

“Revitalizing Nuclear Disarmament”
The 50th Anniversary of the Pugwash Conferences
5-7 July 2007, Pugwash, Nova Scotia

Plenary III — How Non-Nuclear Weapon States Can Advance Nuclear Disarmament

July 7, 2007

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Most non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) have little interest in nuclear disarmament issues. Those that are concerned can do very little to advance nuclear disarmament but they can certainly do much more than they have done in the recent past. The nuclear disarmament items on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) offer a good starting point. The resolutions approved year after year by a vote can serve to measure a country’s commitment to nuclear disarmament.

The yearly ritual at the UNGA is certainly a repetitive exercise but therein lies its value to ascertain changes in the voting patterns. It is useful to see what has happened with regard to nuclear issues at the UNGA since 1999, the year before the NPT’s Review Conference’s relative success. To do this, we shall rely on two tools of analysis that we developed some years ago: the Coincidence Index (CI) and the median of that CI¹.

The median of the CI among all UN members on all resolutions has dropped from 875 in 1999 to 868 in 2006. In contrast, in 1999 the CI median for all members on nuclear disarmament resolutions was 818, while among the then 19 members of NATO it was 958. In 2006, the median of the CI for all members on those resolutions was 850, while among the 26 members of NATO it was 964. In other words, over the past eight years the IC median on nuclear issues has increased among NATO members and UN members as well.

¹ To determine the CI, begin by eliminating those votes in which one (or both) of the countries being compared was absent. Then add all those times in which they voted the same: Yes/Yes, No/No or Abstention/Abstention. To each of those “coinciding” or identical votes assign a value of two; and, in order to differentiate between a Yes/No, on the one hand, and a Yes/Abstention or a No/Abstention, on the other, assign to the latter a value of one. The formula is quite simple:

$$CI = \frac{2 (\text{total identical votes}) + (\text{total Abstention/Yes} + \text{Abstention/No})}{2 (\text{total resolutions both voted})}$$

The CI is only a tool for comparing the votes of any two given States. It does not pretend to judge the content of the resolution being voted. That would be an exercise fraught with danger. It simply takes into account how often the votes were identical (Yes/Yes, No/No and Abs/Abs), different (Abstention/Yes or Abstention/No) or opposite (Yes/No).

The basic tool employed in comparing votes is the median, or the point at which UN Member States are divided into two equal parts.

The nuclear disarmament resolutions for 1999 and 2006 are listed in the Annex as are the countries that voted against them. Those votes should be turned into talking points for NNWS leaders so that they can raise these issues both with nuclear-weapon States (NWS) and those NNWS that do not support all nuclear disarmament resolutions. For example, Austria, Ireland, and Sweden have voted consistently against two resolutions: “Reducing nuclear danger” and “Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons”. For years New Zealand has also voted against the second and later joined them in opposing the first. There are many more questions regarding the voting patterns on nuclear disarmament issues that should be raised bilaterally.

In sum, NNWS interested in nuclear disarmament issues should strive to educate other NNWS. They should also raise these issues bilaterally with NWS and members of NATO. This is something that has rarely been done.

ANNEX

At the 54th UN General Assembly, in the fall of 1999 and on the eve of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the following twelve resolutions on nuclear issues were put to a vote:

Number 54/	Item	Votes against
63	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty	0
54 D	Nuclear disarmament with a view to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons	0
52	Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons	0
26	IAEA report	1
54 G	Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda	13
54 Q	Follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons	28
57	The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East	3
54 L	Nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and adjacent areas	3
54 A	Preservation of and compliance with the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems	4
54 P	Nuclear disarmament	41
55 D	Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons	42
54 K	Reducing nuclear danger	43

Of the UN’s then 188 members, 49 voted against at least one of those resolutions. The United States voted against eight of them. There were 139 UN members that did not cast a negative vote against those fourteen resolutions.

At the 61st UNGA there were 14 resolutions on nuclear issues that were put to a vote:

Number 61/ 61/	Item	Votes against
70	2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and its Preparatory Committee	0
8	Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency	1
57	Conclusion of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons	1
47	Cooperation between the UN and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization	1
104	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty	2
88	Establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia	3
69	Nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere and adjacent areas	3
74	Renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons	4
103	The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East	5
65	Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments	7
83	Follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the <i>Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons</i>	27
78	Nuclear disarmament	48
85	Reducing nuclear danger	52
97	Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons	52

Of the UN's 192 members, 57 voted against at least one of those resolutions. The United States voted against twelve of them. There were 135 UN members that did not cast a negative vote against those fourteen resolutions.

Median of New Agenda nations in 2006 on nuclear disarmament issues was 821. Individual IC:

	Brazil	Egypt	Ireland	Mexico	New Zealand	South Africa	Sweden
Brazil		964	786	1000	821	964	786
Egypt	964		750	962	786	929	750
Ireland	786	750		769	964	821	1000
Mexico	1000	962	769		808	962	769
New Zealand	821	786	964	808		857	964
South Africa	964	929	821	962	857		821
Sweden	786	750	1000	769	964	821	