



United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

Topic A. Strategies to reinforce efforts towards a world without nuclear weapons

Introduction:

The nuclear bomb was first developed by Gen. Leslie R. Groves and physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer as part of the “Manhattan Project” during World War II. Their technology evolved and nowadays nuclear weapons pose a significant threat to human security. They are widely recognized as the most inhumane and dangerous weapons in existence, with the capability to annihilate entire cities in a matter of seconds, thereby claiming countless innocent lives.

These bombs are primarily designed as missiles and have the potential to cause enduring catastrophic effects, posing a serious threat to the current environmental state. Specifically, when this kind of armament explodes, it releases four different types of energy: a blast wave, intense light, heat, and radiation. Even though nuclear weapons have only been used twice throughout human history in the time of the devastating bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there still are about 13,400 of these weapons in existence, as well as the making of over 2,000 tests globally. For this reason, the United Nations has regulated the use of atomic energy only for peaceful purposes and attempted to eradicate the use of these weapons.¹

In this regard, the United Nations General Assembly in particular is looking forward to reducing or eliminating the use of nuclear weapons by any means, because it has long-term effects on environmental aspects, and it also violates the basic right of living. Considering this, it is crucial to recognize that previous treaties have been established in collaboration with several countries. This is why the General Assembly has reviewed approximately 100 proposals addressing this issue, none of which have had a definitive impact.²

Concepts and definitions:

- **Alliance:** defensive union whose members are committed to safeguarding the freedom and security of each other, against all threats, from all directions.
- **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT):** international treaty, signed in 1996, that bans all nuclear explosions, whether for military or peaceful purposes.

¹*Nuclear Weapons.* (n.d.). UNODA.

<https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/#:~:text=Although%20nuclear%20weapons%20have%20only,nuclear%20tests%20conducted%20to%20date>.

² *General Assembly Adopts over 100 Texts of First, Sixth Committees Tackling Threats from nuclear weapons, International Security, Global Law, Transitional Justice.* (2022, December 7). UN Press. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12478.doc.htm>





- **International Group of Eminent Persons for a world without nuclear weapons (IGEP):** meeting in which participants from both nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, as well as those from countries participating and not participating in the TPNW, exchange ideas beyond their respective national positions and engage in discussions towards the realization of a world without nuclear weapons.
- **Missile:** an object that is thrown, shot, or launched usually to strike something at a distance. Stones, arrows, artillery shells, bullets, and rockets are types of missiles.
- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):** security alliance through which 30 countries from North America and Europe agreed to defend each other against attacks by third parties.
- **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):** significant international treaty with the primary aim of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and related technology.
- **Nuclear weapon:** device designed to release energy in an explosive manner because of nuclear fission, nuclear fusion, or a combination of both. It is also known with the terms "nuclear explosive device", "nuclear bomb" and "atomic bomb".
- **Proliferation:** expansion through the rapid multiplication of components.
- **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT):** international agreement, also recognized as the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), signed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom in 1963 to require parties to abstain from carrying out nuclear explosions in any environment where such explosions could cause radioactive debris outside the limits of the State that conducts the explosions.
- **Tactical nuclear weapon:** any armament that does not fall within the categorization of "strategic" as outlined in arms control agreements between the United States and Russia (such as SALT, SORT, START).
- **Treaty:** a binding formal agreement, contract, or other written instrument that establishes obligations between two or more subjects of international law (primarily States and international organizations) (Shaw, 2023).
- **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):** legally binding international agreement that includes a comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapons activities, which came into force in 2021.

Current issue:

Historically, the evolution of nuclear weapons is linked to the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (1947-1991). This era witnessed the nuclear arms race, during which both countries signed various arms control agreements to manage their rivalry and limit the risk of nuclear war. As the rivalry intensified, both countries were reluctant to develop new and more powerful weapons out of fear of potential attacks. For this reason, the International Atomic Energy Agency was established to oversee civilian nuclear research. Also,





in 1963, the Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States as a response to the concerns of a nuclear fallout.

