

THE WEASEL



A Nuclear Weasel State is a country that is a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, but which is in a nuclear alliance with a nuclear-weapon state, and thus depends on nuclear weapons for its defence and security. Some weasels even have nuclear weapons on their territory.

Weasels include NATO members, Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Weasels typically claim to support nuclear disarmament, but will also be observed undermining disarmament initiatives that look too promising. They will generally defend the interests of their nuclear-armed patron.

Weasels are cute, but pose a serious obstacle to nuclear disarmament.

The weasel dilemma

Like their nuclear-armed allies, weasels want to get rid of nuclear weapons - and to keep them too. They claim to be committed to a world free of nuclear weapons, but in the same breath say that as long as the weapons exist, they will rely on them for defence. In other words, they support nuclear disarmament just as soon as it has happened.

This contradictory stance works as long as no progress is being made with nuclear disarmament. But when something does happen - such as an initiative to examine the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, or a proposal for a treaty banning them - it puts the weasels in a difficult spot. They resist and undermine progress, but cannot reveal the real reason for their reluctance - that they want to continue relying on nuclear weapons. So they are forced to resort to disingenuous and often comical rhetorical contortions.

Weasel behaviour

Weasels often call for others to do things (e.g. increase transparency, reduce the role of nuclear weapons in defence doctrines), but completely ignore their own situation and scope for action. To avoid drawing attention to their own dubious role, weasels stress the primary responsibility of nuclear-armed states in acting on nuclear disarmament.

Weasels and a treaty banning nuclear weapons

The prospect of non-nuclear-weapon states going ahead to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons presents an acute problem for the weasels. Since the weasels are already prohibited by the NPT from possessing nuclear weapons, there is no prima facie reason they could not support and join a ban treaty. Their reliance on nuclear weapons makes it awkward, but admitting this would risk calling into question their compliance with the NPT. So they are obliged either to oppose a ban treaty on disingenuous and flimsy pretexts, or to keep quiet and hope it all goes away.