



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 7986, 16 November 2020

Negotiating a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

By Claire Mills

On 24 October 2020 the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) was ratified by its 50th State Party. This means that the treaty will now enter into force on 22 January 2021. It is the first multilateral, legally-binding, instrument for nuclear disarmament to have been negotiated in 20 years.

However, while the treaty bans the possession of nuclear weapons, none of the world's nuclear weapon states¹ are signatories to it. They are not, therefore, bound by its provisions and there is no obligation on them to disarm.

Without the participation of the nuclear weapon states there are fears that the treaty will be symbolic and play no useful role in nuclear disarmament. Advocates of the treaty argue however, that it establishes an international norm which will, in the longer term, pressure the nuclear states, and their allies, to alter their perceptions and behaviour.

1.1 Background

For decades there had been a distinct lack of progress on nuclear disarmament within the UN-mandated [Conference on Disarmament](#), the body responsible for pursuing and negotiating disarmament measures.² The nuclear weapon states have also been criticised for pursuing modernisation, and in some cases expansion, of their nuclear capabilities, at the expense of disarmament – a pursuit which critics argue places them in contravention of their obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The humanitarian initiative

In 2010, a general frustration at the lack of disarmament progress and the inertia that had developed within the existing multilateral arms control architecture, prompted the non-nuclear weapon states, in

Article VI, NPT

Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.

¹ The five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the P5): the United States, Russia, China, France and the UK, who are the only officially recognised nuclear weapon states under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), along with the de facto nuclear weapon states: India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. The distinction between their nuclear status is examined in the greater detail in House of Commons Library briefing [CBP07566, Nuclear weapons – country comparisons](#).

² The Conference on Disarmament was responsible for negotiating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and both the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions.

2 Negotiating a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

concert with NGOs and other civil society stakeholders, to pursue a new initiative: the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons (HINW).³

First acknowledged in the Final Declaration of the 2010 NPT Review Conference the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons subsequently became a major theme of the NPT Review Conference Preparatory Committees and the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament. Sixteen countries delivered a [joint statement](#) to the 2012 NPT Preparatory Committee⁴ on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament and called for all states to “intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons”. Those sentiments were echoed in a [further statement](#) from 35 countries to the meeting of the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament in October 2012. By the time of Committee’s 2013 meeting, 125 countries had put their names to a [Joint Statement](#).⁵ Specifically that statement noted that while the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons had been reflected in numerous UN resolutions and multilateral instruments, including the NPT, the “humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have not been at the core of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation deliberations for many years”.

Over the course of 2013 and 2014 three international conferences were held on this issue. The conferences were considered historic as they brought together stakeholders from across the whole of society for the first time. Of the nuclear weapon states, only India and Pakistan participated in all three conferences. The US and the UK attended the last conference in Vienna in 2014 but made clear their view that it was not “the appropriate venue for disarmament negotiations or pre-negotiation discussions”.⁶

The [Final Report](#) of the conferences set out eight substantive conclusions. While noting that “the only assurance against the risk of a nuclear weapon detonation is the total elimination of nuclear weapons” the Final Report did not, however, set out any agreement on achieving that aim.

On the back of the final conference, the Austrian government issued a [‘National Pledge’](#), which has since become known as the Humanitarian Pledge. While not calling specifically for any new treaty, commentators widely interpreted it as a first step towards efforts to establish a treaty banning nuclear weapons.⁷

In December 2015 that pledge was formally adopted at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) as [Resolution 70/48](#).

127 nations formally endorsed the pledge, while a further 22 nations also voted for its adoption in the UNGA. None of the nine nuclear weapon states acknowledged the pledge and at the UNGA vote in December 2015 China, North Korea, Pakistan and India abstained; while the US, UK, Russia, France and Israel voted against the resolution.

