

Going Ahead with Nukes

What is the issue?

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- ICAN being awarded the Nobel peace prize is a laudable sign for nuclear disarmament efforts. (Click [here](#) to know on ICAN and its treaty).

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- However civil society and governments are required to focus on practical steps to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons to make the above meaningful.

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Is ICAN's treaty effective?

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- The U.S. President Barack Obama was awarded in 2009 the Nobel Peace Prize for offering a vision of a world without nuclear weapons.

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- This has hardly contributed to any reduction in nuclear dangers and in fact nuclear arsenals have only increased in several states.

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- Similarly, the Nobel Committee's choice of ICAN is more an awarding of ambition.

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- ICAN's Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons creates a legal basis for banning nuclear weapons among adhering states.

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- It only seeks to delegitimise nuclear weapons as tools of statecraft on the grounds of indiscriminate humanitarian effects and has actually not banned them.

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What makes nukes indispensable?

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- Without nuclear weapons, States believe that there would be **more violence**, not less.
 - And **regional wars** would increase in frequency and lethality with catastrophic consequences.
 - States opposed to the prohibition treaty are located in Europe and East Asia which are shaped by the trauma of World War II.
 - States facing nuclear threats are particularly driven by potential **existential threats**.
 - E.g. South Korea supports the idea of acquiring nuclear weapons to counter the growing nuclear threat from North Korea.
 - It is such **international security problems** that the current nuclear prohibition treaty have trouble addressing.
 - Nuclear weapons and alliances backed by them are seen as **guarantee to security**.
 - Resultantly, none of the weapons possessors seems particularly concerned with the stigma created by the prohibition treaty.
 - The efforts that US, Pak, India, China and North Korea, etc are engaging in, to modernise their nuclear arsenals proves this.
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What is the way forward?

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- Instead of increasing the number of states that join the prohibition treaty, efforts could be made globally to **reduce the sources of nuclear danger**.
- This could aim at **mitigating security threats** that drive demand for nuclear weapons, and could legitimise nuclear deterrence.
- Countries could be encouraged to route their investments to **economic or international political power** rather than towards weapons.
- This could possibly work as an alternative means of international leverage or

suasion.

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- Stakeholders should thus find the right balance between nuclear disarmament (complete elimination of weapons) and nuclear deterrence (discouraging or inhibiting the use).

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- Without these the prohibition treaty of ICAN risks becoming merely a moral victory, rather than contributing to concrete steps.

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Source: The Hindu

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