

10. NUCLEAR WEAPON-FREE ZONES

BACKGROUND

Nuclear weapon-free zones (NWFZs) are geographic areas, defined by treaty or agreement within which the presence of nuclear weapons, their manufacture and testing are banned. NWFZs differ in their specific aspects with some maintaining more stringent or different restrictions than others. Treaties establishing such zones often have protocols which are open to signature by nuclear weapon states and which require such states to respect the provisions of the zone. In establishing NWFZs, states hope to fend off or eliminate nuclear weapon-related activity in their region, limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons, use the zone as a confidence-building measure which will promote regional security and contribute to the progressive "denuclearization" of the planet.

The first NWFZ was proposed at the United Nations by Polish Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki in 1957. The Rapacki Plan would have prohibited the manufacturing, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and West Germany. While the Rapacki Plan had Soviet support, it was opposed by NATO and subsequently dropped. The Plan did, however, succeed in generating widespread interest in the establishment of regional denuclearized zones.

Since the 1950s, a wide variety of NWFZs have been proposed and implemented. In 1967, the Treaty of Tlatelolco established Latin America as the first NWFZ in a populated area. Parties to this treaty are required to use nuclear materials for peaceful purposes only, and to prevent the testing, storage or acquisition of nuclear weapons on their territories. As of 1 January 1991, twenty-three states were party to the Treaty.

In 1985, a NWFZ was established in the South Pacific by the Treaty of Rarotonga. The Treaty bans the stationing, manufacture and testing of nuclear explosive devices within the zone and also prohibits the dumping of radioactive waste. The question of transit and visiting rights for ships and aircraft carrying nuclear weapons in the zone has been left open for signatory nations to decide independently. As of 1 January 1991, eleven states had signed the Treaty. China and the Soviet Union have signed and ratified the Protocols to the Treaty. The US, UK and France have refused to sign.

The success of these two zones, the only ones to be established in populated areas, has been mixed. Within the Latin American zone, not all of the signatories have completed safeguard agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as required. In the South Pacific, the most serious drawback to the success of the zone has been the continued unwillingness of the US, the UK and France to consider signing the Protocols. In particular, France continues to maintain a very active nuclear programme in the Pacific and continues to carry out underground tests there. However, both zones continue to act as valuable precedents and confidence-building measures.