

Nuclear disarmament : United Nations General Assembly 2007

Preamble: Explanation of useful Terms

The **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)** is the principal organ of the United Nations. It decides the budget, the non-permanent members of the Security Council and has the ability to pass resolutions. Those resolutions are recommendations for national and international policies. Every state has one vote in the UNGA. The UNGA has annual sessions from September to December. To coordinate and prepare the work of the UNGA, it has six committees.

CTBT	Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FC	First Committee
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
FMCT	Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty
MANPAD	Man Portable Air-defence System
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NWFZ	Nuclear Weapons Free Zone
NWS	Nuclear Weapons State
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

The **First Committee, on Disarmament (FC)** is part of the UNGA. During the committee's sessions, resolutions tabled by UN member states on disarmament and related issues are discussed. The sessions are held before the UNGA has disarmament issues on its timetable. All the resolutions have to be adopted by the committee before being presented in the General Assembly. The votes of the states barely change between the FC and the UNGA; most of the discussion takes place in the FC.

Decision Making

In both organs, resolutions can be **Adopted without a Vote** if there is a consensus between all states. If no consensus can be reached during the discussion there is a **vote on the resolution**. If the majority of the states support the resolution, it is adopted.

International Framework

For nuclear disarmament, the **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** provides the main international framework. Its goals are the prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapon technologies to other countries except five Nuclear Weapons States (NWS), the peaceful use of nuclear energy and nuclear disarmament. The NWS are USA, Russia, UK, France, China which had nuclear weapons before January 1st 1967. Other states are not allowed to possess or to develop nuclear weapons if they have ratified the treaty. The treaty entered into force in 1970.

The **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** is an international treaty to stop nuclear explosions in the environment. It was opened for signature in 1996 but has still not entered into force because it has still not been ratified by some of the required states

There are two institutions that negotiate international treaties on disarmament. The **Conference on Disarmament (CD)** is the successor of different Committees on Disarmament. It is formally independent from the UN but the CD's secretary general is a representative of the UN Secretary General. Currently there are 65 member states. Successful results of the negotiations are the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the CTBT.

The **United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC)** is part of the UNGA. It makes recommendations on issues related to disarmament for the General Assembly. All UN member states are part of the UNDC, which meets at the beginning of each year.

Introduction

In the 2007 session of UNGA new resolutions were introduced, alongside resolutions that are introduced each year. A resolution dealing with the health risks of depleted uranium gained unexpected success and a broader discussion occurred in the FC on the de-alerting of nuclear weapons. In the FC, a total of 315 statements were made and 52 draft texts discussed. Every resolution the FC dealt with was adopted either by consensus or by majorities of the countries in the UNGA. Nearly every resolution dealing with a topic related to nuclear weapons was opposed by the US and in most cases Israel also. Therefore the United States isolated itself from the global framework of nuclear disarmament. Besides these resolutions, discussions about the nuclear weapons programme of Iran and the DPRK were a major focus this year. This short summary gives a brief insight into the presentations and voting results of those resolutions concerning nuclear issues. The voting results are those of the UNGA, but the progress to the votes in the FC is also discussed.

Depleted uranium

Depleted uranium is used in weapons by US and British forces. The key aim of those weapons is to more effectively penetrate heavy armour. Depleted uranium is a waste by-product of enrichment facilities and has high physical density, which makes it attractive for projectiles. The radiation and dust that is emitted during the use of these weapons could be a risk for health and the environment. Resolution L.18, "Effects of the use of armaments and ammunitions containing depleted uranium"¹ was tabled by Cuba. It calls upon the Secretary General to submit a report about the effects on health and the environment of the use of depleted uranium to the General Assembly. In the original resolution there was an additional paragraph that requested member states to stop the use of depleted uranium until the studies of the impacts were completed. This paragraph was deleted and a revised resolution² was proposed by Indonesia for the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. The resolution was adopted with 136 states voting in favour and 5 against (Israel, The Netherlands, United States, United Kingdom, Czech Republic. France voted against in the FC but abstained in the UNGA). Thirty-six states abstained, including most of the NATO states, with Italy and Germany voting in favour. In their explanation of their vote the US delegation stated that enough research had been done in the past with results indicating that there were no environmental or health risks.

Operational Status of Nuclear Weapons

Two resolutions dealt with the operational status of nuclear weapons. Currently, there are approximately 4000 nuclear weapons on high alert. Those weapons can be launched in minutes to counter a foreign attack. A decrease in the readiness of weapons would immediately increase global security as it would reduce the opportunity to launch by accident or miscalculation.

Two resolutions dealt with this issue. One resolution sponsored by India (L.21, "Reducing nuclear danger"³) was identical to their 2006 resolution. It was adopted by the UNGA but 52 states voted against and 12 abstained. The text contained the term "hair-trigger alert" for nuclear weapons which is a term not accepted by some states. In their statement to the First Committee, the US Ambassador Mrs. Rocca said: "the US forces are not, and never have been, on hair-trigger alert. In order to comply with this request we would have to first put our forces on hair-trigger alert so that we could then de-alert them."⁴ The United States

1 [A/C.1/62/L.18](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L18.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L18.pdf>)

2 [A/C.1/62/L.17/Rev.1](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17Rev1.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17Rev1.pdf>)

3 [A/C.1/62/L.21](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L21.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L21.pdf>)

4 Statement in the General Debate of First Committee, 09/10/2007, H.E. Christina Rocca, <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/statements/9octusa.pdf>

have a large number of nuclear weapons ready to be launched in minutes⁵, so many would challenge the accuracy of this statement.

