

# **Canada and Nuclear Disarmament**

**Analysis of Canada's Votes in the U.N.  
Disarmament Committee 2007**

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**A Paper Prepared for Expert Seminar  
"Restoring Canada's Nuclear Disarmament Policies"**

**Ottawa, February 3-4, 2008**

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## Summary

**Of 28 votable resolutions in the U.N. Disarmament Committee in 2007, Canada voted yes 14 times, no 4, and abstention 10. Canada supported the New Agenda and Japanese “Renewed Determination” resolutions, but abstained on New Zealand’s new “de-alerting” resolution, citing NATO doctrine. The government’s new delineation of NATO’s priority in Canada’s nuclear disarmament policy calls into question whether the Non-Proliferation Treaty is still “the central instrument.” NATO’s policy, stating that nuclear weapons are “essential,” contradicts the “unequivocal undertaking” to the total elimination of nuclear weapons made by all NPT parties.**

**At the U.N., when resolutions are tough in calling for specific action leading to nuclear disarmament in a timely manner, Canada and its NATO partners vote no as a bloc with the U.S. When resolutions point the way forward without condemning present nuclear arsenals, NATO countries split. Canada’s position is ambiguous. The lack of clear-cut authoritative statements by Canada’s political leadership has reduced Canada’s effectiveness in upholding the NPT and working for the elimination of nuclear weapons.**

This paper seeks to examine Canada's voting record in the First (Disarmament) Committee at the U.N. 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in 2007.

The Committee adopted 51 resolutions, 24 by consensus and 28 by voting. Canada voted yes 14 times, no 4, and abstention 10.

## Canada's Votes U.N. Disarmament Committee 2007

<b>Resolution</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Abstention</b>
Risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East (Egypt)			X
U.N. Conference to eliminate nuclear dangers (Mexico)			X
Follow-up to 1995 and 2000 NPT obligations (Iran)		X	
Towards a nuclear weapon-free world: accelerating implementation of commitments (New Agenda)	X		
Promotion of multilateralism in disarmament (NAM)			X
Observance of environmental norms in disarmament (NAM)	X		
Indian Ocean as a zone of peace (NAM)			X
Convening Fourth special session on disarmament (NAM)	X		
Effects of depleted uranium (NAM)			X
South-East Asia NWFZ (Bangkok Treaty)	X		
"Missiles" (Egypt, Indonesia, Iran)			X
Reducing nuclear danger (India)		X	
Convention on prohibition of use of nuclear weapons (India, Iran)		X	
U.N. regional centre Africa (Nigeria)			X
NWFZ southern hemisphere (Brazil, New Zealand)	X		

Comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty (Australia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Turkey)	X		
Decreasing operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems (New Zealand)			X
Renewed determination: Total elimination of nuclear weapons (Japan)	X		
Prevention of arms race in outer space (NAM)	X		
Follow-up to ICJ Advisory Opinion (NAM)			X
Implementation anti-personnel mines (Australia)	X		
“Nuclear disarmament” (NAM)		X	
Transparency, confidence-building in outer space	X		
Conventional arms control in regions	X		
Assurances to non-NWS against use of nuclear weapons (some NAM states)			X
Telecommunications for international security	X		
Illicit trade in small arms and light weapons	X		
Relationship between disarmament and development (NAM)	X		

Canada’s most notable contribution was the leadership it gave in sponsoring a resolution, adopted without a vote, on verification. Through the years, Canada’s scientific and diplomatic work in advancing the principles of verification has been well established. In 2007, a panel of government experts, chaired by John Barrett, Director-General, Strategic Planning, DFAIT, tabled a report exploring verification in all its aspects, including the role of the United Nations. The report, recognizing rapid

technical advances, upheld the need for verification of arms agreements, treaties and other commitments and highlighted the responsibility of states to comply with those commitments. The 21 recommendations did not propose specific solutions for verification, but suggested that solutions could be found. The subsequent resolution in the First Committee asked member states to give their views on the report. Since the resolution did not require any action, it met with no objection.

Canada had traditionally been the lead sponsor of a draft calling on the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on a ban on fissile materials. Ottawa withdrew the draft in 2006 and did not introduce it in 2007. This resolution has enjoyed consensus in the past, but that consensus is broken – the United States does not want any reference to verifiability in the draft; many other states would object if the concept was excluded. Forcing a vote would have put that division on the record, which Canada chose not to do.

