

Obstacles to nuclear disarmament - and how to overcome them

4. The weasels



Anyone familiar with Wildfire>_ will already be aware of the pernicious and underhanded role that the nuclear weasel states play in obstructing disarmament. But for those new to Wildfire>_, and for the sake of completeness, let's review the charge sheet.

The weasels are, officially, all non-nuclear-weapon states, for whom nuclear weapons are prohibited by the NPT. They all claim to be in favour of nuclear disarmament. The more sensible and self-aware ones keep a low profile, but others such as Australia, the Netherlands and Germany are often to be found speaking prominently and piously on the subject. They like to style themselves as moderate, realistic and capable mediators, working tirelessly to “build bridges” and “engage” the nuclear-armed states.

At the same time, the weasels depend on US nuclear weapons for their security, and some - incredibly - even keep US nuclear weapons on their territory. Undeterred by this blatant conflict of interest, they continue to blather away in the NPT, Conference on Disarmament and elsewhere, talking about “sustained, practical steps” for “effective disarmament”. While nauseating, this would be harmless enough in itself. The problem is that when faced with anything that might actually move disarmament forwards, or put pressure on the nuclear-armed states, or otherwise disturb the comfortable status quo, the weasels resist - in a disingenuous and underhanded way, since they have to pretend to support disarmament.

And so we see the sorry string of flimsy pretexts trotted out by the weasels to oppose what they call a “near-term” ban treaty. Such a treaty, they fatuously argue, will undermine the NPT (how?), will not “guarantee” disarmament (the step-by-step process does?), and will “enrage” rather than “engage” the nuclear-armed states (why?). The real reason the weasels oppose a ban treaty, of course, is that it presents awkward choices for them given their nuclear alliance commitments, and shines an unwelcome light on their

hypocritical policies. Here, for example, is an illustrative interpretation of some recent Australian statements:

Interpreting Julie Bishop, Australian foreign minister



What she says:

“a near-term nuclear weapons ban treaty would not provide a short cut to some form of security nirvana”

“pushing for a ban would divert attention from the sustained, practical steps needed for *effective disarmament*”

What she means:

“a near-term nuclear weapons ban treaty would not be very convenient for Australia, given our reliance on nuclear weapons”

“pushing for a ban would focus unwelcome attention on Australia’s reluctance to support effective disarmament”

It would be tempting to dismiss these weasel antics as so much comedy. The trouble is that many weasels enjoy an (occasionally justified) reputation as reliable, influential and effective multilateral operators. Many of the more lily-livered non-nuclear-weapon states are reluctant to pursue a ban treaty without the involvement of at least a few weasels.

And there’s the rub: a ban treaty would be a very effective way of forcing the weasels out of their comfortably ambiguous armchairs. But if everyone else waits for the weasels to come on board, it will never happen.