The second resolution by Chile, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland received support from more UN member states. As India's resolution, it called for the decrease of readiness of weapons to protect the world from unintentional or accidental use.

Additionally it invited states to negotiate bilateral agreements and welcomed the de-alerting as a possibility for confidence building between Nuclear Weapon States and Non-Nuclear Weapon States. The resolution was written in a tone more acceptable to member states, so 139 states voted in favour (including Italy and Germany, both states hosting US nuclear weapons), only three voted against (France, United Kingdom, United States) and 36 nations abstained.

Nuclear weapons in Middle East

Two resolutions considered nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Nuclear weapon free zones around the world play an important role in nuclear disarmament. Resolution L.1 “Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the region of the Middle East”⁶ was sponsored by Egypt. The resolution was adopted by the UNGA without a vote. Israel explained in the FC that it doesn't want to break the consensus but is sceptical about the installation of a nuclear weapon free zone. The process of arms control “clearly cannot begin in situations where some of the parties concerned still maintain a state of war with each other”.⁷ This despite Israel's admission that it possesses nuclear weapons and that it would have to renounce them before a NWFZ in Middle East could be established. The country is also one of the few states, and the only state in the Middle East, which has not signed the NPT.

The second resolution “The risk of proliferation in Middle East” requests Israel to ratify the treaty and place its nuclear facilities under the control of safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA). The vote resulted in 170 states supporting the resolution, five (Israel, USA and FSM, Marshall Islands, Palau) opposing it and 7 states abstaining. In the discussions about this resolution in the FC, many nations including Canada and the European Union raised the question why it only addressed Israel and not also Iran. Iran has ratified the treaty but is alleged by the US to have moved towards violating it by secretly building up uranium enrichment facilities.

Southern hemisphere nuclear weapons free

There are a number of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZs) covering parts of the southern hemisphere. The Treaty of Tlatelolco sets up a NWFZ in Latin America. The resolution L.10 “Consolidation of the regime established by the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco)”⁸ calls again upon the states in Latin America to ratify this treaty.

For the NWFZ in Africa the resolution L.26 “African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty”⁹ was tabled again to remind those African states which have not done so to join the Treaty of Pelindaba. Those two resolutions were adopted without a vote in the General Assembly.

5 See Hans Kristensen (http://www.lcnp.org/disarmament/kristensen-rebuttal_oct07.pdf) and Bruce Blair (<http://www.lcnp.org/disarmament/opstatus-blair.htm>)

6 [A/C.1/62/L.1](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L1.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L1.pdf>)

7 Meir Itzhaki, Representative of Israel, Explanation of vote of Israel to the Conference on Disarmament

8 [A/C.1/62/L.10](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L10.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L10.pdf>)

9 [A/C.1/62/L.26](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L26.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L26.pdf>)

However there was a vote on Resolution L.19 “Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (Bangkok Treaty)”¹⁰ with 174 states favouring the resolution, one voting against it (USA) and five abstaining. Part of this resolution was a call upon the Nuclear-Weapon-States (NWS) to declare that they would not criticise the treaty and its protocols. In explanation of its vote in the FC, the US delegation explained their vote against it by referring to the need for consultations between the nations which are signatories of the treaty and the NWS.

With the resolution L.27 “Nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and adjacent areas”¹¹ Brazil and New Zealand called the states in the southern hemisphere to connect the NWFZs in this half of the world to make the whole hemisphere a NWFZ. Besides the NWFZs mentioned above, the NWFZ of South Pacific (Treaty of Rarotonga) and the Antarctic Treaty are referred to in the resolution. It also welcomes other approaches like the negotiation of a NWFZ in the Middle East, and the NWFZ in central Asia (Semipalatinsk Treaty). The result of the vote for this resolution was 169 in favour, three against (UK, USA and France) and eight abstentions. In the explanation of the vote by the UK, USA and France, given by France, the states explained that this resolution would probably contradict the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. It further stated: “We question, therefore, whether the real goal of this draft resolution is in fact the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone covering the high seas.”¹²

Nuclear Disarmament

On the issue of Nuclear Disarmament, four resolutions were tabled. In similar forms, all resolutions had been discussed during First Committee meetings in earlier years, so they introduced no new ideas for global disarmament.

Resolutions L.9 “Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments”¹³ (tabled by the New Agenda coalition¹⁴) and L.30 “Renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons”¹⁵ (by Japan) were comprehensive resolutions to continue the non-proliferation and disarmament activities as negotiated in the NPT and to lead for a constructive NPT review conference in 2010.

