

On Nuclear Disarmament

In recent years, the nuclear crises—both real and imagined—in Iran, Iraq, and North Korea have underscored the ongoing threat posed by nuclear weapons, which remains undiminished despite the end of the Cold War more than a decade and a half ago.

Mainstream discourse on this issue is often couched in terms of nuclear "non-proliferation." The real issue underlying these crises, however, is the failure of the existing nuclear weapons states to pursue policies that would lead to nuclear disarmament.

Following are five salient points on why nuclear disarmament must replace nuclear "non-proliferation" or "arms control" as the central paradigm of the Nuclear Age.

1. Nuclear Colonialism: The nuclear fuel chain—the process by which nuclear weapons and energy are created—wreaks havoc on communities throughout world, including those that host uranium mines, uranium mills, and nuclear waste dumps, and those downwind of nuclear weapons tests and production facilities. In the U.S. most of these communities are inhabited primarily by indigenous peoples, such as the western Shoshone and the Navajo (where more than 50 percent of uranium in the U.S. has been mined). "Nuclear colonialism" or "nuclear racism" is a brutal hallmark of the nuclear age.

2. Tools of Empire: Nuclear weapons continue to be held and developed by leaders of dominant nations because they are tools of global

supremacy used to keep poorer countries in a state of fear and subordination. The struggle for nuclear disarmament is therefore a struggle against imperialism.

3. Illegality Under International Law: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), ratified in 1970, commits all nuclear weapons states to "negotiate in good faith for nuclear disarmament," an obligation they have continuously flouted. Meanwhile, in 1996, the International Criminal Court of Justice ruled that the possession of nuclear weapons is unequivocally illegal under international law.

4. True National Security: To date, the U.S. has spent \$7 trillion on nuclear weapons-related programs, under the pretense that they protect "national security." Rather than continuing down this twisted path, the U.S. should devote resources to real security concerns, such as global warming and Peak Oil.

5. Disarmament Movement: Although the end of the Cold War brought notable progress toward nuclear disarmament, much of that progress has been lost, and the powerful grassroots opposition that catalyzed it largely evaporated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The nuclear disarmament movement of the 1980s was the largest international movement of modern times. We must pick up where this movement left off to create lasting nuclear disarmament.