However, contemporary nuclear weapons are notably larger and more potent. The environmental and health damage caused by nuclear bombs is capable of immediately claiming tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of lives. The immense overpressures result in the destruction of most structures, while temperatures soaring into the thousands of degrees Celsius incinerate any combustible materials, and powerful winds generate firestorms. Given the reason is the ionizing radiation emitted by nuclear weapons due to the unregulated chain reaction of fissile material, leads to immediate and prolonged illnesses, often fatal, along with health effects that can extend across generations, affecting both genetics and subsequent generations.

Currently, there are officially nine States that possess nuclear arms, who collectively hold over 14,000 warheads (IPPNW, 2020). So, unfortunately, the use of nuclear weapons is not unthinkable; it is a very real threat that needs to be addressed. In this regard, the Assembly has called upon all States to exert efforts to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again or, at the very least, to reduce their usage and the impact they have on society. It also condemns the use of nuclear weapons as a violation of human conscience and human rights.³

Actually, there has been a threat to use these weapons in contemporary confrontations such as the invasion of Russia in Ukraine or different conflicts in the Middle East, which emphasizes the importance of combating and regulating the use and distribution of nuclear weapons. The United Nations has responded alarmingly to these threats because they could cause millions of human casualties and other catastrophic consequences.

Taking this into account, several treaties have been developed collaboratively to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again. As many nations are presently taking actions to address the situation, numerous documents have been created to resolve this issue. Some of the most relevant treaties that have been made to deal with the difficult circumstances are the Non-Proliferation Treaty of nuclear weapons (NPT), The Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Test in The Atmosphere, In Outer Space, And Under Water or Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Comprehensive-Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

Specifically, the NPT is an agreement that seeks to promote collaboration in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy and advance the objective of achieving both nuclear disarmament and comprehensive disarmament. The document also stipulates that there must be a review of the Treaty's operation every five years, emphasizing the importance of evaluating the deterrents of each country and addressing them. It plays a crucial role in supporting and shaping disarmament norms through various means.

³ Loretz, J. (2020, December 14). *International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War*. <https://www.ippnw.org/programs/nuclear-weapons-abolition/nuclear-weapons-facts>





Furthermore, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), created by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1998, promotes disarmament through dialogue, transparency, and confidence-building in military matters. It also encourages regional disarmament efforts and participates in initiatives such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and regional forums.

In addition, it provides unbiased and current information on multilateral disarmament issues to a wide range of stakeholders, including Members States, parties to multilateral agreements, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations departments and agencies, research and educational institutions, civil society, the media, and the public. It also actively supports the development and implementation of practical disarmament measures post-conflict, such as disarming and demobilizing former combatants, and facilitating their reintegration into civil society.

Moreover, when discussing disarmament, legal issues and other works, the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which has been active for over five years, is considered in conversations about actions that should be taken against the unethical use of nuclear weapons, including the regulation of international weapon transfers.

That being said, it is crucial to acknowledge that conflict resolution should always be pursued using all available means to reach a peaceful settlement and adhere to diplomatic protocol and international law. Nevertheless, despite the number of international documents and efforts to promote and enforce disarmament, which should be the most effective strategy to achieve a world without nuclear weapons, the menace of the use of this type of weapons remains latent due to the continued resistance by some nations of the world to abide by what was agreed upon. For example, the 2015 Review Conference was unable to reach an agreement on the substantive part of the draft outcome document.

That is the reason why the General Assembly keeps making efforts to highlight the importance of the problem, as well as consolidate the agreements that have been reached so far. For instance, in a resolution that was adopted without making any votes, *“The rule of law at the national and international levels”*, the General Assembly recognized that seeking to restore the confidence in the rule of law was an important key element of transitional justice.

Also, emphasizing the importance of sharing inclusive conversations, the Assembly requested Member States to voluntarily exchange relevant national practices in informal meetings, with the support of an electronic depository on the United Nations rule-of-law website. This urges State Members to share their own country's politics to reach better settlements and solutions to these problems, making law and international treaties a key element to discuss nuclear weapons.





