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Full interview with Princeton's Zia Mian about the proposed U.N. nuclear ban treaty, the U.S. boycott and the U.S. trillion-dollar plan to "modernize" its nuclear arsenal. Zia Mian is a physicist, nuclear expert and disarmament activist. He is co-director of the Program on Science and Global Security at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: We turn now to a historic debate at the United Nations. Some 120 countries gather this week to draft a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. But the United States did not take part. In fact, the U.S. led a boycott of the talks. This is U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley.

NIKKI HALEY: You're going to see almost 40 countries that are not in the General Assembly today. And that's 40 countries that are saying, in this day and time, we would love to have a ban on nuclear—on nuclear weapons. But in this day and time, we can't honestly say that we can protect our people by allowing the bad actors to have them, and those of us that are good, trying to keep peace and safety, not to have them.

AMY GOODMAN: U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley was joined by envoys from Britain, France, South Korea and other nations in opposing the U.N. talks on a nuclear weapons ban treaty. Russia and China have also declined to participate in the conference.

We're joined now by Zia Mian, physicist, nuclear expert and disarmament activist, co-director of the Program on Science and Global Security at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. He's co-author of *Unmaking the Bomb: A Fissile Material Approach to Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation*.

What's happening here? Why is the U.S. leading this boycott?

ZIA MIAN: The news is not that the U.S. is leading a boycott. We knew the United States wasn't going to participate and that it's been trying to force its nuclear NATO allies also to not participate. The news here is that, after 70 years, the vast majority of countries in the world have decided they've had enough of waiting for the United States and the other countries with nuclear weapons to keep their promise that they would get rid of nuclear weapons, and said, "Enough is enough. We are now going to create an international treaty that will ban nuclear weapons, and you are going to be nuclear outlaws. And you're going to have to deal with this new reality."

NERMEEN SHAIKH: So how did these nations come together now?

ZIA MIAN: It's taken years and years of effort by non-weapons states and peace movements around the world to build the kind of coalition that it's taken to bring a resolution to the United Nations last year, in which 123 countries, as you mentioned, voted in support of the beginning of talks. The United States tried actively to block that resolution being passed. It actually sent a classified memo to all of the NATO allies the U.S. protects with its nuclear weapons, saying, "Don't support this resolution at the United Nations. And if the resolution passes, don't go, or else." It was actively threatening its own allies to make sure they wouldn't participate, because they know that in many of the countries in Europe, in particular, and in countries like Japan, which are protected by U.S. nuclear weapons, public opinion and many parliaments are actually in favor of joining the process to ban nuclear weapons. And it's taken a lot of effort by the United States to keep these countries out of the process.

AMY GOODMAN: Trump said recently, "If countries are going to have nukes, we're going to be at the top of the pack." And, of course, you had Nikki Haley saying, "Sure, I'd like a nuclear ban, but what about North Korea?" Your response? What has to happen?

ZIA MIAN: Well, you can't wait for the worst actors in the world before you pass laws about what's right and wrong. If that was the way the world worked, we would never have banned slavery, if you had to wait for slave owners to agree in advance that slavery is a bad thing. What countries are doing is laying down a marker, just like we did with chemical weapons, biological weapons, land mines, cluster munitions and creating the laws of war, that simple humanitarian principles apply. There are limits on what states are allowed to do, no matter what. You don't commit genocide. You don't use chemical weapons, biological weapons, and you shouldn't use nuclear weapons. And we're going to pass a law that says having nuclear weapons and threatening to use nuclear weapons and using nuclear weapons is forbidden

under international law. And if you're going to keep your weapons, then you are going to be on the outside of what the international community considers is acceptable.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: What about other nuclear weapon states—India, Pakistan and so on? Did they issue any statement about why they wouldn't participate?

ZIA MIAN: They haven't said why they wouldn't participate. But what happened when the U.N. was passing the resolution at the end of last year, which the U.S. tried to block, was that China and India and Pakistan abstained. They didn't vote no, unlike the United States and Russia and Britain and so on. And there was a possibility that at some stage in the future they might actually think about joining the negotiations, even if they're not ready right now to sign the treaty, because it's hard to imagine that countries like China, which have 250 nuclear weapons, are going to agree on a process to ban nuclear weapons, where the United States, which has 7,000 nuclear weapons, is going to sit outside this treaty.

AMY GOODMAN: President Trump has proposed slashing the budgets of the NIH, the National Institutes of Health, at the same time proposed boosting federal spending on the production of nuclear weapons by more than a billion dollars. Your final response?