The UN’s Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament

The groundswell of support among non-nuclear weapon states for greater disarmament efforts, also prompted the UN General Assembly to adopt [Resolution 67/56](#) in December 2012. That Resolution established an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to “develop

³ A similar approach was adopted in the 1990s with respect to landmines which ultimately led to the *Mine Ban Convention 1997*. Similarly, a ban on cluster munitions was achieved as a result of a humanitarian approach. The *Convention on Cluster Munitions* was subsequently adopted in 2008.

⁴ This was the first of three Preparatory Committees held in advance of the 2015 NPT Review Conference

⁵ At the 2013 NPT Preparatory Committee Session 80 countries had signed the statement.

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/11/233868.htm>

⁷ “NPT review: failure underlines challenges ahead”, *Strategic Comments*, 4 June 2015

proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons".⁸

Along with the Humanitarian Initiative, the nuclear weapon states regarded the OEWG as a potential shortcut to launching negotiations of a nuclear weapons convention or ban treaty, which they have long resisted.⁹ They subsequently boycotted the OEWG when it met over the course of Spring/Summer 2013.

The OEWG presented its [report](#) to the UN General Assembly and the Conference on Disarmament in October 2013, although nothing of substance emerged as a result.

In 2015 efforts were made to revive the OEWG concept. At the NPT Review Conference in May 2015 discussions were held on re-establishing the OEWG, although that forum ultimately failed to agree a final document.

The failure to adopt a new mandate for the OEWG led to the issue being revisited by the UN General Assembly at its autumn 2015 session. A Resolution was subsequently passed in December 2015 ([A/RES/70/33](#)), supported overwhelmingly by the non-nuclear weapon states, establishing an OEWG for 2016.¹⁰ Under the terms of the resolution the OEWG was tasked with addressing the legal measures and provisions that would be required to attain, and maintain, a world without nuclear weapons; and examine other measures that could contribute to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, including measures to increase awareness about the humanitarian and societal consequences of nuclear weapons use. Notably, the resolution also allowed the OEWG to operate according to the General Assembly's normal rules of business, which do not require consensus.

Adopting this approach was regarded as an opportunity to move forward on disarmament issues. However, the nuclear weapon states once again refused to participate in the talks labelling them "divisive" and lacking "the vital components that would guarantee both a meaningful collaboration and a productive outcome".¹¹ The P5 did, however, suggest that they remained open to "an appropriately mandated" OEWG.¹²

The OEWG met in its first session in February 2016. A second session followed in May of that year. According to media reports, discussions focused on the commencement of negotiations on a legally binding agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons. However, participating States remained divided over the best way to approach the issue.¹³ As Aleem Dattoo, writing on the BASIC blog, noted:

The OEWG is in danger of being lost in the disagreements between these camps, unable to find common ground.¹⁴

At a final session of the OEWG in August 2016 it adopted a [final report](#),¹⁵ in which it recommended:

⁸ France, Russia, the UK and US voted against the resolution; while China, India, Israel and Pakistan abstained.

⁹ The P5 have argued that nuclear disarmament should proceed on a multilateral basis through existing mechanisms, primarily the NPT and the UN-mandated Conference on Disarmament and in accordance with the prevailing international security environment. The remaining nuclear weapon states cite national security interests as a justification for their lack of support for a global ban.

¹⁰ The nuclear weapon states either voted against the resolution, or abstained.

¹¹ "UN creates new disarmament group", *Arms Control Today*, December 2015

¹² "UN creates new disarmament group", *Arms Control Today*, December 2015

¹³ "Momentum builds for nuclear ban treaty", *Arms Control Today*, June 2016

¹⁴ Aleem Dattoo, "[Moving the OEWG forward](#)", *BASIC Blog*, 20 June 2016

¹⁵ With 68 countries in favour, 22 against and 13 abstentions

4 Negotiating a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

The convening, by the General Assembly, of a conference in 2017, open to all States, with the participation and contribution of international organizations and civil society, to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination...¹⁶

That report was subsequently presented to the 71st session of the UN General Assembly in the autumn 2016. Based on the recommendation of the OEWG, the UNGA adopted a resolution in December 2016 ([A/RES/71/258](#)) which mandated the convening of a UN conference in 2017 to “to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination” (para.8).