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In the field of nuclear disarmament, Canada's yes votes were most notable in the New Agenda Coalition and Japanese resolutions.

The New Agenda Coalition (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden) introduced its customary resolution,

“Towards a nuclear-weapons-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments.” Expressing “grave concern at the danger to humanity posed by the possibility that nuclear weapons could be used,” the resolution reiterated its call to the nuclear weapons states to “accelerate the implementation of the practical steps towards nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation” agreed to at the 2000 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The positive vote on this resolution, 156-5-14, continues to grow each year, and Canada can take some credit. In 2002, Canada was the only NATO country to vote for the NAC resolution. The next year, seven other NATO states followed Canada’s lead and by 2005, 14 NATO states had come on board. In 2007, all the leading non-nuclear NATO states (including Germany, Italy, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands) supported the NAC. Among the NWS, China voted yes, the U.S. and France no, and the U.K. and Russia abstention. This was the first time the U.K did not oppose NAC outright.

Japan’s resolution, “Renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons,” co-sponsored by Canada, upholds the NPT and encourages “deeper reductions in all types of nuclear weapons,” applying irreversibility, verifiability and increased transparency. It stressed

“the necessity of a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies....” the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, immediate negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, and universalization of IAEA safeguards and the Model Protocol Additional Agreement. The resolution passed overwhelmingly, 170-3-9. The no votes were cast by the U.S., India and North Korea.

The Japanese resolution contained a call “for the nuclear weapons states to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems in ways that promote international stability and security.” This is known as “de-alerting,” and New Zealand submitted a resolution exclusively on this subject for the first time. The N.Z. resolution, expressing concern that several thousand nuclear weapons remain on high alert, ready to be launched within minutes, the use of which would have “catastrophic consequences,” called for “the taking of further practical steps to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, with a view to ensuring that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status.” The resolution passed 124-3(U.S., U.K., France)-34. Canada abstained and in an Explanation of Vote, affirmed its support for reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems. Nonetheless, “there must also be a recognition that – for the time being – deterrence remains an important element of international

security, and a fundamental component of the defence strategy of NATO, of which Canada is a member.” Though Canada cited NATO doctrine as a reason for its abstention, some of the most important non-nuclear NATO states (Germany, Norway, Italy, Spain) voted yes.

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Canada’s citation of NATO as the reason for not supporting a resolution specifically calling for steps to remove all nuclear weapons from high alert status focuses attention on NATO’s nuclear doctrine. This is a relevant point because of the manner in which Canada is now expressing its nuclear weapons policies. The Department of Foreign Affairs website states:

Canada has long held a policy objective of non-proliferation, reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. We pursue this aim steadily, persistently and energetically, consistent with our membership in NATO and NORAD and in a manner sensitive to the broader international security context.

When the government explicitly gave NATO policies a priority in the Canadian approach to nuclear disarmament is not clear. In 1999, in response to a parliamentary committee’s report on nuclear disarmament, the government stated: “The government’s policy is guided by the firm belief that the NPT is the central instrument in which Canada’s nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament policy is rooted.” Presenting the

government's response, then Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said: "The government today reiterates its long-standing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation policy, and pledges to work consistently to reduce the political legitimacy and value of nuclear weapons in order to contribute to the goal of their progressive reduction and eventual elimination."

The government's new delineation of NATO's importance in Canada's nuclear policy calls into question whether the NPT is still "the central instrument." The incompatibility of the NPT's "unequivocal undertaking" to the total elimination of nuclear weapons and NATO's Strategic Concept, holding that nuclear weapons are "essential to preserve peace" and are "the supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies," is glaring.

In respect of de-alerting, the government stated in 1999 that it "supports the concept of de-alerting and other measures which contributed to the safety and security of nuclear arsenals and the stability of U.S.-Russian strategic nuclear relations. Verifiable de-alerting measures, undertaken in a reciprocal fashion, can increase both safety and stability." Nothing is said here about NATO being an inhibiting factor in achieving de-alerting of strategic weapons. Apparently, the other major NATO states that voted for New Zealand's de-alerting resolution were not inhibited by NATO. Why

then was Canada? The answer lies in the known pressure the United States put on its NATO allies to resist, or at least not support, the de-alerting resolution.

