

Canada was included in this first negotiating body because of its experience as a wartime partner of the United States and Britain in atomic energy work. It has been a member of virtually every negotiating body ever since and has shown a keen interest in disarmament and arms control.

Canada also became the first country with the capability of making nuclear weapons to take the deliberate decision not to do so. The government's policy was announced to the House of Commons in December 1945.

The UN has not lived up to the expectations of its founding members as the principal organization to preserve international peace and security. When this became apparent, some groups of nations joined together in search of alternatives. One of the first was the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO), signed by Canada, the USA and some Western European nations. Later, the Warsaw Pact was signed by the nations of Eastern Europe. These developments have led to some arms control negotiations taking place outside the UN. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) have been bilateral, between the United States and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers with the major arsenals of inter-continental rockets. The Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiations have been between members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The existence of regional organizations has also affected the composition of the various UN committees and commissions which have been established for disarmament negotiations.

Initially, their membership was small, composed largely of those states with substantial armed forces. In theory, it should be easier to reach agreement in a smaller group, but progress was slow and other states began pressing for a voice. As a result, the negotiating body grew from five nations in 1954 (Britain, Canada, France, USA and USSR), to ten in 1959 (five from NATO, five from the Warsaw Pact), to 18 in 1962 (the same ten plus eight non-aligned nations), to 26 in 1969 (with the addition of two western, two socialist and four non-aligned states), to 40 in 1979 (the five nuclear-weapons states, 21 non-aligned, seven others from NATO and seven others from the Warsaw Pact).

The UN designated the 1970s as the Disarmament Decade. They featured: