



General Assembly First Committee Topic Background Guide
Topic 1: Nuclear Disarmament¹

24 September, 2017

The first nuclear weapons were developed by the United States in 1945. The US tested one in New Mexico, and exploded two in August 1945 over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing and wounding about 40 percent of their populations and destroying or damaging more than half of their buildings. This was the first and only time nuclear weapons were used in war. Soon after, the Japanese government surrendered, and World War II ended.

Two months before, in June 1945, the United Nations Allies (the US, UK, France, China, Russia, and 45 of their partners against Germany and Japan) founded the United Nations organizations (UN). In doing so, their primary goal was “to maintain international peace and security.” To achieve this goal, they articulated several principles, including respecting “the sovereign equality” of all Member States and settling “international disputes by peaceful means.”² In addition, they gave the Security Council “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security” and tasked it with carrying out this responsibility “with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.” According to the UN Charter, the Council was to “formulat[e]... with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article 47, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments,”³ including “possible disarmament.”⁴

The Military Staff Committee (MSC) was to “consist of the Chiefs of Staff of the permanent members of the Security Council or their representatives”⁵ – in other words, the top British, Chinese, French, Russian, and US military commanders. In April 1947, the MSC submitted to the Security Council a report on the “General Principles Governing the Organization of the Armed Forces Made Available to the Security Council by Member Nations of the United Nations.” The report generated such discord among the permanent Security Council members “regarding the composition and organization of the armed forces” that the MSC ceased to meet, and the report was laid aside.⁶ The main lines of disagreement reflected the emergence of the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union. Despite

¹ This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams and Nicholas Potratz. Copyright 2017 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² United Nations (UN), “Charter of the United Nations,” 1945, Chapter I, Articles 1 and 2, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>.

³ UN, “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter V, Articles 24 and 26.

⁴ UN, “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter VII, Article 47.

⁵ UN, “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter VII, Article 47.

⁶ UN Treaty Collection, “Article 43” (which later became Article 47), [history of Military Staff Committee and Security Council deliberations and agreements], p. 393, http://untreaty.un.org/cod/repertory/art43/english/rep_orig_vol2-art43_e.pdf

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hopes that it would be revived when the Cold War ended,⁷ the MSC has remained “moribund.”⁸ It has never played a role in UN disarmament negotiations or plans.

In 1949, the Soviet Union tested its first nuclear weapon, followed in 1952 by the UK, 1960 by France, and 1966 by China. After 1949, the USSR and US engaged in an arms race. By 1969, each had an arsenal of more than 10,000 nuclear weapons,⁹ as well as a vast array of conventional weapons deployed and in use in places like Vietnam and Czechoslovakia.

In 1978, in frustration at the Security Council’s lack of attention to disarmament, the Cold War arms race, and US and Soviet military interventions, the General Assembly (GA) held a special session on disarmament, in which member states called attention to the description of the GA’s duties in the Charter¹⁰ and asserted that “The General Assembly has been and should remain the main deliberative organ of the United Nations in the field of disarmament and should make every effort to facilitate the implementation of disarmament measures.”¹¹

At that meeting and since that time, the GA has established and received reports from a number of disarmament sub-committees and has passed many resolutions calling for “a nuclear-free world” and “general and complete disarmament.”¹² Yet the number of states possessing nuclear weapons has grown, and no significant progress has been made on treaties controlling or eliminating nuclear arsenals.

Given this, should the GA continue to encourage disarmament, or should it turn its attention to other matters? In particular, should it encourage states to dismantle their nuclear weapons altogether, or should it give them to a UN agency such as the MSC to secure and control?

History and Current Events

To address this issue, it is important to understand the destructive power of nuclear weapons, past efforts to eliminate them and control their spread, and their current distribution in the world.

