

# Boycotts that bomb: Nuclear weapon states reject dialogue

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**B**oycotts are very blunt instruments and hence are used sparingly in multilateral diplomacy. To refuse to engage in discussion of principles which one has subscribed to also suggests inconsistency at best, hypocrisy at worse.

This, however, is the course that the five Nuclear Weapon States under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty have chosen to follow in connection with two recent initiatives relevant to the goals of the treaty.

The first event prompting a boycott from the five nuclear weapon states, or P5, was a conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapon use hosted by Norway in March of this year.

This conference, which was attended by 127 states, was a followup to an important

acknowledgment contained in the outcome document from the 2010 NPT Review Conference. That acknowledgment was that any use of a nuclear weapon would lead to "catastrophic humanitarian consequences" and that states had an obligation to comply with international humanitarian law.

This affirmation was, on one hand, a simple matter of fact. But on the other hand, it introduced a fresh perspective into NPT proceedings normally couched exclusively in the language of international security. It also pointed, albeit indirectly, to a disturbing reality of nuclear weapons, namely that their massive and indiscriminate destructive power made any use of them incompatible with international humanitarian law.

This theme of the humanitarian implications of nuclear weapons is gaining prominence in international discussions of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. At the current meeting of the preparatory committee for

the 2015 NPT Review Conference, South Africa on behalf of 77 states presented a statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

This invocation of a moral argument for nuclear disarmament over and above the international security reasons for pursuing it has prompted considerable discomfort for some NPT member states. Even normal champions of international humanitarian law and action such as Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, Australia, and Canada have declined to associate themselves with the joint statement.

This stance presumably arises from the perceived contradiction between affirming the menace to humanity represented by nuclear weapon use and supporting NATO nuclear policy that threatens such use if deterrence fails.

Despite their reluctance to endorse the humanitarian impact statement, these non-nuclear weapon states have at least participated in the Oslo conference this March and have expressed their intention to attend a follow-up conference to be held in Mexico in early 2014. The P5 states have in contrast resorted to a boycott of the Oslo conference and planned followup.

Given that these states were all party to the agreed outcome document from the 2010 Review Conference, including its humanitarian-related references, this rejectionist front appears a strange overreaction. It would seem that a wiser course of action would have been to attend the Oslo conference and explain there how the progress these states are making towards fulfilling their nuclear disarmament commitments under the NPT constitutes the best way to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used.

To reject this and subsequent opportunities for dialogue sets the P5 up for a PR disaster and distracts attention from dealing with immediate problems threatening the authority of the NPT, such as the Iran file and WMD challenges in the Middle East and in North Korea.

If the ill-advised boycott of the humanitarian-themed conferences was not prob-

lematic enough, the P5 seem intent on exacerbating the situation by signaling their non-participation in another multilateral process established by the UN General Assembly.

This is the Open Ended Working Group that is to consider ideas for advancing the currently stalled multilateral disarmament negotiations. The creation of this group, which will meet in Geneva for two weeks in May and August, reflects the deep frustration of many over the protracted impasse in multilateral disarmament activity.

The 65-nation Conference on Disarmament, the UN-designated forum for negotiating disarmament agreements, is moribund not having been able to agree a program of work for the last 15 years. In this context, it is hardly surprising that a large majority of UN member states supported the initiation of a process allowing all states to voice their opinion on how to renew multilateral disarmament work.

Here again the P5 have opted for boycott over engagement. The reasons cited by P5 participants vary from claiming that the working group represents a distraction from the NPT or that the fact it does not function under a consensus rule (the procedural rule that has ensured the paralysis of the Conference on Disarmament) renders it unacceptable to the P5 which wish to retain the veto power that the consensus rule permits them. There has even been a strange conflation of the working group with the humanitarian-related conferences although the two are quite separate processes.

The boycott tactic the P5 have adopted may appeal to them in the short term as a way of avoiding difficult topics, but will inevitably tarnish their public image and alienate non-nuclear weapon states whose co-operation they will need to keep the NPT intact.