Those who have followed closely nuclear disarmament forums are well aware of the contrary positions taken by the Bush Administration, which almost single-handedly tried to roll back the consensus international commitments made at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences. At the 2007 First Committee, the U.S. voted no 27 times, i.e. in all but one of the votable resolutions. Ten times, the U.S. cast the only negative vote. The antipathy of the present U.S. administration to nuclear disarmament is a source of deep concern in the international community. Its full meaning is beyond the scope of this paper.

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What is noticeable in the Canadian voting pattern at the First Committee is the uncertainty of Canada's direction. It voted, with its NATO partners, an abstention on Mexico's proposal that the U.N. hold a special conference to identify appropriate ways of eliminating nuclear dangers. 123-3(U.S., U.K., France)-44. The grounds for not supporting such an international conference (that would include India, Pakistan and Israel, non-NPT members) as long advocated by Kofi Annan, were not explained.

Yet Canada abstained when the major NATO states were resisting a resolution, “Follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legality of the Treat or use of Nuclear Weapons” (127-27-27). The resolution underlined the unanimous conclusion of the International Court of Justice that states must “conclude” negotiations for nuclear disarmament; and commence multilateral negotiations “leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, testing, deployment, stockpiling, transfer, threat or use of nuclear weapons and providing for their elimination.” That Canada did not reject outright this resolution shows that the idea of a nuclear weapons convention has at least some standing in the government.

Strangely, when the annual CTBT resolution was introduced, Canada held back its customary co-sponsorship, only adding its name at a later stage. This hesitation in keeping Canada in the forefront of what Hans Blix has called the single most important gain now needed was not explained.

In a resolution, “ The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East,” calling for Israel to join the NPT, Canada abstained, even though it voted yes in previous years. Germany, Italy, Norway and Spain, among major non-nuclear NATO states, voted yes. Canada’s move to an abstention signals

new support (or at least reduced opposition) for Israel's nuclear weapons program.

Though it abstained on the ICJ resolution, which pointed the way to a nuclear weapons convention, Canada voted, with all its NATO partners, a straight no to a resolution requesting the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a convention "prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances" (120-52-10). And Canada maintained its no vote to the annual resolution of the Non-aligned Movement calling for a host of measures centering around "negotiations on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament leading to the eventual total elimination of nuclear weapons (117-47-17). That these two resolutions had among their chief sponsors such states as Iran and India, both in disfavour in the West, did not help in the Canadian assessment. But, on substantive grounds, the resolutions ran far beyond the NPT and right up against NATO policy.

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Our analysis shows that when resolutions are tough in calling for a specific action leading directly to nuclear disarmament in a timely manner, Canada and its NATO partners vote no as a bloc with the U.S. When resolutions are sophisticated and point the way forward without condemning the present, NATO splits. Part of NATO, perhaps most, wants to move

forward. Sometimes this desire is enough to overcome U.S. resistance; other times it is not. Canada is caught in the middle in these choices.

The lack of clarity in Canada's voting record stems from the government's ambiguous stance.

Addressing the Extraordinary Workshop at Pugwash, N.S., in July, 2007, then Foreign Minister Peter MacKay stated:

This Canadian government continues to advance the nuclear disarmament agenda.

Canada strongly supports the multilateral nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament regime, especially efforts to strengthen and universalize the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Canada also supports specific steps within the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review process to advance nuclear disarmament. These steps include reaffirming the importance of the progressive implementation of the 13 Practical Steps agreed to at the 2000 Review Conference; encouraging the de-alerting and de-mating of deployed weapons systems; and increasing the transparency of nuclear weapons states' nuclear policies as well as disarmament plans and results.

Canada clearly wants to uphold the NPT. But it now highlights NATO superiority in nuclear disarmament questions. Government officials know that NATO's policy is incoherent with the NPT. Contrary to Canada's effort a decade ago to bring change to NATO, the present political leadership shows no sign of trying to get NATO to change its policy. The

government seems torn on the NPT/NATO issue, and the lack of authoritative statements by the political leadership is a cause of confusion and concern. What is clear is that Canada has ceased to be either a champion or a leader in ridding the world of the ultimate evil of nuclear weapons. When the U.S. puts pressure on Canada, nuclear disarmament values suffer. In 2007, the drift and ambiguity were evident.

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The Japanese “Renewed Determination” resolution contained this operative paragraph:

Encourages the constructive role played by civil society in promoting nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In voting for this, the Canadian government implicitly reaffirmed its longstanding support for Canadian civil society’s efforts. This Expert Seminar reflects Canadian civil society’s desire to work with the government to revitalize Canada’s nuclear disarmament policies.