1.2 UN negotiations on a nuclear weapons prohibition agreement

In February 2017 the [UN Conference](#) held a one-day organisational session, during which they adopted a [draft agenda](#) and elected Costa Rican Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez as Conference President. In March the [first session of talks](#) was held, which focused on a general exchange of views among participants, including more than a hundred non-nuclear weapon states and a number of non-governmental organisations.

Several countries that had voted against the UN General Assembly resolution in December 2016, including all of the P5 nuclear weapon states, declared their intention to boycott the conference or participate only in the planned second round of discussions. Among those states were NATO allies,¹⁷ and many countries which fall under regional US nuclear security guarantees.

The first round of negotiations immediately revealed several differences of opinion among treaty supporters about how comprehensive any agreement should be. The majority of states argued that the goal should be a short and simple treaty text that focused on a set of core prohibitions: acquisition, stockpiling, transfer and deployment. However, a number of states argued for a more comprehensive approach with extensive prohibitions which also covered the threat of use, testing and financing. They also argued that verification provisions should form part of the treaty text.

Agreement of a draft treaty text

In June/July 2017 a further, more substantial, round of discussions was held. 124 UN Member States were present at the conference. None of the nine countries in possession of nuclear weapons were in attendance.

Under discussion was a [draft treaty text](#) circulated a few weeks before. In line with other weapons prohibition treaties, the original draft text expressly prohibited States from using, testing, developing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, transferring, or receiving control over nuclear weapons. It also prevented them from assisting, encouraging, or inducing others in any of those activities. States Parties would also be required to prohibit and prevent the stationing, installation, or deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory or any other place under its jurisdiction or control. Under the original text 40 States would need to sign and ratify the agreement in order for it to become binding international law.

Summary of discussions

At the beginning of the conference several delegates shared their concerns over the draft as well as their suggestions for improvements. The representative for Brazil began by

¹⁶ UN General Assembly, A/71/371, 1 September 2016, para.67

¹⁷ With the exception of The Netherlands, which was the sole NATO ally in attendance.

stating that the treaty could be “the missing piece in the puzzle” of nuclear disarmament; while Cuba recognised that various sections could be “strengthened”, although provided no detail. South Africa’s representative highlighted the importance of delegitimising and stigmatising the use of nuclear weapons as well as underlining that no additional obligations must be imposed on the non-nuclear weapon states, thereby allowing these states to use nuclear energy within their territories. The Netherlands reaffirmed that any convention must be compatible with their obligations as a member of NATO.

Proposed revisions to the first draft included a change to the title with many states arguing that it should be classified as a ‘treaty’, rather than a ‘convention’ in order to better reflect its intended scope as a simple prohibition. Proposals were also put forward to strengthen the preamble by including international humanitarian law, the aim of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons and the role of women in disarmament.

A [second draft text](#) was subsequently released by President Gómez which adopted many of those proposals. The most significant revisions were made to articles 2-5 on declarations, safeguards and the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Specifically, a “join and destroy” option for nuclear armed states was introduced into Article 4, meaning nuclear weapon states that join the treaty must remove all nuclear weapons from operational status and submit “no later than sixty days after the submission of its declaration, a time-bound plan for the verified and irreversible destruction of its nuclear weapons programme to be negotiated with the States Parties”. The number of states required to ratify the treaty in order for it to enter force (Article 16) was also increased from 40 to 50 states.

A [third, and final draft](#) was introduced on 3 July. The preamble remained untouched; while Article 1 was altered with a prohibition on the ‘threat of use’ being included in the text. This addition was welcomed by a number of countries, including Brazil and Algeria, who had been pushing for its inclusion from the start of the talks. Article 4 was also revised to include an obligation on States Parties to remove “as soon as possible” any nuclear weapons, or any other nuclear explosive device stationed on its territory. An additional paragraph which charges States Parties with designating an international authority to negotiate and verify the dismantlement of nuclear weapons, was also included. The final draft also extended the withdrawal period from the treaty (Article 16) from 3 months to 12.