The Nature of Nukes

Conventional or “relative” weapons (such as tanks, artillery, aircraft, and anti-aircraft missiles) fight other weapons. By contrast, unconventional weapons (such as biological, chemical, nuclear, and radiological weapons) target entire populations or geographic areas. Of these, nuclear weapons are – and biological weapons have the potential to become – “absolute weapons” or weapons of mass destruction (WMD).¹³

⁷ Karen A. Mingst and Margaret P. Karns, *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2012), p. 101.

⁸ Frank J. Priol, “Confrontation in the Gulf; Crisis Breathes Life Into a Moribund U.N. Panel,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/06/world/confrontation-in-the-gulf-crisis-breathes-life-into-a-moribund-un-panel.html>

⁹ Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, “Global nuclear weapons inventories, 1945-2010,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 66, no. 77 (July/August 2010), p. 81, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/66/4/77.full.pdf+html>

¹⁰ UN, “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter IV, Article 11.

¹¹ UN General Assembly, “Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its Tenth Special Session,” 23 May - 30 June 1978, Item 115, page 12, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/S-10/4&Lang=E

¹² For the most recent resolutions, go to UN General Assembly, “71st Session: Resolutions,” 2016-2012, <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/7>, and search on “disarm” and “nuclear.”

¹³ Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1946), pp. 28-29. On biological weapons, see Karen Ruth Adams and Kedra Hildebrand, “Topic 1: Strengthening and Enforcing the Convention on Biological Weapons,” General Assembly First Committee topic guide, Montana

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What sets WMD apart is that, regardless of how they are targeted, their destructive effects cannot be limited. For example, according to physicist Richard L. Garwin, a small, one kiloton (kt) nuclear device exploded at ground-level in Manhattan would kill approximately 210,000 people “mostly from prompt radiation within a week or so. Of these, 30,000 would have died from blast earlier, and about 100,000 from burns.”¹⁴ In 2006, North Korea tested a nuclear device of approximately this size.¹⁵

The uranium bomb exploded by the US over the Japanese city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 was 13 kt. The plutonium bomb exploded three days later over the Japanese city of Nagasaki was 20 kt.¹⁶ According to the US Strategic Bombing Survey, the uranium bomb killed 60-70,000 people, about 27 percent of Hiroshima’s population of 245,000, seriously injured another 50,000, and rendered 72 percent of the 90,000 buildings useless. The plutonium bomb killed 40,000 people, 17 percent of Nagasaki’s population of 230,000, injured 40,000, and destroyed or badly damaged 37 percent of the city’s 52,000 buildings.¹⁷ In 1973, after being invaded by Egypt and Syria during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel assembled 13 devices of this size.¹⁸ In 1998, India and Pakistan conducted underground nuclear tests of similar devices.¹⁹

The other nuclear weapons states have all tested much larger nuclear devices. Russia began testing in 1949 with a 21 kt device in Kyrgystan; its largest test (of a total of 715) was of a 50-58,000 kt device. The US’s largest test (of 1,032) was of a 14,800 kt device in the Marshall Islands. The UK has conducted 45 nuclear tests,²⁰ including an atmospheric test of 60 kt over Australia, and three of 3,000 kt in the Pacific.²¹ France has carried out 210 tests, starting with a 60-70 kt explosion in Algeria in 1960. The largest French test was of a 2,600 kt device in the South Pacific. China has conducted 45 tests, of which the largest (in 1967) was 3,300 kt. The last known tests (both atmospheric and underground) by Russia, the US, the UK, France, and China were in the 1990s.²²

Today most nuclear weapons are thought to be between 100 and 300 kt.²³ This reflects the fact that weapons with larger destructive “yields” are unnecessary. Given the ability of just one 20 kt device to kill and

Model UN, 14 September 2012, <http://www.cas.umt.edu/mun/documents/2012%20guides/GA-1%2012%20topic%20Biological%20Weapons%20final.pdf>

¹⁴ Richard L. Garwin, “Nuclear and Biological Megaterrorism,” 27th Session of the International Seminars on Planetary Emergencies, 21 August 2002, <http://www.fas.org/rlg/020821-terrorism.htm>

¹⁵ Federation of American Scientists (FAS), “North Korea: Nuclear Weapons Program Current Status,” 16 November 2006, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nuke/index.html>

¹⁶ Garwin, “Nuclear and Biological Megaterrorism.”

