

Why Nuclear Disarmament Is Imperative

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“Twenty years after the end of the Cold War there are at least 23,000 nuclear warheads still in existence, with a combined blast capacity equivalent to 150,000 Hiroshima bombs. The U.S. and Russia together have over 22,000, and France, the U.K., China, India, Pakistan and Israel around 1,000 between them. Nearly half of all warheads are still operationally deployed, and the U.S. and Russia each have over 2,000 weapons on dangerously high alert, ready to be launched immediately – within a decision window of just 4-8 minutes for each president – in the event of perceived attack. The command and control systems of the Cold War years were repeatedly strained by mistakes and false alarms. With more nuclear-armed states now, and more system vulnerabilities, the near miracle of no nuclear exchange cannot continue in perpetuity.”

These sobering words are taken from the report of the *International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2009*, sponsored by the governments of Japan and Australia. Only a few days ago, the foreign ministers of both countries reaffirmed their common recognition that the threat of nuclear weapons is one of the most serious issues that humankind faces. They pledged to attain a meaningful agreement

at the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty concerning each of the treaty's three pillars, nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

This leadership gives us heart that the long struggle to rid the world of nuclear weapons is gaining a foothold on the international agenda. U.S. President Barack Obama's initiative in convening an unprecedented summit meeting of the United Nations Security Council devoted to the nuclear weapons issue has given new hope to the world. With both U.S. and Russian leadership seriously committed to nuclear disarmament negotiations, a new opportunity exists to make substantive reductions in existing nuclear arsenals, halt proliferation and set the world on an irreversible path to zero nuclear weapons.

Calls for achievement of a nuclear weapons-free world have continued to pour in from other quarters as well, notably the Five-Point Proposal of U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In 2009, he put his nuclear disarmament proposals in a broad context:

“There can be no development without peace and no peace without development. Disarmament can provide the means for both. ‘We the peoples’ have the legitimate right to challenge the leaders of the international community by asking these questions: What are you doing to eliminate nuclear weapons? How will you fund your fight against poverty? How will we finance mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and the protection of our environment? These are global goods that every government and every individual in the world should strive to achieve together in the spirit of renewed multilateralism.... Disarmament can help lead the way to a renewed multilateralism and that is why I have made it a number one priority.”

These are wise words from Ban Ki-moon, and the world is fortunate to have a U.N. Secretary-General with such a clear vision of the true human security agenda. In coming to Mr. Ban's own country, I wish to pay tribute to his excellent leadership and to thank the people of Korea for having given the world such a fine statesman.

I wish also to pay my respects to the government of the Republic of Korea, which is playing a crucial role in the stabilization of North-East Asia. It is unacceptable for the DPRK to become a permanent nuclear weapons state. I believe a final solution to the DPRK problem would be aided by the proposed North-East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. A regional zone, and the process of creating it, could contribute to the sustainable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. In such a zone, the DPRK would relinquish its nuclear arsenal and nuclear weapons capabilities, and receive in return binding assurances against use of nuclear weapons -- long a concern of DPRK leadership. By providing Japan and the Republic of Korea binding assurances against use of nuclear weapons, a zone could also facilitate their lessening or ending reliance on U.S. nuclear weapons for defense. Already, we see support for the proposal from a working group composed of parliamentarians from the Republic of Korea and Japan, established in 2009 through the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament.

World attention is focused on the North Korea and Iran situations. Without question, the proliferation of nuclear weapons must be stopped. Even greater dangers for the world lie ahead if more states -- or terrorists -- acquire nuclear weapons. But proliferation is inevitable as long as the nuclear weapons states maintain their nuclear weapons, even in reduced numbers, while proscribing their acquisition by any other state. A two-class

nuclear world is not sustainable in the 21st century. It is time for middle power states to emphasize this point in their discussions with the nuclear powers.

