



Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones

Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) are regional [agreements](#) that ban the development, manufacturing, control, possession, testing, stationing and transport of nuclear weapons in a given area. These prohibitions are based on treaties that commit signatories to international verification, control and compliance systems. The aim of these accords is to strengthen global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament norms.

There are five major NWFZ treaties that cover five respective geographical areas:

- Treaty of Tlatelolco: Latin America and the Caribbean
- Treaty of Rarotonga: Oceania and the South Pacific
- Treaty of Bangkok: Southeast Asia, the Philippines and the Indonesian Islands
- Treaty of Pelindaba: Africa
- Treaty of Semipalatinsk: Central Asia

The United Nations (UN) has also recognized Mongolia's self-declared nuclear-weapon-free status through General Assembly resolution.

History of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones

The 1969 Treaty of Tlatelolco was the first NWFZ treaty that [denuclearized](#) a major populated area. The treaty banned nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean as north as Mexico and the Bahamas. The agreement was negotiated in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, which saw the United States and Soviet Union in potential conflict over the Soviet nuclearization of Cuba.

The Treaty of Rarotonga [established](#) an NWFZ in the South Pacific including such members as Australia, New Zealand and a number of small island states in Oceania. The charter covers a vast geographical area from the west coast of Australia to the 115th meridian west (also the western limit of the Treaty of Tlatelolco), and from the equator to the 60th parallel south (the north limit of the Antarctic Treaty). Signed in 1986, this accord was seen as a reaction to nuclear weapon states testing nuclear weapons in the area.

The Treaty of Bangkok traces its founding to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The five original members of the organization, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, signed the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality declaration in 1971 which sought to create a NWFZ. Cold War rivalries delayed the project, and in 1995 the then-10 members of ASEAN [signed](#) the Bangkok Treaty, which took effect two years later.

Similarly, the founding of the Central Asian NWFZ [arrived](#) with cessation of Cold War tensions. The idea [began](#) with Mongolia's self-declaration as a nuclear-weapon free zone in 1992 and a succeeding recommendation for a larger NWFZ in Asia. The presidents of the five central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) issued the Almaty Declaration in 1997 endorsing the proposal. This declaration began a series of talks which eventually resulted in the Semipalatinsk Treaty establishing a Central Asian NWFZ in 2002.

Finally, the Treaty of Pelindaba [created](#) the African NWFZ. The accord was preceded by an international effort spearheaded by the Organization of African Unity, the predecessor to the African Union, for a denuclearization of the continent in 1964. Like previous efforts, Cold War tensions as well as the Arab-Israeli rivalry delayed the agreement, which did not open for signature until 1996. The UN General Assembly passed multiple resolutions calling on African states to ratify the agreement, which eventually came into force in 2009.

Non-Compliance Issues with NWFZs

Neglect for NWFZ Protocols

The United States has not ratified many of the protocols that NWFZ parties request from Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). One such protocol typically mandates that NWS respect the prohibitions set forth in the treaty. A second commonly protects parties and their territory from the use or threat of nuclear weapons by NWS. And a third, generally, calls on NWSs to not test any nuclear weapons within the treaty zone.

The United States has signed, but [not ratified](#), the protocols of the Rarotonga Treaty, the Bangkok Treaty, the Pelindaba Treaty and the Semipalatinsk Treaty. No other NWS has ratified those of the Bangkok and Semipalatinsk treaties; however, all NWSs have ratified the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

The bottleneck for U.S. ratification is often the Senate in which concerns persist as to whether the protocols could violate treaty obligations to allies. The executive branch has [repeatedly insisted](#) such concerns are unfounded and NWFZs actually benefit global security.

Central Asia Treaty Controversy

The United States along with France and the United Kingdom have not ratified the protocols of the Semipalatinsk treaty due to a disagreement on interpretation. Article 12 of the main treaty [reads](#):

“This Treaty does not affect the rights and obligations of the Parties under other international treaties which they may have concluded prior to the date of the entry into force of this Treaty.”

Western NWS [argue](#) that Russia could still deploy nuclear weapons to central Asia under the Commonwealth of Independent States' Collective Security Treaty, also called the Tashkent Treaty. Washington also has also pointed to issues with Article 12 and its compatibility with the Treaty of Bangkok. Russia and China have supported the treaty through UN General Assembly resolution though no NWS has actually ratified the agreement.