1.3 A positive outcome

Despite the short negotiating time, a [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) was subsequently adopted on 7 July 2017. It is the first multilateral, legally-binding, instrument for nuclear disarmament to have been negotiated in 20 years. In short:

- The treaty prohibits States Parties from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, transferring or receiving control over nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It also prohibits them from using, or threatening to use, such weapons.
- States Parties are required to prohibit and prevent the stationing, installation, or deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory or any other place under its jurisdiction or control. This latter provision has implications for those countries which have US nuclear weapons based on their territories: Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.
- The treaty requires States Parties to have, at a minimum, a [Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement](#) with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

6 Negotiating a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

- For the first time, the treaty also requires that States Parties provide victim assistance and environmental remediation to those affected by nuclear weapons use and testing.

At the time, 122 countries voted in favour of the treaty; while The Netherlands, a NATO Member State, voted against and Singapore abstained.¹⁸

Entry into force

The treaty opened for signatures from any UN member state, regardless of their participation in the conference, on 20 September 2017. Under its provisions the treaty will come into force 90 days after 50 countries have ratified it.

On 24 October 2020 Honduras became the [50th state to ratify the treaty](#). The treaty will therefore enter into force on 22 January 2021 and take full legal effect for all of those countries which have signed and ratified it by that date. A further 34 countries have signed but not ratified the treaty and it remains open to accession.¹⁹ For any state that ratifies or accedes to the treaty after it enters into force, the treaty will take full legal effect 90 days later.

To date, none of the nuclear weapon states have signed the treaty. Neither has any NATO Member State or country that falls under the US nuclear umbrella in Asia.²⁰

Other notable absentees from the list of signatories are Sweden, Switzerland and the Marshall Islands who all voted in support of the treaty in July 2017. The US was reported to have warned Sweden that signing the treaty could damage US-Swedish military cooperation.²¹ A statement issued by NATO's North Atlantic Council also called "on our partners and all countries who are considering supporting this treaty to seriously reflect on its implications for international peace and security, including on the NPT".²² Sweden is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme.

While supportive of the treaty the Marshall Islands is considered unlikely to sign and ratify the treaty in the longer term due to the implications it would have for its Compact of Free Association agreement with the United States. Under that agreement the US retains full responsibility for the defence and security of the Marshall Islands; while it, in turn, cannot take any action which is deemed by the US to be incompatible with that provision.²³

After conducting a comprehensive review of the treaty text and its possible consequences for Swiss security, the Swiss Federal Council [announced](#) in August 2018 that it would not sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, at the present time. While reiterating that Switzerland remained committed to nuclear arms control and disarmament, and that it would continue to work towards the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, it concluded that, for Switzerland, the arguments against accession outweigh the potential benefits. However, the Federal Council also stated that Switzerland

¹⁸ [A/CONF.229/2017/L.3/Rev.1, Draft treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons](#)

¹⁹ Any state can become a Party to the treaty after it enters into force. Accession has the same legal effect as ratification.

²⁰ If a nuclear state were to accede to the treaty at some point in the future it could either verifiably destroy its nuclear weapons programme and then become Party to the treaty, or sign the treaty and immediately remove its nuclear weapons from operational status, before submitting a time-bound plan for verifiable and irreversible destruction of its nuclear weapons programme within 60 days. Under either option a state would also be required to conclude a comprehensive safeguards agreement with the IAEA to verify that nuclear materials are not diverted from peaceful nuclear activities into a weapons programme at any future point.

²¹ "Fifty states sign nuclear weapons ban", *Arms Control Today*, October 2017.