¹⁷ US Strategic Bombing Survey, “Summary Report (Pacific War).” Washington, D.C., 1 July 1946, pp. 23-24, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/index.php

¹⁸ FAS, “Israel: Nuclear Weapons,” 8 January 2007, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/nuke/index.html>

¹⁹ FAS, “India: Nuclear Weapons,” 8 November 2002, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nuke/index.html>; FAS, “Pakistan Nuclear Weapons,” 11 December 2002, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/pakistan/nuke/index.html>

²⁰ Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO PrepCom), “Types of Nuclear Weapons,” table on “Significant Nuclear Explosions,” <http://www.ctbto.org/nuclear-testing/types-of-nuclear-weapons/>.

²¹ United Kingdom, Ministry of Defense, “UK Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests Factsheet 5: UK Programme,” https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/82781/ntvfactsheet5.pdf.

²² CTBTO PrepCom, “Types of Nuclear Weapons,” table on “Significant Nuclear Explosions.”

²³ CTBTO PrepCom, “Types of Nuclear Weapons,” table on “Significant Nuclear Explosions.”

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injure more than one-third of Nagasaki's population and destroy more than one-third of its buildings, any increase in destructive power is of marginal significance.²⁴ In other words, it is "overkill." Moreover, precision targeting and other advances since World War II make small nuclear devices loaded on missiles more destructive than the gravity bombs dropped by American airplanes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Efforts to Eliminate and Control Nuclear Weapons

In 1946, when the US was the only country that possessed nuclear weapons, US President Harry Truman asked one of his advisors, Bernard Baruch, to develop a proposal for turning the weapons over to the UN, which would control them on behalf of all countries. It was thought this would reassure other states so they would not try to develop their own nuclear weapons. But the US and Soviet Union could not agree about whether the first step should be to establish a system of control (the US preference) or eliminate nuclear stockpiles (the Russian preference).²⁵

In October 1962, the US and Soviet Union had the world's first nuclear stand-off during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The crisis began when US satellites showed a Soviet missile in Cuba capable of reaching the US. It ended when the Soviet President Khrushchev withdrew Soviet missiles after weeks of tense negotiations with US President Kennedy, both of whom were well aware of – and eager to avoid – the effects of nuclear weapons.²⁶

Soon after the crisis, the US and Soviet Union began bilateral and multilateral efforts to reduce nuclear tension. To the chagrin of many UN Member States, the purpose of these agreements was not to eliminate nuclear weapons. Instead, it was to reduce misunderstanding, overspending, international anger about nuclear tests, and competition from other states. To make it easy to negotiate in future crises, the US and USSR installed a "hotline" (direct telephone line) between the Kremlin and the White House. To save money on systems they knew would not work, they agreed to the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty (1972). To respond to international outcry about the human and environmental effects of atmospheric and other above-ground nuclear tests, they agreed to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963). That treaty did not speak to the legality of underground tests, which were state-of-the-art at the time and have since been widely used. Even today, long after the Cold War, the US objects to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). As a result, it has never come into force.²⁷

Most importantly, the US and USSR agreed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). According to the NPT, the only legal nuclear weapons states are those that had declared nuclear programs when the Treaty was written in 1968, namely the US, Russia, UK, France, and China. All other state parties to the Treaty agreed to pursue nuclear programs only for energy, not for weapons. In exchange, the five existing nuclear states promised under Article VI to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to ... nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."²⁸

Since 1970, several states have developed or otherwise obtained nuclear weapons, including Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. Of these, only North Korea ratified the NPT, though it withdrew before conducting nuclear tests. UN Member States disagree about whether these nuclear states have "legitimate" nuclear arsenals.

²⁴ Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon*, p. 48.

²⁵ "Arms control and disarmament," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/616264/United-Nations-UN/225022/Arms-control-and-disarmament#ref368985>, accessed 7 October 2012.

²⁶ "Cuban Missile Crisis," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/145654/Cuban-missile-crisis>, accessed 25 September 2017.

²⁷ CTBTO PrepCom, "Status of Signature and Ratification," <http://www.ctbto.org/the-treaty/status-of-signature-and-ratification/>, accessed 25 September 2017.

²⁸ "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," 1968, Articles II and IV <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/>,

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Are they all illegitimate because they weaponized in violation of the NPT? Or are they legitimate because the original nuclear states have not disarmed, despite their promises in the NPT?²⁹

Later in the Cold War, the US and Soviet Union negotiated a series of bilateral agreements to reduce the size and destructive power of their nuclear arsenals. These efforts have continued, in fits and starts, since the end of the Cold War and have been supplemented by unilateral measures, such as detargeting weapons so they cannot be launched as quickly. The most recent agreement between the US and Russia is the New Start Treaty, which took effect in 2011 and stipulates that each will reduce its arsenal to 1,550 active nuclear warheads or 700 strategic delivery vehicles (long-range bombers and missile launchers) by 2018. This is down from the Cold War high of 31,255 nuclear weapons for the US in 1967 and 45,000 for the USSR in 1986.³⁰ Under New Start, each country “is allowed 18 short-notice inspections a year over 10 years” to confirm that the other is in compliance.³¹

In July 2017, UN Member States created a new treaty called the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The treaty “prohibits the use, threat of use, development, production, manufacturing, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, transfer, stationing and installment of nuclear weapons or assistance with any prohibited activities.”³² Thus, the treaty represents the first agreement that, if universally adopted and entered into force, would eliminate nuclear weapons globally, and permanently prohibit their use.³³

The treaty was adopted by approximately 122 UN Member States (about two-thirds of all UN Member States). The Netherlands, the only NATO member who participated in the negotiation of the treaty, was the only participating country to vote against the agreement. The nine states possessing nuclear weapons boycotted the conference, and have stated that they have no intention to accede to the agreement.³⁴ The agreement opened for ratification on September 20, 2017. Upon opening, “dozens” of countries signed the agreement, and nuclear-possessing states once again renounced the event. The treaty will not enter into force until 90 days after 50 parties to the treaty submit ratifications.³⁵

Nuclear States

During the Cold War, a number of states, including Canada, agreed to let the US base weapons on their territory. Today, the US has “a couple of hundred or so weapons ... (down from about 500 a decade ago)” in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. “These are mostly gravity bombs deployed under ‘dual-key’

²⁹ For an example of the debate, see Madeleine K. Albright, “Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, “Press Remarks on India and Pakistan.” Washington, D.C.: Office of the Spokesman U.S. Department of State, June 3, 1998, <http://www.fas.org/news/india/1998/06/980603-ma.html>; Jaswant Singh, “Against Nuclear Apartheid,” *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (September/October 1998), pp. 41-52, <http://www.fas.org/news/india/1998/09/980900-js-fa.htm>

³⁰ Norris and Kristensen, “Global nuclear weapons inventories, 1945-2010.”

³¹ Cheryl Pellerin, “New START Treaty to Take Effect Feb. 5,” US Department of Defense American Forces Press Service, 2 February 2011, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62656>.

³² For a list of disarmament treaties with links to their text, go to Arms Control Association, “Treaties and Agreements,” <http://www.armscontrol.org/treaties>, accessed 15 September, 2017.

³³ Rick Gladstone, “A Treaty Is Reached to Ban Nuclear Arms. Now Comes the Hard Part.” *New York Times*, 7 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/world/americas/united-nations-nuclear-weapons-prohibition-destruction-global-treaty.html?mcubz=0&r=0>.

³⁴ Gladstone, “A Treaty Is Reached to Ban Nuclear Arms.”

³⁵ Staff, “Dozens of states sign nuclear weapons ban treaty at United Nations,” *Reuters*, 20 September 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nuclear-un/dozens-of-states-sign-nuclear-weapons-ban-treaty-at-united-nations-idUSKCN1BV1QJ?il=0>.

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arrangements: The U.S. has custody of the weapons in peacetime, but custody could in theory be transferred to the various host nations ... in the event of war.”³⁶

Until 1990, the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine. When they became independent, the weapons were dismantled or transferred back to Russia. Only one country, South Africa, has ever eliminated its nuclear arsenal. The white South African government did so sometime before 1993, in preparation for the transfer of power to the first post-apartheid government.

Several states (such as Sweden) have conducted research sufficient to develop nuclear weapons or have gone further and begun development before halting the programs in response to regional agreements (Brazil and Argentina), international inspections and sanctions (Iraq), international attacks (Syria), and international aid (Libya).

As shown in Table 1 below, nine states currently possess nuclear weapons.

Table 1
Current Nuclear Weapons States

Name	Year Developed ³⁷	Total Inventory (2017) ³⁸
United States	1945	6,800
Russia	1949	7,000
United Kingdom	1953	215
France	1964	300
China	1964	270
Israel	1967	80
India	1998	110-120
Pakistan	1998	120--130
North Korea	2006	<10
Total		~19,000

Beginning in 2006, Iran was under strict Security Council sanctions, as well as separate sanctions by the EU and US, for non-compliance with NPT provisions requiring it to refrain from enriching uranium and plutonium to weapons grade and to provide unobstructed access to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.³⁹ In 2015, Iran signed a nuclear deal with six states (the US, Russia, China, France, the UK, and Germany) promising to reduce its nuclear production activity in exchange for the eliminate of sanctions. Iran agreed to reduce the number of centrifuges in its country from nearly 20,000 to a little over 5,000, to eliminate 98% of its supply of nuclear materials, and to restrict uranium enrichment to 3.67%, well below the 90% needed to produce nuclear weapons. In addition, Iran agreed to limit research on nuclear materials. So far, Iran has complied, according to the IAEA.⁴⁰

³⁶ Stephen M. Walt, “Time to get U.S. nukes out of Europe,” *Foreign Policy* blog, 18 April 2012, http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/04/18/a_tactical_nuclear_mistake

³⁷ Norris and Kristensen, “Global nuclear weapons inventories, 1945-2010.”

³⁸ Includes operational strategic, operational non-strategic, reserve/non-deployed, and military stockpile. Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Status of World Nuclear Forces 2012,” FAS, 7 May 2012, <http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/nuclearweapons/nukestatus.html>

³⁹ “Iran’s Nuclear Program,” Times Topics, *New York Times*, 5 October 2012, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear_program/index.html?8qa

⁴⁰ *BBC News*, “Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details,” 16 January 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655>.

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Under the terms of the NPT, peaceful uses of nuclear energy are acceptable, but the acquisition or production of nuclear weapons by states other than those that had them when the treaty was signed is not. When states sign the NPT, they agree to allow the IAEA to visit their nuclear installations to ensure that they are not trying to obtain nuclear weapons⁴¹ and to assess their safety (to avoid nuclear accidents such as occurred in 1979 in the US at Three Mile Island, in 1986 in the former Soviet Union at Chernobyl, and in 2011 in Japan).⁴²

States that wish to produce nuclear energy can purchase or mine uranium and plutonium and use them in nuclear reactors with little refinement. Thus, the main way the IAEA monitors states for possible nuclear weapons production is by looking for signs of enrichment activity. Enrichment is the process by which uranium and plutonium are made more concentrated and, therefore, useful for nuclear weapons. There are several ways to enrich nuclear materials, one of which is to spin it in centrifuges. Hence, the acquisition of centrifuges and the presence of enriched nuclear materials in a country suggest the possibility of nuclear weapons production.⁴³

Between 2006-2017, North Korea has tested nuclear weapons, including a recently developed hydrogen bomb, six times. This makes North Korea the only state to have tested nuclear weapons since 1998.⁴⁴ In early 2017, North Korea stated that it was nearing completion of long-range ballistic missiles that could deliver nuclear warheads intercontinentally. In July 2017, North Korea fired a test missile into the sea of Japan, which experts said could potentially reach Alaska. This was followed by another missile test that flew over Japan in September, along with threats to fire missiles at the US territory of Guam. In response to these actions and threats, US President Donald Trump has warned that the US would be willing to use military action against North Korea if necessary. The Security Council has responded by placing additional sanctions on North Korea's coal, mineral, and seafood imports. The sanctions were supported by China, which has traditionally been one of North Korea's closest allies.⁴⁵

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

From its first session in 1946 to its most recent 71st session in 2016-2017, the GA has passed many resolutions on both general and nuclear disarmament. In addition, it has initiated and affirmed several treaties attempting to limit or ban certain types of weapons, such as land mines, nuclear weapons, and biological and chemical weapons, and has supported the efforts of Latin American, Central Asian, and Middle-Eastern states to declare their regions nuclear-weapons free zones. Beyond its work in promoting treaties related to nuclear weapons, however, the GA has made little progress in controlling the use of nuclear weapons and achieving universal nuclear disarmament, especially with regard to existing nuclear states.⁴⁶

In its first resolution on disarmament (1946), the GA recommended “as an essential step towards the urgent objective of prohibiting and eliminating from national armaments atomic and all other major weapons adaptable

⁴¹ “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).”

⁴² Matthew L. Wald, “Keeping Score on Nuclear Accidents,” Green [blog]. *New York Times*, 12 April 2011, <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/keeping-score-on-nuclear-accidents/>

⁴³ Federation of American Scientists, “Uranium Production,” <http://www.fas.org/nuke/intro/nuke/uranium.htm>, accessed 25 September 2017.

⁴⁴ Arms Control Association, “The Nuclear Testing Tally,” updated September 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nucleartestally>

⁴⁵ “North Korea Profile – Timeline,” *BBC News*, 17 August 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15278612>; “Trump and North Korea War of Words Escalates,” *BBC News*, 24 September 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41377124>.

⁴⁶ Arms Control Association, “Treaties and Agreements.”

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now and in the future to mass destruction, and the early establishment of international control of atomic energy and other modern scientific discoveries to ensure their use only for peaceful purposes.”⁴⁷

In 1998, a group of states known as the New Agenda Coalition began to work together to develop support for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. The group, which initially included Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden, has grown over the years. It is motivated by the belief that “the proposition that nuclear weapons can be retained in perpetuity and never used - accidentally or by decision - defies credibility. The only complete defence is the elimination of nuclear weapons and assurance that they will never be produced again.”⁴⁸

At the GA’s most 70th (2015-2016) session, the New Agenda Coalition sponsored a resolution entitled, “Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments.” The resolution passed with 142 votes in favor, 7 opposed, and 36 abstaining. The states in opposition were the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, France, Russia India, Israel, Pakistan, the UK, and the US. The number of abstaining states increased by about 20 from previous years.⁴⁹

Between 1998 and the present, several UN secretaries-general have taken up the cause of nuclear disarmament. Recently-elected Secretary-General António Guterres continued this trend while attending the Conference on Disarmament in January 2017. While there, he stated that he was “committed to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.”⁵⁰

In 2008, at the request of Costa Rica, the Security Council considered its role in disarmament as articulated under the UN Charter and as exercised since 1945.⁵¹ In September 2009, when the United States held the Security Council presidency, then-US President Barak Obama chaired a rare Security Council session attended by heads of state. At the meeting, the Council passed Resolution S/RES/1887, which urged states to recommit to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, strengthen nuclear inspections, and secure nuclear materials within the next four years.⁵² According to reporter David E. Sanger,

Mr. Obama accomplished that goal in part by acknowledging that the United States was part of the nuclear problem and would have to accept limits on its own arsenal — steps Mr. Bush always rejected. Mr. Obama committed to winning Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, “Principles governing the general regulation and reduction of armaments,” Resolution A/Res/41(1), 14 December 1946, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/41\(1\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/41(1)).

