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Russia is listed with 1,648 deployed warheads, up from 1,537 in 2011. Yet because Russian bombers also do not carry nuclear weapons under normal circumstances but are artificially counted as one warhead per bomber, the actual number of Russian strategic warheads deployed on its ballistic missiles is closer to 1,590 warheads.

Because it has fewer ICBMs than the United States (see below), Russia is prioritizing deployment of multiple warheads on its new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). In contrast, the United States has downgraded its ICBMs to carry a single warhead – although the missiles retain the capability to load the warheads back on if necessary. And the next-generation missile (GBSD; Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent) the Air Force plans to deploy a decade from now will also be capable of carry multiple warheads.

Warheads from the last MIRVed U.S. ICBM are moved to storage at Malmstrom AFB in June 2014. The sign “MIRV Off Load” has been altered from “Wide Load” on the original photo. Image: US Air Force.

This illustrates one of the deficiencies of the New START Treaty: it does not limit how many warheads Russia and the United States can keep in storage to load back on the missiles. Nor does it limit how many of the missiles may carry multiple warheads.

And just a reminder: the warheads counted by the New START Treaty are not the total arsenals or stockpiles of the United States and Russia. The total U.S. stockpile contains approximately 4,700 warheads (with another 2,500 retired but still intact warheads awaiting dismantlement). Russia has a stockpile of approximately 4,500 warheads (with perhaps 3,000 more retired warheads awaiting dismantlement).

Deployed Launcher Status

The New START Treaty count lists a total of 762 U.S. deployed strategic launchers (ballistic missiles and long-range bombers), down 23 from March 2015 and a total reduction of 120 launchers since 2011. Another 62 launchers will need to be removed before February 2018.

Four and a half years after the treaty entered into force, the U.S. military is finally starting to reduce operational nuclear launchers. Up till now all the work has been focused on eliminating so-called phantom launchers, that is launchers that were no longer used in the nuclear mission but still carry some equipment that makes them accountable. But that is about to change.

On September 17, the Air Force announced that it had completed denuclearization of the first of 30 operational B-52H bombers to be stripped of their nuclear equipment. Another 12 non-deployed bombers will also be denuclearized for a total of 42 bombers by early 2017. That will leave approximately 60 B-52H and B-2A bombers accountable under the treaty.

The Air Force is also working on removing Minuteman III ICBMs from 50 silos to reduce the number of deployed ICBMs from 450 to no more than 400. Unfortunately, arms control opponents in the U.S. Congress have forced the Air Force to keep the 50 emptied silos “warm” so that missiles can be reloaded if necessary.

Finally, this year the Navy is scheduled to begin inactivating four of the 24 missile tubes on each of its 14 Ohio-class SSBNs. The work will be completed in 2017 to reduce the number of deployed sea-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) to no more than 240, down from 288 missiles today.

Russia is counted with 526 deployed launchers – 236 less than the United States. That’s an addition of 11 launchers since March 2015 and five launchers more than when New START first entered into force in 2011. Russia is already 174 deployed launchers below the treaty’s limit and has been below the limit since before the treaty was signed. So Russia is not required to reduce any more deployed launchers before 2018 – in fact, it could legally increase its arsenal. ☹

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Yet Russia is retiring four Soviet-era missiles (SS-18, SS-19, SS-25, and SS-N-18) faster than it is deploying new missiles (SS-27 and SS-N-32) and is likely to reduce its deployed launchers more over the next three years.

Russia is also introducing the new Borei-class SSBN with the SS-N-32 (Bulava) SLBM, but slower than previously [Russian Borei- and Delta IV-class SSBNs at the Yagelnaya submarine base on the Kola Peninsula. Click to open full size image] anticipated and is unlikely to have eight boats in service by 2018.

Two are in service with the Northern Fleet (although one does not appear fully operational yet) and one arrived in the Pacific Fleet last month. The Borei SSBNs will replace the old Delta III SSBNs in the Pacific and later also the Delta IV SSBNs in the Northern Fleet.

The latest New START data does not provide a breakdown of the different types of deployed launchers. The United States will provide a breakdown in a few weeks but Russia does not provide any information about its deployed launchers counted under New START (nor does the U.S. Intelligence Community say anything in public about what it sees).

As a result, we can't see from the latest data how many bombers are counted as deployed. The U.S. number is probably around 88 and the Russian number is probably around 60, although the Russian bomber force has serious operational and technical issues. Both countries are developing new strategic bombers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Four and a half years after the New START Treaty entered into force in 2011, the United States has reduced its "accountable" deployed strategic warheads below the limit of 1,550 warheads for the first time. The treaty limit enters into effect in February 2018.

Russia has moved in the other direction and increased its "accountable" deployed strategic warheads and launchers since the treaty entered into force in 2011. Not by much, however, and Russia is expected to reduce its deployed strategic warheads as required by the New START Treaty by 2018. Russia is not in a build-up but in a transition from Soviet-era weapons to newer types that causes temporary fluctuations in the warhead count. And Russia is far below the treaty's limit on deployed strategic launchers.

Yet it is disappointing that Russia has allowed its number of "accountable" deployed strategic warheads to increase during the duration of the treaty. There is no need for this increase and it risks fueling exaggerated news media headlines about a Russian nuclear "build-up."

Overall, however, the New START reductions are very limited and are taking a long time to implement. Despite souring East-West relations, both countries need to begin to discuss what will replace the treaty after it enters into effect in 2018; it will expire in 2021 unless the two countries agree to extend it for another five years. It is important that the verification regime is not interrupted and failure to agree on significantly lower limits before the next Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in 2020 will hurt U.S. and Russian status.

Moreover, defining lower limits early rather than later is important now to avoid that nuclear force modernization programs already in full swing in both countries are set higher (and more costly) than what is actually needed for national security. . [IDN-InDepthNews – 15 October 2015] ◆

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Civil Society Perspective

Three New Resolutions to Watch Out at the First Committee

By Beatrice Fihn | ICAN Executive Director



At the 2015 session of the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee, three new resolutions are on the table, which aim to consolidate the humanitarian initiative. For ICAN, they reflect a momentum for starting negotiations on a new treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.

Recognizing the humanitarian consequences

The joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons that has been delivered regularly by an increasing number of states since 2012 has turned into a resolution for this First Committee. The text of the resolution remains largely the same as the statement. Making it a resolution will mean that the humanitarian perspective on nuclear weapons – which has grown to be the central consideration in nuclear disarmament discussions – can be formally adopted by the UN General Assembly. The resolution calls for nuclear weapons never to be used again under any circumstances, and decides to put the issue of humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons on the agenda of the First Committee next year.

Surprisingly, some from the original group of 16 states that drafted this statement have not yet signed up to co-sponsor this resolution. Previously supportive states like Denmark and Norway seem to be feeling pressured by NATO "commitments" to maintain nuclear weapons. It is also remarkable that Switzerland – the state that first initiated the joint statement in 2012 – has not signed on. Does this suggest that such countries are now less concerned about the humanitarian consequences of a nuclear detonation? Or do these decisions indicate a reluctance to show leadership and act upon the evidence that has been presented?

Committing to fill the legal gap

The second important resolution is related to the humanitarian pledge. At the time of writing, 119 states have endorsed this commitment to take action towards filling the "legal gap" for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. Austria has decided to submit the text of the pledge as a resolution, thereby seeking to anchor the pledge in the UN General Assembly. This will press governments that have so far avoided taking a decision on endorsing the pledge to make up their minds on this key international commitment and the need to fill the legal gap.

Negotiating a new treaty

The third text is a new version of the resolution "Taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations", led by Mexico. This resolution includes a mandate for an open-ended working group (OEWG) in Geneva to "negotiate with a view to reaching agreement on concrete effective legal measures to achieve nuclear disarmament, in particular new legal provisions and norms to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons".

Civil society has consistently called for the start of negotiations for a treaty banning nuclear weapons, which is the natural next step that should follow from the evidence provided during the Oslo, Nayarit, and Vienna conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. This diplomatic process must be open to all, blockable by none, and inclusive of civil society. There will most certainly be attempts to weaken the mandate to a discussion or to include consensus rules. ➡

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If this resolution is to have any value, governments must reject such weakening, as it would then risk repeating the failed discussions from the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the 18-year deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament, or the unfocused discussions of the OEWG in 2013.

Such actions will not be able to adequately address the urgent humanitarian concerns that nuclear weapons cause. It is therefore imperative that governments indicate clear support for starting negotiations towards a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons.

A moment to make history

With these three resolutions and other initiatives and announcements, October will be an intensive period where governments have the opportunity to place negotiations on a new legal instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons on the table for the first time.

It is crucial that committed states have the conviction to undertake such negotiations even without the participation of those armed with nuclear weapons. It is time for those that have spoken out about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons to establish an international legal instrument that would prohibit the development, production, testing, acquisition, stockpiling, transfer, deployment, threat of use, or use of nuclear weapons, as well as assistance, financing, encouragement, or inducement of these prohibited acts.

In addition, such an instrument could suggest a framework for the elimination of nuclear weapons, as well as include positive obligations on states to ensure the rights of victims and survivors. Faced with the indisputable evidence presented over the past three years, wasting more time on pointless discussions cannot be justified by those which have recognized the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament.

While the nuclear-armed states are ramping up the modernization of their nuclear arsenals at an alarming rate, [1] the number of near-accidents and security failures at nuclear weapon facilities are on the rise [2] and investments to secure those facilities fail to adequately address the security gaps. [3]

With increasing tensions between Russia and Western states, experts say that the risk of nuclear weapons use is on the rise – higher than it has ever been since the end of the Cold War. [4]

So far 159 states have recognized the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, and 117 have committed to work towards filling the legal gap in relation to the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. With the world having just commemorated the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the moment has come to start the process to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons. (ICAN | 08 October 2015) ◆

This article appeared in the preview edition of the [2015 First Committee Monitor of Reaching Critical Will](#).

[1] <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/9724-assuring-destruction-forever-2015-edition>

[2] https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20140428TooCloseforComfortNuclearUseLewisWilliamsPelopidasAghlani.pdf

[3] <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/09/03/17939/audit-shows-security-gaps-persist-nuclear-weapons-complex-penetrated-nun-and-other>

[4] http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/NTI_Rising_Nuclear_Dangers_Paper_FINAL.pdf

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TOWARD A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS



<http://www.nuclearabolition.info/documents/Toward a World without Nuclear Weapons 2015.pdf>

International Press Syndicate Disarmament Talks

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=International+Press+Syndicate+Disarmament+Talks



With Jayantha Dhanapala, Former UN USG for Disarmament Affairs

With Ambassador Aikawa, DG Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, Japan's MOFA



People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition
Initiated by Soka Gakkai International (SGI)



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