²² North Atlantic Council Statement on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 20 September 2017

²³ [Compact of Free Association, as amended April 2003, Title Three](#)

would participate as an observer in the Conferences of States Parties to the treaty and instructed that a further report on developments related to the treaty be prepared in time for the first review conference, to allow a re-examination of Switzerland's position if necessary.²⁴

1.4 What can the treaty achieve?

Under Article 8, a meeting of States Parties will be convened within the first year of the treaty entering into force to discuss the implementation of its provisions and next steps to strengthen the agreement. After five years a conference will be convened to review the operation of the treaty and the progress made in achieving its aims.

However, many critics have questioned what the treaty can achieve if the nine states that possess nuclear weapons do not participate.²⁵ Without signing and ratifying the treaty, none of these states will be legally bound by its provisions. For many commentators, this runs the risk of the treaty becoming symbolic and of little practical use in the pursuit of disarmament.

However, advocates have argued that the treaty will have a moral effect and pressure the nuclear countries, and their allies, to alter their behaviour and help shape the norm against nuclear weapons.

When the treaty was negotiated in 2017 the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons argued that:

This treaty is a clear indication that the majority of the world no longer accepts nuclear weapons and does not consider them legitimate tools of war. The repeated objection and boycott of the negotiations by many nuclear-weapon states demonstrates that this treaty has the potential to significantly impact their behavior and stature.

As has been true with previous weapon prohibition treaties, changing international norms leads to concrete changes in policies and behaviors, even in states not party to the treaty. "The strenuous and repeated objections of nuclear-armed states is an admission that this treaty will have a real and lasting impact".²⁶

The organisation Reaching Critical Will also commented:

This treaty is an incredible new piece of international law, achieved despite the opposition of the most militarised and powerful countries in the world. It marks a turning point in the struggle against these genocidal weapons, in which the vast majority of governments and civil society have united to create law that can change policies and practices of nuclear deterrence and help facilitate nuclear disarmament.²⁷

More recently a spokesman for the UN Secretary General suggested that the treaty's entry into force was "the culmination of a worldwide movement to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and represented "a meaningful commitment towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations".²⁸

Daryl Kimball of the Arms Control Association suggested that the treaty "marks a new, hopeful phase in the long-running struggle to prevent nuclear war and eliminate nuclear

²⁴ Statement of the Federal Council, 15 August 2018

²⁵ Library briefing paper [CBP7566, Nuclear weapons – country comparisons](#), sets out the assets and capabilities of each of those nine states.

²⁶ [ICAN campaign news](#), July 2017

²⁷ Reaching Critical Will, [News Release](#), 7 July 2017

²⁸ [United Nations press release](#), 24 October 2020

weapons” and that it has “the potential to stimulate further action on disarmament and take us closer to a world without nuclear weapons”.²⁹

1.5 Position of the British Government

The British Government did not participate in any of the discussions or negotiations relating to the prohibition treaty in 2016 and 2017 and did not sign the treaty when it opened for signatories in September 2017.

Addressing the UK’s non-participation in the talks in March 2017, the then UK Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, stated:

The UK is not attending the negotiations on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons because we do not believe that those negotiations will lead to effective progress on global nuclear disarmament. They cannot and will not work.

The British government firmly believes that the best way to achieve the goal of global nuclear disarmament is through gradual multilateral disarmament, negotiated using a step-by-step approach and within existing international frameworks.

A step-by-step approach to global nuclear disarmament is what we need to build trust and confidence. It will provide for tangible steps towards a safer and a more stable world where countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them.

Finally... a ban on nuclear weapons will not in itself improve the international security environment, or increase trust and transparency between nuclear weapon possessor states and it will also not address the technical and procedural challenges of nuclear disarmament verification.³⁰

Following adoption of the treaty on 7 July 2017 the UK, US and France issued the following statement:

France, the United Kingdom and the United States have not taken part in the negotiation of the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. We do not intend to sign, ratify or ever become party to it. Therefore, there will be no change in the legal obligations on our countries with respect to nuclear weapons. For example, we would not accept any claim that this treaty reflects or in any way contributes to the development of customary international law. Importantly, other states possessing nuclear weapons and almost all other states relying on nuclear deterrence have also not taken part in the negotiations.

