

**Turning Pessimism into Optimism:  
A Growing Consensus on Nuclear Disarmament**

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In this knowledgeable gathering, all the problems of nuclear weapons are well known. The extent of the crisis for humanity, as we enter the Second Nuclear Age, is understood. The actions to halt the spread of nuclear weapons and lead to a nuclear weapons-free world have been clearly delineated in many forums. And, of course, the maxim that political will is needed to effect change has been repeated over and over. One would be hard-pressed to find a new idea to rid the world of the scourge of nuclear weapons.

What there is a shortage of in the subject of nuclear disarmament is hope. The great vision for the elimination of nuclear weapons set out in the Final Document of the U.N. First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 has long been abandoned. A sense of despair now grips the international community. Pessimism, if not cynicism, is now fashionable.

I contend, however, that there are grounds for optimism. A new kind of consensus on workable ideas is actually being formed, though it is not yet complete. A near-consensus on key elements was identified at the 2005 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the very conference often cited as evidence that the non-proliferation regime is collapsing. In fact, the Working Paper of the Chairman of Main Committee I and the Working Paper of the Chairman of the subsidiary body on nuclear disarmament and assurances were supported by strong majorities. The highlights of these documents included:

- Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) must stop nuclear sharing for military purposes under any kind of security arrangements.
- The most effective way to prevent nuclear terrorism is the total elimination of nuclear weapons.
- International action to stop proliferation is essential.

- Building upon the decisions taken at the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, including the “unequivocal undertaking” for total nuclear disarmament, no new nuclear weapons should be developed.
- Anticipating the early entry-into-force of the CTBT, the moratorium on testing should be maintained.
- The NWS must respect existing commitments regarding security assurances pending the conclusion of multilaterally negotiated legally binding security assurances for non-nuclear States Parties to the Treaty.
  - Assurances are not applicable if any beneficiary is in material breach of its own non-proliferation and disarmament obligations.
  - --Nuclear weapon free zones strengthen the non-proliferation regime and deserve to receive security assurances.

The fact that these elements did not command complete consensus was a reflection of the recalcitrance of the few, not the fissures of the many. As one who has participated in and followed closely every NPT meeting for the past two decades, I state as an incontrovertible fact that the overwhelming number of states, not to mention the critical mass of public opinion around the world, want to proceed in mutual, verifiable steps to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Progress, at the moment, is thwarted. But the gridlock ought not to blind us to the gathering consensus on what it is possible to achieve even in the near term. A roadmap to the future has been superbly drawn by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. In 2006, all but four states in the United Nations voted for the holdout states to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiate a ban on the production of fissile materials,

diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies, reduce the operational status of nuclear forces, and take other practical steps. Leading figures in nuclear weapons countries, some never before identified with nuclear weapons abolition, have started calling for action to reduce nuclear dangers.

In historical terms, the tide is turning against nuclear weapons. The moral, legal and military case against them is now better understood than ever before. The intellectual argument – that nuclear weapons are needed for security – is now rejected as baseless. Only a small coterie of defenders of nuclear weapons can be found today. We know that this coterie still possess immense political power. But the opponents of nuclear weapons are gathering strength. That itself is a new reason for hope. In the present crisis lie the seeds of opportunity.

Thus, out of the failed 2005 NPT Review Conference was born the Article VI Forum, which takes its name from the article of the NPT requiring good faith negotiations to achieve nuclear disarmament. In October, 2005, the Middle Powers Initiative began convening a group of about 25 like-minded states in this special forum devoted to examining in a non-combative way the political, legal and technical elements for a nuclear weapons-free world. Subsequent meetings at The Hague and Ottawa narrowed the focus on what must be done to energize the 2010 NPT Review Conference. MPI believes that the following steps can be achieved:

- Full ratification and entry-into-force of the CTBT.

- Immediate negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.
- Standing down (de-alerting) of U.S. and Russian nuclear forces and elimination of the launch-on-warning option from nuclear war plans.
- Legal assurances of non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states.
- Strengthening systems for the verification of reduction and elimination of nuclear arsenals, notably U.S. and Russian arsenals.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. Key issues in the nuclear fuel cycle are ready to be addressed by intensive diplomatic work. For example, states should relinquish their right to construct new reprocessing facilities and voluntarily institute a moratorium on the construction of enrichment and reprocessing facilities. However, these countries will only cooperate in restricting their right to develop nuclear energy (thus cutting off any possibility of developing a nuclear weapon) if they see the major nuclear states fulfilling their obligations to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Middle Powers Initiative believes that a crucial route to achieving global security is middle power leadership. MPI calls upon the middle power states to join together on this critical issue affecting humanity's very future, and act with the urgency that is demanded if we are to save the planet and posterity from foreseeable catastrophes.

The heart of the Article VI Forum message is: non-proliferation and disarmament are inextricably interlinked. As this message takes hold, our optimism should increase.