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# Moving Forward to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons (?): How Regional Issues Shape Global Non-proliferation and Disarmament Politics

LEONARDO BANDARRA  AND PATRÍCIA NABUCO MARTUSCELLI 

This special issue contributes to the global dialogue on a nuclear weapons ban by evaluating how regional politics enable or hinder a global ban on nuclear weapons. The insights of 17 contributions offer a nuanced and diverse account of the landscape of nuclear disarmament, arguing that understanding the diversity of regional perspectives, lenses, and approaches is crucial for advancing toward a global nuclear weapons ban. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of common themes, aiming to shed light on the structural elements that characterize regional and global nuclear politics. For that, we employ a Comparative Area Studies Approach to explore venues and patterns across different regions, offering a comprehensive analysis that underscores the importance of considering local, regional, and global dimensions in tandem. We delineate three key elements that either facilitate or impede the implementation of a nuclear weapons ban: (1) Inclusivity: *How key actors participate and are included in the policy-making process at the global, regional, and local levels*; (2) Inequalities: *how power inequalities shape social processes that enable or hinder the continuity of nuclear weapons*; (3) Institutions: *how networks and institutions are organized and structured between each other*.

On January 24, 1946, just some months after the nuclear bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the United Nations General Assembly issued its very first resolution, establishing a commission tasked to find venues “for the elimination from national armaments

of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction” (UNGA 1946, 1). Behind this resolution, members of the United Nations shared a clear understanding of the unproportionate and indiscriminate nature of nuclear explosions, and they understood that their use should be avoided. Since then, banning nuclear weapons has become a continued international ambition at the core of most disarmament and nonproliferation initiatives.

This ambition is, for example, enshrined in the preamble and in Article VI of the 1968 Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which calls for a “general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” It is also at the center of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the first multilateral instrument at the global level to unequivocally prohibit the possession of nuclear arsenals by all countries indistinctively. Besides, over half of the world’s surface, including all the Southern Hemisphere, is already covered by nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs), which are treaties that ban those arms from geographically defined areas whose status is protected under international law and verified by designated regional or international organizations. Many other international actions and initiatives have also been taken regularly to pursue a world liberated from the fear of a nuclear war. Many of those initiatives are taken up by civil society organizations and by populations directly affected by nuclear weapons, making the nuclear disarmament environment more inclusive and diverse than one would think at first sight.

Given the continuity of initiatives and the continued call for action from most states (particularly from the Global South) and civil society organizations for a world free of nuclear weapons, why do prospects for nuclear disarmament seem so gloomy as of 2024? An easy answer would focus on the emergence of conflicts involving nuclear weapon possessors, such as the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This view eclipses, however, the many elements that enable or hinder effective nuclear disarmament and, consequently, the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons. A more nuanced answer to that question requires an in-depth evaluation of the many overlapping, competing, or complementary approaches to how countries and populations across the world perceive a nuclear weapons ban.

This evaluation is at the core of this special issue, which looks at how a focus on regions may help to untangle not only different approaches to nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation but also the growing gaps between security structures and the shifting role of different actors—from governments to civil society—in defining those structures. Even if eradicating nuclear weapons remains a global goal, policymakers, negotiators, activists, and scholars continue to diverge on the appropriate means to achieve a global ban on nuclear weapons, and those divergences vary across different regions significantly.

This special issue brings together 17 contributions from scholars, civil society activists, and policymakers from around the world, with different backgrounds, training, and epistemological standpoints, to discuss *how regional issues shape global nonproliferation and disarmament politics*. These contributions unveil a holistic approach to nuclear politics that brings to the surface general elements that characterize global nuclear politics at the structural level. In this introduction, we address the rationale of this special issue, the methodological conception behind it based on comparative area studies, and the general elements that surfaced when analyzing the contributions from a comparative perspective.

### A READERS' GUIDE: THE RATIONALE OF THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue examines whether support or rejection of a global norm banning nuclear weapons could be explained by regional patterns of behavior among states. Two main considerations led to this effort. Methodologically, it uses a Comparative Area Studies Approach (CAS), which is still underrepresented in Security Studies, particularly in the field of nuclear politics. CAS combines area expertise, as expressed in all contributions to this special issue, with a comparative method employed in this essay, which aims to spot patterns that translate across different regions (Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018, 15). Some of those patterns identified below include the interaction between local and global politics, the role of civil society and marginalized actors in global politics, the processes of norm diffusion, and the weight of multilateral institutions *vis-à-vis* great-power politics.