International initiatives:

- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO):**

One of the most robust international initiatives on this matter is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Its cooperation regarding nuclear weapons prioritizes objectives such as maintaining nuclear capabilities to uphold peace, thwart coercion, and discourage aggression. If nuclear weapons exist, NATO will persist as a nuclear alliance, that aspires to contribute to a safer global environment for everyone and aims to establish security conditions conducive to a world free of nuclear weapons.

In alignment with the alliance, the Government of Japan established the International Group of Eminent Persons (for a world without nuclear weapons) as an opportunity for participants from both nuclear-armed and non-nuclear-armed States to exchange ideas and thoughts beyond their respective national positions. The goal is to engage in candid discussions concerning a concrete path toward the realization of a world without nuclear weapons.

The Strategic Concept states that “NATO will take all necessary steps to ensure the credibility, effectiveness, safety, and security of the nuclear deterrent mission. The Alliance is committed to ensuring greater integration and coherence of capabilities and activities across all domains and the spectrum of conflict, while reaffirming the unique and distinct role of nuclear deterrence. NATO will continue to maintain credible deterrence, strengthen its strategic communications, enhance the effectiveness of its exercises, and reduce strategic risks”.⁴ In this regard, NATO’s nuclear policy is established by the Heads of State and Government and is the responsibility of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), of which all allies except France are members.

- **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):**

It is an agreement that aims to encourage cooperation in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy and promote the goal of achieving both nuclear disarmament and comprehensive disarmament. It also represents the sole binding commitment within a multilateral agreement wherein States possessing nuclear weapons are committed to disarmament.

Initially opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty came into force in 1970. On May 11, 1995, it was extended indefinitely. Currently, 191 States, including five nuclear-weapon States, are parties to the Treaty, rendering it one of the most fundamental pacts.

The meetings established by the NPT have been held every five years through Review Conferences. The preparation process for the 2026 review is currently underway. The objective of each of them is to update the situation of each country and the development of

⁴ *NATO’s nuclear deterrence policy and forces.* (n.d.). NATO.
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm





the pact in each of them, as well as to identify those problems that may prevent the agreement from being implemented in a country.

- **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT):**

It mandates signatory nations to prohibit, prevent, and refrain from conducting nuclear weapons tests or any nuclear explosions in the atmosphere, outer space, underwater, or any environment that results in the presence of radioactive debris beyond the territorial boundaries of the State conducting the explosion.

- **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):**

It is a legally binding document working towards the prohibition of nuclear weapons leading to total elimination. Its relevance is partly due to how current its dispositions are since it entered into force on January 22nd, 2021. Moreover, it comprises a comprehensive set of prohibitions on engagement in any nuclear weapon-related activities. These prohibitions encompass commitments to refrain from developing, testing, producing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, using, or threatening to use nuclear weapons.

The agreement also forbids the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State engaging in prohibited activities. State parties to the treaty are mandated to prevent and suppress any prohibited activities within their jurisdiction or control. Additionally, the treaty obliges States to offer adequate assistance to individuals affected by nuclear weapon use or testing and to implement necessary environmental remediation measures in areas under their jurisdiction or control contaminated due to nuclear weapon-related activities.

- **UNODA's research:**

Each year the UNODA releases a book regarding nuclear weapons with the purpose of being a brief reference resource intended for diplomats, researchers, students, and the public. It covers topics related to disarmament, nonproliferation, and arms control currently under consideration by the international community.

Guiding questions:

1. What is the problem related to nuclear weapons?
2. What is the status of nuclear weapons in today's world?
3. Does your delegation hold nuclear weapons?
4. What is your delegation's policy on the use of nuclear weapons?
5. How can we reinforce international treaties initiatives and put them into practice?
6. What is your delegation's position on the use of nuclear weapons during war?
7. Does your delegation believe that nuclear energy or nuclear weapons could have another use that benefits humanity?





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