⁴⁸ “Joint Declaration by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of: Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden (The “New Agenda” Coalition),” 9 June 1998, http://www.ccnr.org/8_nation_declaration.html

⁴⁹ UN General Assembly, “On Recommendation of First Committee, General Assembly Adopts More than 50 Drafts, Including New One on ‘Ethical Imperatives’ for Nuclear Disarmament,” Press release GA/11735, 7 December 2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11735.doc.htm>.

⁵⁰ “UN chief Guterres pledges commitment to achieving world free of nuclear weapons,” *UN News Centre*, 24 January 2017, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56029#.Wb4RUMh97IU>.

⁵¹ Security Council Report, “Cross-Cutting Report No. 2: The Security Council’s Role in Disarmament and Arms Control: Nuclear Weapons, Non-Proliferation and other Weapons of Mass Destruction,” 1 September 2009, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/cross-cutting-report/lookup-c-glKWLeMTIsG-b-5405331.php>

⁵² United Nations, *Security Council Resolution 1887*, 24 September 2009, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1887\(2009\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1887(2009)).

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Treaty, which President Bill Clinton could not get through the Senate, and acknowledged that the United States had an obligation under the treaty to move toward elimination of its own arsenal.⁵³

Each year, the GA Plenary receives and passes resolutions on reports from three sub-committees it established to work in this area: the UN Disarmament Commission, the GA-1 (Disarmament and International Security) and the Conference on Disarmament. The purpose of the first is to make recommendations to the GA, the purpose of the second is to “build consensus,” and the purpose of the third is to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties. According to Reaching Critical Will, a non-profit that lobbies for disarmament,

the UN Disarmament Commission and First Committee have in recent years largely become showcases to highlight divisions of governmental opinion on matters of disarmament, non-proliferation, and international security. The Conference on Disarmament, which convened a working group on the item “comprehensive programme for disarmament” between 1980 and 1989, has not adopted a programme of work [agenda] since 1999.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Without the efforts of the General Assembly, nuclear disarmament remains unlikely. More than 45 years after they pledged in the NPT to disarm, the permanent five members of the Security Council have given little indication that they are willing to dismantle their weapons or turn them over to a UN agency to secure and control. Given their inaction, what could and should the GA-1 do to encourage the P-5 and the other nuclear weapons states to do to promote the prohibition of nuclear weapons?

As you write your position paper on this topic, consider the following questions:

- Does your country have nuclear energy and/or nuclear weapons? Why or why not?
- Has your country ratified and is it in compliance with the NPT and other disarmament treaties?
- If your country is a nuclear state, what relationship has it historically had with today’s non-nuclear states? Has it been willing to consider disarmament? Why or why not?
- If your country is not a nuclear state, what relationship has it historically had with today’s nuclear states? Has it agreed to accept their weapons on its territory? Has it been affected by their nuclear tests?
- How did your country react to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and other countries that alleged that it had WMD, to the 2011 nuclear accident in Japan, and to North Korea’s recent nuclear threats and the US’s response to those threats?
- What relationship does your country have with Iran, and what is its position on the Iranian nuclear program and to the recent Iran nuclear deal?
- From your country’s point of view, is nuclear disarmament necessary, possible, and/or desirable? Why or why not? What would be the costs and benefits?
- Is your country a member of the New Agenda Coalition? What could it contribute to advance the cause?
- Would it be better for each country to dismantle its own weapons or turn them over to a re-invigorated Military Staff Committee or some other, new UN agency? If the latter, how should that agency be organized, and what should its responsibilities and capabilities be?
- Would it be easier for disarmament to occur first at the regional level and then internationally, or would it be necessary for all states to disarm at the same time?

Recommended Reading

⁵³ David E. Sanger, “Security Council Adopts Nuclear Arms Measure,” *New York Times*, 24 September 2009; http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/25/world/25prexy.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=obama%20%22security%20council%22&st=cse.