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# A practical application of Arctic sovereignty

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**T**he only reasonable approach to Canada's northern development and Arctic sovereignty is to focus initial efforts on the Port of Churchill on the west coast of Hudson Bay, and secondarily on Rankin Inlet, which is further up the same coast.

Attempts to support national security, aboriginal communities, scientific research, environmental protection, and resource exploration by annual sealifts and air-freight are not economically viable. Lower cost and greater frequency forms of logistics and operations are required to provide for a safe and prosperous Northern future.

The existing Hudson Bay Railway carries mostly prairie grain to Churchill, Manitoba for trans-shipment to markets in Europe, but it could also transport on a year-round basis the fuel, equipment, materials, and personnel needed for facilitation of a Canadian Arctic strategy.

Global warming will continue to lengthen the time period when goods can be moved by ships throughout Hudson Bay and the Eastern approaches, along with a navigable route through the Foxe Basin to the Northwest Passage that will be viable in the future, but this is incremental improvement that could take decades to fully realize—options need to be assessed and implemented.

Sealifts will continue the most cost-effective means of delivering large equipment and bulk goods, but with the technological advances in condensing inert gases will make cargo airships the likely source of multi-season sustainability, and Arctic-



A Royal Canadian Air Force CC-138 Twin Otter supplies a Canadian Ranger patrol on Sherard Osborn Island, Nunavut on April 14.

capable hovercraft on cleared sea-ice routes could provide local logistic (and search and rescue) support for a range of activities within the Arctic Archipelago.

Permanent facilities, whether governmental, civilian, or commercial will remain few and far between, so there would be a seasonal emphasis on heavy icebreakers, Arctic tugboats, large platform barges, and possibly tethered-aerial-sensor-arrays for surveillance and communications relay.

The Canadian government needs to implement many overlapping responsibilities and obligations, with limited funds and personnel, and an entity such as Canadian Arctic Service Corps would need to be established to integrate efforts involving the Canadian Forces, Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans, Northern Development, Natural Resources, etc.; combined with capabilities that can be supplied by the commercial and corporate entities that will wish to operate in the Arctic and high North.

The military and territorial protection aspects of Canadian sovereignty can only be enacted through a layered development approach to logistics bases and expanding operations nodes throughout the North. Our allies and neighbours in the Arctic, the

Americans in the West, and the Danes (via Greenland) in the East, will be instrumental in how Canada deals with trans-oceanic shipping, search and rescue, Arctic development, and continental security.

The Hans Island dispute must be resolved with the Danes and Greenlanders for Canadian Arctic policy to take form. Both nations have viable claims, but the Island has little value beyond the surrounding fisheries and control of three quarters of the Nares Strait. Perhaps having Hans Island declared a dual jurisdiction would pave the way for Greenland and Canada to move ahead in a common alliance for Arctic development and security. Similar views on rights of transit through internal waters and territorial claims make for natural Arctic allies.

The Americans (via Alaska) directly contest many Canadian sovereignty claims, mostly saying that there must be a right of innocent passage through Canadian waters—but if

they held such a massive archipelago you can bet that they would sing a different tune.

The government of Canada has to firmly remind the United States that this is also a matter of North American perimeter security, though this would be led by Canada for sovereignty reasons. What types of seaworthiness standards are required for vessels transiting the Northwest Passage should be defined by Canada, the USA, and Denmark (Greenland), with consultation with Norway and Russia.

All five nations are members of the Arctic Council, and both vested and mutual interests should obligate them towards a common approach to Arctic affairs.

As the northern sea passages become accessible for longer periods, Canadian assets will not be able to cover the two million square kilometre area of the Arctic, but you only need to turn away non-complying vessels at the few entrances to the Northwest Passage and have surveillance capabilities at waypoints when different water channels can be chosen. A mixture of radar and TASA-style systems will cover the ingress and egress points on land, sea, and air. It is far more complex situation in dealing with search and rescue, or disaster response in a timely and dedicated fashion.

The opening up of the North and the Canadian Arctic needs to be well thought-out, with resources and personnel situated and supported for a wide range of operations, whether it relates to military threats, emergency response, commercial operations, or community developments.

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