ZIA MIAN: Well, the Trump administration's plan to increase spending on nuclear weapons is perfectly consistent with what President Obama's administration was also doing, which was increasing spending on nuclear weapons. There is a shared commitment by the U.S. policymaking process on spending a trillion dollars over the next 30 years to modernize the nuclear weapons, the submarines, the bombers and every part of the nuclear weapons production complex to get ready for a hundred more years of nuclear weapons. And this is part of what this U.N. process is trying to block, which is that we are not willing to live with nuclear weapons for another hundred years.

AMY GOODMAN: So, Zia Mian, as we talk about the nuclear nations, many of them saying no, are some saying yes, being a part of these talks?

ZIA MIAN: Not a single nuclear weapon state has actually agreed to be part of the negotiations. And so, first thing is, this is not a debate. This is the negotiation of a treaty, mandated by the General Assembly of the United Nations. This is the first time in the history of

the nuclear age, since the first creation of nuclear weapons and the use of nuclear weapons by the United States in 1945, that there has ever been an international treaty negotiation to ban nuclear weapons. Until now, all negotiations have been limited to a handful of countries, mostly the United States and Russia, about how to reduce marginally the weapons that they hold. This is the first time there has ever been an effort for a treaty to actually ban all nuclear weapons for all countries. So it's no surprise the nuclear weapon states don't want to be part of this process.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Well, I'd like to go back to comments Donald Trump made last year on the risk of nuclear proliferation. During the Republican presidential town hall, Trump talked about the possibility of other countries acquiring nuclear weapons. He was questioned by moderator CNN's Anderson Cooper.

DONALD TRUMP: At some point, we have to say, "You know what? We're better off if Japan protects itself against this maniac in North Korea. We're better off, frankly, if South Korea is going to start to protect itself." We have to—

ANDERSON COOPER: Saudi Arabia, nuclear weapons?

DONALD TRUMP: Saudi Arabia, absolutely. They're making—

ANDERSON COOPER: You would be fine with them having nuclear weapons?

DONALD TRUMP: No, not nuclear weapons—

ANDERSON COOPER: OK.

DONALD TRUMP: —but they have to protect themselves, or they have to pay us. Here's the thing: With Japan, they have to pay us, or we have to let them protect themselves.

ANDERSON COOPER: So, but if you say to Japan, "Yes, it's fine you get nuclear weapons," South Korea, "You, as well," and Saudi Arabia says, "We want them, too"—

DONALD TRUMP: It's going to—can I be honest with you? It's going to happen anyway. It's going to happen anyway. It's only a question of time.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: That was Donald Trump speaking last year at the Republican presidential town hall in Milwaukee. So, Zia, your comments on what he had to say about Japan acquiring nuclear weapons, and also to go back to the point that you made earlier about whether the question should be reduction and not elimination, as both the U.K. ambassador and the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. have said, that that's more plausible than calling for elimination? But first Trump's comments?

ZIA MIAN: So, it's—Trump's comments reflect a deep and abiding perspective in the United States that nuclear weapons will spread remorselessly and relentlessly to the rest of the world, and that the only way to do this is to make sure we have more and bigger weapons and are more ready to use them than anybody else, and therefore we'll maintain a decisive advantage over any other state. This is what drove the arms race with the Soviet Union from the very beginning. You have to remember that when the United States made and used nuclear weapons at the end of World War II, for the first few years it was the only country in the world with nuclear weapons. And in 1946, the United Nations, newly formed, passed its very first resolution: Resolution 1. The first thing the United States ever—United Nations ever talked about and agreed on was the need for a plan to eliminate nuclear weapons. And the United States said no.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Is there any reason to believe that it'll be different this time?

ZIA MIAN: I think what's different this time is that after 70 years of seeing what nuclear weapons have done, the rest of the world, the 120 countries, which is the vast majority of countries in the world, have decided they do not want this as the future. After 70 years of nuclear weapons, there are still only nine countries with nuclear weapons. There are dozens and dozens of countries that tomorrow could begin to make nuclear weapons, if they wished. But these are countries that are sitting in the room in the United Nations, saying, "We want to make sure that this never happens for anyone," not that "Let's all go out and defend ourselves the way that the United States thinks that you should do, which is by the threat to commit genocide by using nuclear weapons."

