

# No Respect for U.S. Nonproliferation

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[http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/05/26/no\\_respect\\_for\\_us\\_nonproliferation\\_107974.html](http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/05/26/no_respect_for_us_nonproliferation_107974.html)



It seems like the whole world has been chastising the United States lately for not cutting its nuclear arsenal deeply enough, quickly enough. In response, you could almost hear the U.S. representatives at the [recently concluded](#) United Nations Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference channel Rodney Dangerfield's famous one-liner, "I don't get no respect!"

If there is one nation that deserves respect when it comes to disarmament and nonproliferation, however, it is the United States. No other nation has been as willing and transparent in its nuclear cuts as the United States. So why is there still so much denunciation?

Domestic critics and other nations claim indignantly that the United States is not doing enough to uphold the NPT because they believe that partial disarmament is never enough. Despite spending [billions of dollars](#) on nonproliferation programs, cutting its nuclear stockpile [by 85%](#), and leading the world in [stockpile transparency](#), nuclear disarmament advocates still accuse the United States of being a barrier to further disarmament.

It is easier, in their minds, to criticize the United States for not being productive enough rather than address the true obstacles to disarmament progress: Russia and China.

Since the conclusion of the 2015 NPT Review Conference is widely [viewed](#) as a [failure](#), countries and organizations concerned with nonproliferation now have a chance to press for productive changes in international behavior that may create the conditions for a successful Review Conference in 2020.

If nuclear disarmament advocates really want to strengthen the NPT's Article VI on nuclear disarmament, they must first call out and generate international consensus against the counterproductive Russian and Chinese actions that work against the treaty's principles and purposes.

For example, Russia [has violated](#) the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty by possessing a new ground-launched cruise missile that could fly further than the allowed range. In addition, Russian tests of its new RS-26 ICBM [appear to be in violation](#) of the spirit, if not the law, of the INF Treaty.

Russian officials have also rejected the U.S. offer for further nuclear reductions with a firm "nyet," with one diplomat [saying](#), "... our country has virtually exhausted the possibilities to reduce our nuclear arsenal on a bilateral basis with the USA."

In a similar manner, China is [reportedly](#) increasing the number of nuclear warheads in its arsenal leading the U.S. Air Force to [assess](#), "The number of Chinese ICBM nuclear warheads capable of reaching the United States could expand to well over 100 within the next 15 years."

China, in fact, is the only original nuclear power signatory to the NPT that is qualitatively and quantitatively increasing its nuclear forces. Chinese diplomats claim they will join multilateral nuclear disarmament talks "[when the conditions are ripe](#)," yet these conditions are never fully explained.

Now the Obama administration stands at an impasse. Domestic nuclear disarmament groups are [pressuring](#) it to "curtail its modernization efforts" and take other [unilateral steps](#) in order to enlighten Russian and Chinese leaders, and perhaps show them a better way to manage their security. This would be an admirable notion if foreign leaders aligned their national interests with those of the United States simply because they knew U.S. intentions were good.

The historical record, however, gives us no confidence in these optimistic assumptions.

The United States, beginning in the late 1980s, has been steadily reducing the number and types of nuclear weapons in its arsenal, an almost 80% cut over a 25 year period.

And how have other nations responded to this display of U.S. good faith? The answer is not in the way nuclear disarmament groups wish.

North Korea began and expanded their nuclear weapons program in the early 1990s as the United States unilaterally withdrew its tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula. Then, North Korea completely withdrew from the NPT in 2003. Now the Pentagon believes North Korea may be capable of miniaturizing its nuclear warheads and [placing them](#) on an ICBM, not a pleasant thought considering their threats to turn the United States into a "[sea of fire](#)."

Russia has made numerous [nuclear threats](#) against NATO allies, China has [made](#) investments in its expanding nuclear force for the long-run, and Iran has [flouted](#) its NPT obligations.

All of these counterproductive actions have taken place during an enormous drawdown in U.S. nuclear weapon numbers and a U.S. [pledge](#) not to produce new nuclear capabilities.

The United States has led the way in nonproliferation and disarmament for decades, so when nations such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran choose to stray from the narrow path, we can be confident it is not because of a lack of U.S. effort. The reason is much simpler, it is in their national interest to do so, and well-intentioned unilateral U.S. concessions will probably not change their calculus.

The NPT Review Conference is an important forum on the most serious of subjects, nuclear weapons. Since it is a “review” conference however, representatives from all nations and non-governmental organizations would have done well to review the actions of the most flagrant NPT violators and formulate ways to place international pressure on them.

And no, signing a [strongly-worded pledge](#) to outlaw nuclear weapons will not be enough to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin into changing his ways. International pressure, like nuclear weapons, must threaten what offending nations hold dear, which in this case may be their pocketbooks. If the international community is serious about enforcing NPT commitments, let them put their money where their mouth is and impose focused economic sanctions against the offenders in order to influence their national interests in the direction of compliance. Sanctions may not be a decisive factor in changing counterproductive behavior, but it sends a stronger message than any toothless diplomatic letter could.

It is a sad commentary on a backwards world when nations criticize the international leader in nonproliferation while refraining from censuring arms control violators too harshly, for fear of imperiling future arms control agreements. The United States should be proud of its nonproliferation accomplishments and challenge those who question its commitment to turn their anger into action against the nations which are the real barriers to a more stable and peaceful world.

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