Conceptually, we gathered pieces from authors from different regions, bridging diverse perspectives on what is needed to understand and enable a global prohibition of nuclear weapons. We defined a region as a social and historical construct identifiable through mutual interactions and connections between relevant actors. Regions are not immutable but rather fluid. Instead of offering a closed list of regions or continents (large masses of land), we let contributing authors select and define by themselves which region would be more suitable for their analyses. In doing so, we ended up with a total of eleven regions. Some of those were defined under existing institutional architectures, such as NWFZs (Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa), NWFZs under negotiation (the Middle East), and regional organizations (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO and the European Union). Others were defined based on interaction

patterns that justify nuclear nonproliferation, proliferation, and disarmament policies (such as South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Europe, and North America). Some overlapped, highlighting the flexibility needed to understand regional politics (this was the case of, on one hand, South Asia, the Pacific, and the Indo-Pacific, and, on the other, Europe, North America, and NATO). And some did not feature as a joint entity, such as “the Americas” or “Asia,” which were divided into more targeted areas.

Structurally, this special issue follows a narrative line that starts with regions where a nuclear weapons prohibition is already a security reality and then moves on to where it is not, covering both regions where a nuclear weapons prohibition is being negotiated (the Middle East) and where nuclear deterrence thinking coexists with prohibitionist approaches, such as in Europe and North America. Types of contributions include fourteen academic essays, two interviews with relevant civil society actors involved in pursuing a world free of nuclear weapons, and a practitioner view by Sergio Duarte, a key negotiator in the field of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. The authors also provided different views on what should be seen within each region—be it a focus on specific countries, on dyadic regions, on regional organizations, or on transnational movements aimed at prohibiting nuclear weapons. In the next section, we explore some elements and trends that emerged from a comparative view of the contributions listed in [Table 1](#).

## GENERAL ELEMENTS FOR A NUCLEAR WEAPON BAN

This special use complements current literature and offers new venues for research on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament by analyzing regions as the central unit of analysis for understanding perspectives and requirements for a nuclear weapons ban. Each piece shows specific understandings, images, and meanings behind nuclear weapons, and how those change and vary across regions and scholarship. Those differences imply that a nuclear ban is only possible if those specificities are covered and diversity is embraced. Taking all contributions into account, we delineate three key elements that either facilitate or impede the implementation of a nuclear weapons ban: (1) *Inclusivity: How key actors participate and are included in the policy-making process at the global, regional, and local levels*; (2) *Inequalities: how power inequalities shape social processes that enable or hinder the continuity of nuclear weapons*; (3) *Institutions: how networks and institutions are organized and structured between each other*. It is relevant to note that those elements are not

**TABLE 1.** Contributions to the Special Issue on Regional Perspectives on a Nuclear Weapons Ban, *Peace Review*, 36 (2), 2024.

Regional perspectives		Title	Authors
Overview of Special Issue	1	Moving Forward to a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World (?): How regional issues shape global nonproliferation and disarmament politics.	Leonardo Bandarra Patricia Nabuco Martuscelli
Latin America and the Caribbean	2	The contribution of Latin America and the Caribbean to multilateral nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament	Sergio Duarte
	3	Nuclear Disarmament in Latin America: Unveiling the Impact of Humanitarian Perspectives and Advocacy Campaigns on the TPNW	Cristian Wittmann
Africa	4	Proliferate to Abolish: Ali Mazrui's Perspective on Nuclear Disarmament	Seifudein Adem
Pacific	5	"We're taking back the narrative." An interview with Benetick Kabua Maddison, of the Marshallese Educational Initiative.	Benetick Kabua Maddison Linda Ostermann Julian Schäfer
The Middle East	6	The Challenges and Avenues for Banning Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East	Nir Hassid
	7	A Balanced Approach for Addressing Nuclear Risks in the Middle East while Preserving the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)	Almuntaser Albalawi
	8	Achieving the possible: Prospects for a Middle East Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction	Sharon Dolev Emad Kiyaei Paul Ingram
South Asia	9	South Asian Perspectives on the Nuclear Weapons Ban: Challenges and Prospects for Disarmament	Mohd Amin Mir Thseen Nazir
	10	India's Chequered Relationship with the	Ankit Kumar Sameer Patil