AMY GOODMAN: In the period after Trump was elected and when he became president, he has had perhaps more communication—it's not clear, we'll find out if with other countries he had lots of secret communication—with Japan, certainly at the top, and spent a weekend with Shinzo Abe, the prime minister, not to mention had a press conference in Washington. Why this focus on Japan?

ZIA MIAN: The focus on Japan is—comes from three factors. The first of this is that, because of the situation in North Korea and the U.S. military commitments to Japan, Trump and others in the U.S. policymaking process feel that it's only by trying to raise the stakes in East Asia, by threatening to further arm and perhaps allow nuclear weapons to go to Japan and South Korea, that you can intimidate both North Korea and China. And this has been a constant refrain among some elements of the U.S. policymaking process, that you just have to raise the stakes and reduce the cost to the United States directly for its military guarantees to these countries. But the fact of the matter is that in Japan and in South Korea, there is no real domestic constituency for going nuclear. These are countries where, in Japan, its constitution forbids it to go to war. The idea that Japan is suddenly going to go off and start making nuclear weapons is unthinkable, except for—

AMY GOODMAN: And the U.S. forced that Article 9—

ZIA MIAN: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: —into their constitution, after—

ZIA MIAN: The U.S. wrote the Japanese constitution.

AMY GOODMAN: After World War II.

ZIA MIAN: After World War II, yes, exactly. And this tells you where things have come as to how far the Trump administration has gone beyond what's been considered acceptable for so long.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Well, let's go back to Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. She spoke to the media alongside other diplomats from nations boycotting the U.N. talks.

NIKKI HALEY: You know me as the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. But first and foremost, I'm a mom. I'm a wife. I'm a daughter. And so, I always think of my family first, as every one of the people behind me do, as well. Then we go, and we look at our positions. And what are we supposed to do in our jobs? Our jobs is to protect the people in our country, keep them safe, keep the peace, and do it in a way that brings no harm. Every one of the people behind me, that's our number one goal. That's the goal of our countries.

So now, suddenly the General Assembly wants to have a hearing to ban nuclear weapons. As a mom, as a daughter, there is nothing I want more for my family than a world with no nuclear weapons. But we have to be realistic. Is there anyone that believes that North Korea would agree to a ban on a nuclear weapons?

NERMEEN SHAIKH: So that's U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley, speaking on Monday. So, Zia, could you comment on what she said, and also tell us about the letter signed by 3,000 scientists endorsing the talks on the nuclear weapons ban treaty?

ZIA MIAN: So, two comments on Nikki Haley. First, the idea that the United States—right?—needs nuclear weapons to defend itself, and that this does no harm, because this is how you keep peace. All countries want to feel secure. All countries want to see peace in

the world. So why shouldn't all countries go off and seek nuclear weapons, including North Korea, given that the United States has threatened them repeatedly, including with the use of nuclear weapons? And so, the fallacy of Nikki Haley's argument is exposed absolutely clearly, that the United States and its friends uniquely have the right to protect themselves using nuclear weapons, but God forbid that anybody else should want to do the same thing. This is just an unsustainable and fundamentally immoral perspective, that we want to be able to commit mass murder to defend us, and we call it keeping the peace, but anybody else wants to have the same right, only it's absolutely intolerable and illegal, and we have to mobilize the international community to defeat this effort.

The second is the idea that nuclear weapons do no harm as a way to keep the peace. The fact is, the United States, along with other nuclear weapon states, have the capacity to destroy civilization. And they've known this from the very beginning, from the first dropping of the atom bomb in Hiroshima, that one bomb destroys an entire city. And if this is your notion of what keeping the peace is in the modern world, then you actually have no right to speak about peace and security as part of a civilized community. Mass murder is no way to keep the peace.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think President Trump would consider dropping an atomic bomb?

ZIA MIAN: I think all American presidents would consider dropping the bomb. You have to remember, the United States is the only country that had the choice to not do it, but chose to do it. And every president has retained the option, no matter what they've said, to use nuclear weapons, including President Obama, despite his promises to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons. He was the one that when the chance came to say we would not use nuclear weapons first in a war, he didn't do it. And so, the option to go first and to start nuclear war is a right that American presidents have kept to themselves and seek to deny everybody else.

AMY GOODMAN: Do you think President Obama paved the way for this with the trillion-dollar modernization of nuclear weapons, that many peace activists oppose? And what does that mean? Does it make it easier to use nuclear weapons?