Resolution L.9 saw the NPT as a centrepiece of disarmament and calling for a acceleration in disarmament was adopted with 156 votes in favour, 5 against (DPRK, France, UK, USA, India) and 14 abstentions. India explained that it could not ratify the NPT as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State, so it voted against the resolution.

Resolution L.30 called upon all states to ratify the CTBT and start negotiations about a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). Unsurprisingly, the United States opposed this resolution like the year before, but they referred to the draft as the “most balanced and realistic” of the nuclear disarmament texts. The complete result of the vote showed 170 states supporting this draft, three opposing it (USA, DPRK, India) and nine abstentions.

10 [A/C.1/62/L.19](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L19.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L19.pdf>)
revised resolution: [A/C.1/62/L.19/Rev.1](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L19Rev1.pdf)

11 [A/C.1/62/L.27](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L27.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L27.pdf>)

12 Jean Francois Debelle, Joint explanation of vote: Draft resolution 27
(<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/EOV/L27france.pdf>)

13 [A/C.1/62/L.9](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L9.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L9.pdf>)

14 The New Agenda Coalition is a coalition between Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and Sweden which wants to make a progress on nuclear disarmament.

15 [A/C.1/62/L.30](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L30.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L30.pdf>)

In resolution L.40 “General and complete disarmament: nuclear disarmament”, which related to continuing the work on the NPT, one can also find initiatives that are currently not part of a treaty. Besides others, it urges NWS to start negotiations with other NWS to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in arsenals. One hundred and seventeen states agreed with this resolution, 47 opposed it and 17 abstained.

The fourth resolution dealing with Nuclear Disarmament and the NPT was L.8 “Follow-up to nuclear disarmament obligations agreed to at the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”, tabled by Iran and containing the same text as the resolution in 2005. It calls upon all states to continue the disarmament progress within the NPT and to ratify the NPT, if they have not yet done so. In the FC this resolution was barely discussed and the delegations tried to complete the topic quickly, because they didn't want to agree with Iran or to recognise Iran as a “guardian” of the NPT. Fifty states including most of the NATO states opposed this resolution, 114 states supported it and there were 10 abstentions.

Disarmament Machinery

The Disarmament Machinery of the United Nations consists mainly of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC). For this year's First Committee session, both institution's reports were presented as resolutions, as in previous years (CD Report: L.11¹⁶, UNDC Report: L.3¹⁷) and both were adopted without a vote.

The USA criticized the UNDC for electing a representative from Iran as vice-chair. Resolution L.17 called again (as per last year) for a fourth Special Session on Disarmament of the General Assembly¹⁸. It was adopted with only the USA voting against.

Many delegations complained about the slow progress on negotiating treaties in both institutions. Those complaints are made each year, this year with a special focus on the stalemate in the CD. While many delegations are calling for changes in the Disarmament Machinery, there were no new ideas how to improve the system, which has been stalled for the last years. The simplest way of breaking the deadlock would simply be to remove the rule that decisions must be made by consensus.

Outer Space

On this year's agenda, there were two resolutions dealing with outer space security issues. Resolution L.34 “Prevention of an arms race in outer space”¹⁹ calls the states, particularly those with major space capabilities, to secure the peaceful use of outer space. The resolution was successful with 178 states supporting it. Only the United States opposed and Israel abstained.

Both states behaved similarly regarding resolution L.41 “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities”²⁰ and gave no explanations of the reasons for their votes. Independently, the second resolution was as successful as the first with support from 179 states. Its key objective is the invitation of all states “to continue to submit to the Secretary-General concrete proposals on international outer space transparency and confidence-building measures”. Both resolutions were nearly the same as in the previous year's UNGA meeting.

16 [A/C.1/62/L.11](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L11.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L11.pdf>)

17 [A/C.1/62/L.3](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L3.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L3.pdf>)

18 [A/C.1/62/L.17](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17.pdf>)
revised resolution: [A/C.1/62/L.17/Rev.1](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17Rev1.pdf)

(<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L17Rev1.pdf>)

19 [A/C.1/62/L.34](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L34.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L34.pdf>)

20 [A/C.1/62/L.41](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L41.pdf) (<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com07/res/L41.pdf>)

Conclusion

In total, the UNGA dealt with 52 resolutions on disarmament. Most of these have been presented over many years, mostly with consistent results over time. But the tabling of new resolutions like the resolution on depleted uranium, suggests we are moving forward on the issue of nuclear abolition. The UN disarmament machinery, which played an important role for international negotiations some years ago, is nearly stalemated in the moment. New ideas for those organisations are needed, to make them again effective tools for disarmament.

Nearly every resolution dealing with nuclear weapons was opposed by the US delegation, often by them alone. This reflects the isolated position that the US has placed itself in. Other states generally acted in groups, and often there was a split between the world and the NATO states. Symbolic can be the resolution tabled by Iran, which should be supported by every nation but the NATO states refused to support Iran.

Despite this, all resolutions regarding nuclear weapons were adopted. Together with the increase of supporting states for some of them, this years UNGA indicates some progress on the long way to a nuclear weapons free world.