(Continued)

**TABLE 1.** (Continued).

Regional perspectives		Title	Authors
		Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Examining Cross-linked Concerns over Nuclear Disarmament and National Security	
Indo-Pacific	11	Nuclear Order in the Indo-Pacific: An Overview of Intermeshing Dyadic Rivalries in the emergent Geostrategic Space	Syed Murtaza Mushtaq Mujeeb Kanth
Northeast Asia	12	The Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in North Korea's Denuclearization Process: Implications to Northeast-Asia	Sudhakar Vaddi
Southeast Europe	13	Southeast European Countries and a Nuclear Weapons Ban	Andrej Stefanovic Marina Kostić Sulejić
European Union	14	The European Union and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: Let's Agree that we Disagree	Manuel Herrera Almela
North America/The United States	15	How Great Powers Resist Emerging Norms: The United States and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons	Rebecca Gibbons
The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (the "West")	16	Sharing the Burden and Dodging the Blame: NATO as a Western Instrument of Nuclear Advocacy	Orion Noda
	17	The Impact of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: The Crucial Role of the European NATO Allies	Tom Sauer

exhaustive but rather a didactic tool to organize the extensive amount of knowledge and in-depth analysis brought by the many contributors to this special issue.

The first element focuses on the inclusion and participation of key actors in the policy-making process at the global, regional, and local levels. The definition of "key actors" changes according to epistemological considerations and the focus of analysis. In their work on Southeast Europe, for example, Andrej Stefanovic and Marina Kostić Sulejić point

to the need to consider countries' shared and specific historical legacies and how those impact their decisions to support or reject a nuclear weapons ban. Those legacies are especially relevant, for instance, when differentiating between neutral or allied countries. A similar approach was taken by Tom Sauer when analyzing the possible role of European NATO allies in supporting the TPNW. Looking in a different direction, however, Rebecca Gibbons and Orion Noda's respective accounts of the United States and of "Western" strategies to hinder the adoption of TPNW show how impeding the participation of allied states may serve as a tool to perpetuate nuclear weapons' existence.

Inclusion and participation are important not only at the international (state) level but also, and maybe more necessary, at the local and global levels, including a wider range of actors like civil society and grassroots movements. As pointed out by Christian Wittmann, organized transnational civil society organizations like the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and region-based civil society organizations like the *Red Sehlaç* have played a crucial role in changing the public discourse toward nuclear weapons by highlighting the humanitarian consequences of their use.

This shift of discourse leads to a new mentality that is crucial to ensure a viable ban on nuclear weapons because it delegitimizes their very existence. Similarly, sustainable full nuclear disarmament is only to be achieved through a holistic approach that brings together regional specificities and considerations with a long-term view on achieving human security and stability, as illustrated by Paul Ingram's interview with directors of the Middle East Treaty Organization, Sharon Dolev and Emad Kiyaei.

Inclusion, however, is also a point that should be addressed at the domestic level of states and at the internal level of organizations. On the first point, Linda Ostermann and Julian Schäfer's interview with Benetick Kabua Maddison, head of the Marshallese Educational Initiative, shows, for example, highlights the need to promote education initiatives and outreach campaigns to push mobilization within the level of government and Congress, targeting both accountability for past actions and prevention of future harm. On the second point, Wittman points out the structural constraints faced by organizations from the Global South to have their voices heard and impact the work of transnational coalitions and organizations.

The second element focuses on structural inequalities in social processes that perpetuate the existence of nuclear weapons. Structural inequalities can be understood in two ways. First, from a traditional perspective based on a balance of power. This understanding is, for example, implicit in the accounts of Mohd Amin Mir and Thseen Nazir, focusing on India and Pakistan's struggle for a balance of power in South Asia, and on the account

of rivalry dyads in the Indo-Pacific by Syed Murtaza Mushtaq and Mujeeb Kanth. This account of power inequality is essential to understanding the short-term psychological justifications for keeping nuclear arsenals.