⁵⁴ Reaching Critical Will, “Article 26 of the UN Charter,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, factsheet, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/fact-sheets/critical-issues/4565-article-26>, accessed 25 September 2017.

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Ban Ki-moon. "The United Nations and Security in a Nuclear-Weapon-Free world." Address to the East-West Institute. New York 24 October 2008. Available at <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/sg5point/>.

In this speech, the Secretary General offered a five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament.

BBC News. "[Topic] North Korea." <http://www.bbc.com/news/topics/590ec892-07c1-49d5-b7b7-1de0b05d0500/north-korea>. Accessed 25 September 2017.

This BBC topic page provides recent stories on North Korea. Use it to explore recent actions from North Korea, as well as international reactions and interactions, related to it's nuclear program.

BBC News. "Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details." 16 January 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33521655>.

This article from the BBC provides an excellent overview of Iran's nuclear program, and the Iran nuclear deals implications for the program.

Federation of American Scientists. "Weapons of Mass Destruction Resources." Website. Available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/>

The FAS is a well-respected source of information on nuclear weapons issues, both technical and political.

Gladstone, Rick. "A Treaty Is Reached to Ban Nuclear Arms. Now Comes the Hard Part." New York Times. 7 July 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/07/world/americas/united-nations-nuclear-weapons-prohibition-destruction-global-treaty.html?mcubz=0&_r=0

This article offers a useful overview of the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It includes discussion of the challenges the international community will face in implementing the treaty.

Sagan, Scott D. "The Causes of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation." Annual Review of Political Science. 2011. Available at http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/23205/Sagan_Causesof_NuclearWeaponsProliferation.pdf

This article summarizes political science research about why some states seek nuclear weapons, while others do not. Search on your country's name.

Singh, Jaswant. "Against Nuclear Apartheid." *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (September/October 1998), pp. 41-52. Available at <http://www.fas.org/news/india/1998/09/980900-js-fa.htm>

This article explains why India stopped waiting for the permanent five members of the Security Council to disarm and instead obtained its own nuclear weapons.

"Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons." (2002). UN Department for Disarmament Affairs. Available at <http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPT.shtml>

This site provides the text of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, a list of states that have ratified it, and information on the nuclear activities of most countries in the world and UN efforts to oversee them. For other disarmament treaties, see the source in footnote 39.

United Nations General Assembly. "71st Session: Resolutions." 2016-2017. Available at <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/71>.

This site provides access to the GA's most recent resolutions on disarmament. To find them, search on "disarm" and "nuclear." You can read the text of each resolution, as well as a meeting record and press conference summarizing the debate and voting results; search for your country's name. On the New

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Agenda Coalition, see the source in footnote 48. Additional disarmament statements by individual countries are posted on the website of the UN Conference on Disarmament, [http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/BDF63DF0419D84B7C125798E00329168?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/BDF63DF0419D84B7C125798E00329168?OpenDocument)

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA). Website. Available at <http://www.un.org/disarmament/>

The UNODA is the part of the UN secretariat that is charged with monitoring arms control and disarmament issues and implementing GA and Security Council decisions related to them. This site provides an overview of the issues, as well as the text of important resolutions and reports.

US Strategic Bombing Survey. "Summary Report (Pacific War)." Washington, D.C. 1 July 1946, pp. 23-24. Available at http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/index.php

This document discusses the rationale for and the human, environmental, political, economic, and military effects of the US bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Wald, Matthew L. "Keeping Score on Nuclear Accidents." Green [blog]. *New York Times*. 12 April 2011. Available at <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/keeping-score-on-nuclear-accidents/>

The author lists 12 serious accidents at nuclear energy installations. Search for your country's name. You can use the *New York Times* search feature to find out more about the causes and effects of each accident.

Nuclear Threat Initiative. "New Agenda Coalition." 31 May 2017. <http://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/new-agenda-coalition/>.

This page from the Nuclear Threat Initiative contains details about the New Agenda Coalition including its objectives and history.