ZIA MIAN: What the trillion-dollar—trillion-dollar modernization means is that when it came down to making deals with Republicans in the Congress, the Obama administration was willing to do a deal on the future of humanity and said, "Look, if you—if we need you to pass legislation through the Senate, and you want more nuclear weapons and more spending on nuclear weapons, we'll give you that to get what we want." And the Obama administration

made a tragic deal with the Republicans in the Senate. But the fact of the matter is, they could have refused to make that deal. But they decided that it was more important to pursue that legislative priority than to think about what the next 30, 40, 50, 60 years will look like. And that is something that we're now going to have to wrestle with year by year, because once this process has been put in play, you've created enormous vested interests in the nuclear weapons complex, within the military and among the political allies, to try and keep this gravy train for them moving forward for years and years and years. And so, yes, the Obama administration carries an enormous burden of responsibility for this problem.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: And, Zia, comment on the letter, the letter signed by 3,000 scientists. And also, you know, what is the status now of this treaty and whether it will have any significance if no nuclear weapon state is a signatory?

ZIA MIAN: So, the letter from scientists supports the ban treaty, and it's signed by scientists from all over the world, including many Nobel laureates and people with lifetimes of experience on working on nuclear weapons policy, from many, many countries, including from the United States. And it's a—

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Obama, as a peace laureate, I assume, was not one of the signatories.

ZIA MIAN: He's not a scientist. This is only scientists.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Ah, right.

ZIA MIAN: And this goes back to a long tradition of scientists speaking out about nuclear weapons. So, in 1946, Albert Einstein led a group of scientists and wrote a letter to scientists all over the world, asking for a million dollars to begin a campaign to educate the world about the dangers of nuclear weapons. And that tradition of scientists trying to reach out to the world, to policymakers and to the public, as part of their commitment to the democratic process, to say, "Look, as people and as democracies and as believing that people have the right to decide what their governments do, scientists, who understand these things, have an obligation to tell everyone that this is what nuclear weapons mean, these are the dangers, and you—now that you know, you have to decide what you want from your government."

And so, this letter from scientists is part of a long-standing effort by scientists from all over the world to make democracy work when it comes to nuclear weapons. And this is what the ban treaty process is also all about, that in the international community, it should not be the most powerful military state in the world that decides what happens in the world, but it should be the majority of the world's community deciding what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. And so, as you mentioned about Noam Chomsky's new book, *Who Rules the World?*, the goal of the ban treaty process, of the very idea of the United Nations, is that the answer to the question "Who rules the world?" is not the people with the biggest and most guns, or in this case the largest number of nuclear weapons, but the majority of countries in the world should decide about how the world works.

AMY GOODMAN: Will many of the scientists who are participating in this letter be in Washington on April 22nd for the March for Science?

ZIA MIAN: Many of the American scientists who signed this letter will certainly be part of the march. But there are scientists all over the world who are committed to this project—scientists from Pakistan, scientists from Russia, scientists from China. There are scientists everywhere who understand the dangers of nuclear weapons and are trying to help their fellow citizens better understand that danger, and give them the tools with which to push back against their governments.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Will you be at the march?

ZIA MIAN: Yes.

AMY GOODMAN: And finally—oh, can you tell us about it, what the plans are for the march?

ZIA MIAN: The march is now expanded from a march for science to basically become a march for rationality and reason and fact as the basis for dealing with public policy and decision-making in this country, and to try and defend the very idea of the Enlightenment and the idea that reason and democracy need facts and ideas, not sound bites and propaganda, as the way to actually shape how we have a democratic conversation and make decisions in this

country.

AMY GOODMAN: And finally, what will happen at the end of this week on the nuclear ban treaty talks?

ZIA MIAN: What happens at the end of this week is that—the countries have been discussing what should be in the treaty. Now they'll go away and draft their ideas as text for what could be in the treaty, and then they will come back in June and July and actually negotiate, sentence by sentence, what the draft treaty text is. And the chair of the United Nations negotiating process, who's an amazing woman ambassador from Costa Rica, is actually going to then present a draft text of a treaty for countries to take back to their capitals and consider. And the hope is that by the end of this year, we may actually begin the process of having countries sign up to a treaty that will declare nuclear weapons to be illegal.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: And Costa Rica doesn't even have a military at all, right? Quite apart from—

ZIA MIAN: Costa Rica does not have a military.

AMY GOODMAN: So, we will leave it there. Thank you so much, Zia Mian, physicist, nuclear expert, disarmament activist, co-director of the Program on Science and Global Security at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Dr. Mian is co-author of *Unmaking the Bomb: A Fissile Material Approach to Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation*.