Unequal structures are, however, more than just a problem of balance of power. They are also embedded in identities, working structures, and discourses. Tackling structural reasons hindering the assimilation of a ban on nuclear weapons requires addressing deep-rooted social inequalities and behaviors that perpetuate the justification for nuclear weapons. This includes assessing power disparities shaped by social, gender, and racial marginalization patterns. Those issues are raised, for example, when bringing in diverse voices of both populations affected by nuclear weapons, as shown by the interview with Benetick Kabua Maddison. Likewise, Seifuden Adem's account of Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui's thinking shows how nuclear possessors keep their arsenals as a means to perpetuate global power inequalities—and further argues why abolition is the only way out of this perpetuation.

The third element looks at the institutional pieces of the global nuclear order—that is, organizations, norms, and treaties that rule the nonproliferation, disarmament, and arms control of atomic weapons.<sup>1</sup> This order is grounded in the NPT and was recently shaken and refreshed by the entry into force of the TPNW, which brought a legal norm prohibiting nuclear weapons. This order is, nonetheless, broader than those two treaties—and this is where regions play a vital role in enabling or hindering a nuclear prohibition norm. Sérgio Duarte's account of Latin American and Caribbean contributions to promoting nuclear disarmament initiatives, for example, shows how initiatives at the regional level create strong institutional foundations that lay the ground for global endeavors aimed at prohibiting nuclear weapons. Negotiations at the regional level allow for tailored approaches that complement and expand international institutions at the global level. Almutaser Albalawi and Nir Hassid highlight this complementarity in their analyses of the current negotiations for a Weapons-of-Mass-Destruction-Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East. Those contributions illustrate how negotiations with a limited number of actors may facilitate the discussions of critical points and allow sensitive security-related concerns to be addressed.

As a network of multiple overlapping institutions, regional and level considerations overlap and intersect with one another. When accounting for India's position vis-à-vis the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), for example, Ankit Kumar and Sameer Patil show how support for a nonproliferation initiative is lost when progress in other areas, like disarmament, is not achieved. Sudhakar Vaddi's study on how targeted

<sup>1</sup>The nuclear order also covers institutions aimed at ensuring the access to peaceful nuclear technology. This element is, however, only incipiently addressed in the special issue.

nonproliferation initiatives failed to avoid the nuclear weaponization of North Korea also illustrates this elusive balance between multiple initiatives at the global and regional levels and how one level may impact the other. The spillover effect of how collapsing regional and local initiatives may harm the global nuclear order structures also features in more delicate structures, such as arm control initiatives. Those initiatives are relevant in the short term and allow for reducing the possibility of nuclear escalation. They are, however, also fragile, as shown by Manuel Herrera in this framing discussion about the gradual collapse of the arms control architecture between the United States and Russia and how it impacted security considerations in Europe, located in between both nuclear powers. Weakening a part of the order affects, therefore, the prospects of another, weakening thereby the fragile balance that ensures not only non-proliferation but also the prospects for nuclear weapons disarmament.

## BRIDGING REGIONAL AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES FOR A BAN ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

*How do regional issues shape global nonproliferation and disarmament politics?* This special issue shows how regions form the basis of the global nuclear order by accounting for security considerations, regional initiatives, creative thinking, and possibilities that emerge at the local level and impact globally. It is evident that understanding the intricacies of regional dynamics is not merely a prerequisite for appreciating the feasibility of a nuclear disarmament framework, but is also crucial for identifying the practical pathways through which such a ban can be either realized or hindered.

The discussions across seventeen essays illuminate the complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and security considerations that shape regional stances on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. By delving into these regional narratives, this issue underscores the necessity of a nuanced approach to understanding a global ban on nuclear weapons, one that recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities presented by each region and how those overlap and interact at the global level. This understanding is pivotal not only in building a robust case for the viability of a nuclear weapons ban but also in crafting tailored strategies that can navigate the specific hurdles and leverage the unique advantages inherent within different global locales.

Moreover, the insights garnered from regional analyses offer a beacon of hope for the advancement of global nuclear disarmament. They reveal that beneath the surface of geopolitical tensions and historical rivalries lies a shared human aspiration for peace and security. This common ground provides fertile soil for international cooperation, suggesting that

the path to a nuclear weapons ban could be paved through enhanced regional dialogues and collaborative security frameworks. By fostering an environment where regional experiences and perspectives are valued and integrated into the broader disarmament discourse, the international community can create more inclusive and effective approaches to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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