This initiative clearly disregards the realities of the international security environment. Accession to the ban treaty is incompatible with the policy of nuclear deterrence, which has been essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia for over 70 years. A purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and security. It will do the exact opposite by creating even more divisions at a time when the world needs to remain united in the face of growing threats, including those from the DPRK’s ongoing proliferation efforts. This treaty offers no solution to the grave threat posed by North Korea’s nuclear program, nor does it address other security challenges that make nuclear deterrence necessary. A ban treaty also risks undermining the existing international security architecture which contributes to the maintenance of international peace and security.

We reiterate in this regard our continued commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and reaffirm our determination to safeguard and further promote its authority, universality and effectiveness. Working towards the shared goal of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament must be

²⁹ For further discussion of practical disarmament measures see [“The nuclear ban treaty: a much-needed wake-up call”](#), *Arms Control Today*, November 2020

³⁰ Foreign and Commonwealth Office press release, 27 March 2017

done in a way that promotes international peace and security, and strategic stability, based on the principle of increased and undiminished security for all.

We all share a common responsibility to protect and strengthen our collective security system in order to further promote international peace, stability and security.³¹

This was position was also set out in a corresponding [statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#).

In a debate in the House of Lords in February 2018, Baroness Goldie discussed the Government's approach to nuclear non-proliferation and set out three reasons for the UK's opposition to the prohibition treaty, saying that it "stands in stark contrast to the proven effectiveness of the nuclear non-proliferation Treaty":

First, rather than building the necessary trust and consensus between states, it is seeking quick fixes. Secondly, the ban treaty offers no solutions to the complex security environment that we all face, nor to the technical challenges of verifying nuclear disarmament. Thirdly, its attempt to create a rival legal framework for disarmament is flawed. Its safeguard standards are inadequate and its restrictions on nuclear test explosions lack the rigour of those imposed by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

She added "the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons fails to offer a realistic path to disarmament and risks undermining the effective non-proliferation and disarmament architecture that we already have in place."

She reaffirmed the UK's commitment to "full multilateral nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control" and "it is our firm belief that the best way to achieve this is through verified, step-by-step, gradual multilateral disarmament." These involve a number of steps including: "first, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; secondly, starting and successfully concluding negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty in the conference on disarmament; and, thirdly, the global adoption of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty."³²

The current Government reiterated this approach in answer to a Parliamentary Question in September 2020:

The UK is committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Government firmly believes that the best way to achieve a world without nuclear weapons is through gradual multilateral disarmament negotiated using a step-by-step approach under the NPT. The UK will not sign or ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as we do not believe that this treaty will bring us closer to a world without such weapons. The TPNW fails to address the security obstacles that must first be overcome to achieve lasting global nuclear disarmament. It will not improve the international security environment or increase trust and transparency, and risks undermining the NPT.³³

At the time of writing, there had been no reaction from the Government on the treaty's entry into force.³⁴

Box 1: Recommended reading

- ["The nuclear ban treaty: a much-needed wake-up call"](#), *Arms Control Today*, November 2020

³¹ [Joint Press Statement from the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of the United States, United Kingdom, and France Following the Adoption of a Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons](#), 7 July 2017

³² [HL Deb 20 February 2018 c114-118](#)

³³ PQ HL7781, 16 September 2020

³⁴ A parliamentary question has been tabled for answer by the MOD: [PQ114962](#)

10 Negotiating a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

- [“The nuclear ban treaty is set to enter force. Experts explain what comes next”](#), *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 30 October 2020
- [“Nuclear weapons treaty: campaigners hail new era for nuclear disarmament”](#), *BBC News Online*, 25 October 2020
- Shannon Kile, [“Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons”](#), *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*
- Emil Dall, [“Sweden’s choice: NATO or the nuclear ban”](#), *RUSI Commentary*, 22 September 2017

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publically available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcinfo@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).