President Obama has indeed raised hopes for a nuclear weapons free world. But he by himself cannot sustain those hopes and already disillusionment is beginning to be felt. In the face of the obstacles being thrown up by those within his own administration and Obama's growing acceptance of the need to compromise in order to get anything done on the polarizing life-changing issues, e.g., climate change, health insurance, can we expect that he will stay the course on abolition? Or will he take the view that some steps, e.g., a test ban, more reductions, is all he can get -- and he should not polarize society even more by demanding that which the political systems are presently incapable of achieving? Will he, in short, settle for the elimination of nuclear weapons as a good idea that we must work to achieve "eventually" while maintaining the doctrine of nuclear deterrence in the meantime?

It appears to me that that retention of "eventual" as the slogan for nuclear weapons abolition may become irresistible and inevitable unless there is resistance from key states abetted by an informed public opinion. The world is falling into a trap. In retaining "eventual," nuclear defenders will so solidify the justification for nuclear weapons that proliferation is bound to occur, and the more proliferation in the years and decades ahead the harder it will be to even claim that nuclear disarmament has legitimacy.

The world has stopped loving the bomb -- that much progress has been made. But it seems the long love affair cannot be ended. We cannot yet summon up the will to start work now to completely ban nuclear

weapons. And the longer this situation persists, the more ingrained they will become into world systems. The time to break this vicious cycle is now while Obama is still in office. At least, he wants to move to a post-nuclear weapons world, a position it would be foolhardy to think his successor will also hold. If the community of nations does not reject the pernicious doctrine that nuclear weapons are necessary for security now, while both the United States and Russia have leaders who want to break from the stranglehold of the past, not only will an opportunity have been missed but the world will be plunged into even deeper danger.

I have learned two great lessons from my years working in the nuclear disarmament field. First, any nation that possesses a nuclear weapon will spur others to want one also. The greater the number of nuclear weapons states, the greater the risk that the weapons will be used. And any use of a nuclear weapon would be a calamity leading to world-wide suffering.

Second, steps in the name of nuclear disarmament, such as reductions or a ban on testing, by themselves will not be effective as long as non-nuclear states are convinced that such steps are but a cover for modernizing arsenals. Lower numbers of weapons, which become more effective through modernization, euphemistically referred to as “refurbishing,” is not nuclear disarmament. When the Partial Test Ban Treaty was achieved in 1963, it did not stop nuclear testing; it simply changed the venue of testing from the atmosphere to underground. Similarly, a comprehensive test ban, now laboriously working its way through the diplomatic processes, will only stop explosive testing; testing for future nuclear weapons will go on in the laboratories. There must, in short, be a visible intent to link the steps to the goal of a nuclear weapons free world.

The idea that it will be satisfactory just to have fewer nuclear weapons held by nations that claim to be stable must be discarded. It was not sufficient just to have a little slavery or to improve somewhat the conditions of life for slaves. Apartheid for only a few blacks was not acceptable. Colonial domination by outside rulers, as long as they were friendly, could not be tolerated. Slavery, apartheid and colonialism were social evils that had to be completely eliminated. So too, nuclear weapons are a social evil, in fact the ultimate evil. They must be banned by the international community because failure to do so threatens the very existence of life on the planet.

The nuclear doctrinists throw up all sorts of false arguments: nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented, we cannot stop cheaters, nuclear disarmament will pave the way to conventional wars. All these arguments have been rejected by numerous commissions. No one is talking about “unilateral” nuclear disarmament. Nor can mutual disarmament be done overnight. What is required is an irreversible commitment by all states to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons. Were the nuclear weapons states to make such a commitment, they would not only save the Non-Proliferation Treaty from further erosion but gain the moral authority to call on the rest of the world to curb the proliferation of these inhumane weapons.

How should such a commitment be evidenced?

The answer lies in starting specific work now on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. This would be a global treaty banning the production as well as deployment of nuclear weapons. A global treaty exists banning chemical weapons; a similar treaty prohibits biological weapons. Why should there not be a global ban on nuclear weapons?

A Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, written by leaders in the nuclear disarmament movement, has been circulating as a U.N. document for several years. On October 8, 2009, in his Geneva Lecture, Ban Ki-moon repeated his call for work to begin:

"...Any commitment to eliminate the world's deadliest weapon can only be achieved with the most binding of all legal obligations. This could take the form of a multilateral nuclear-weapon convention. It could emerge as a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments. Whatever the form it may be, the commitment must have the force of law."

The model convention would prohibit development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons. States possessing nuclear weapons would be required to destroy their arsenals according to a series of phases. The model contains detailed provisions for national implementation and verification; establishes an international agency responsible for enforcement and dispute settlement; and indicates procedures for reporting and addressing violations. Governments are, of course, the principal actors, but civil society would play an important role. The experience of many international and intergovernmental bodies will be useful. Moreover, the scientific, medical, legal, policy, and other expertise of NGOs would make them key partners in the process.

Every year since 1997, the General Assembly has adopted a resolution calling upon all states immediately to commence multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a Nuclear Weapons Convention. In 2009, the resolution was adopted by a vote of 124 to 31,

with 21 abstentions. So far, China has been the only major nuclear power to vote for it. While it is difficult if not impossible to start practical work on a Nuclear Weapons Convention with the opposition votes and abstentions so high, important support is growing.

At the 2009 Security Council Summit, several heads of states expressed support for a convention. While noting that, for the time being, the NPT “remains the core” of the regime, President Heinz Fischer stated, “Austria supports the idea of a Nuclear Weapons Convention equipped with a sophisticated verification mechanism.” Hu Jintao, President of China, stated, “The international community should develop, at an appropriate time, a viable long-term plan composed of phased actions, including the conclusion of a convention on the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons.” India has also raised its voice, most recently on September 29, 2009, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh reiterated India’s proposal for negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament’s 2009 report stated, “It is not too early to start now on further refining and developing the concepts in the model NWC....” The key to a nuclear weapons-free world is to start the preparations now, while political conditions are right, to identify the requisite legal, political, and technical elements while simultaneously undertaking parallel steps on limited measures – such as taking nuclear weapons off alert status, entry-into-force of the CTBT, negotiation of an FMCT, and such other measures as verified reductions on current nuclear stockpiles. Active movement toward a convention will act as a road map to guide and accelerate the current disarmament process. Without the start of such active work, nuclear weapons states will continue to cling to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence,

which has led to an unsustainable two-class world of nuclear haves and have-nots.

International polls show that people around the world overwhelmingly support the proposition that all countries should sign a treaty that prohibits all nuclear weapons. But they are passive, if not skeptical, in expressing this view. The sheer horror of nuclear weapons, and the catastrophic economic, environmental and human costs of their use have not yet penetrated the public consciousness. While it's hard to find anyone who actually thinks using nuclear weapons is a good idea, the subject seems remote from daily concerns. Nuclear disarmament campaigners are frequently relegated to the sidelines of society's concerns.

What we need is a single-focused idea to get rid of all nuclear weapons in a safe and secure way. That's the beauty of a Nuclear Weapons Convention: it provides a legal basis for phasing in concrete steps with a visible intent to reach zero nuclear weapons in a defined time period. The public can easily understand this clear notion.

The Middle Powers Initiative has examined this question and states: *“Middle power countries should press for the NPT Review Conference to adopt a commitment to commencement of preparatory work, deliberations and negotiations on a convention or framework of instruments for sustainable, verifiable and enforceable global elimination of nuclear weapons.”*

Key countries can perform a great service to the nuclear disarmament agenda by ensuring that the Final Document of the forthcoming NPT Review Conference contains a passage calling for active work to begin. This work could then take the form of international consultations involving a core group of like-minded states and representatives of civil society to

thoroughly explore the focus, scope, verification, and other elements relevant to a Nuclear Weapons Convention. An international contact group not blocked by rigid consensus rules would be an important step forward.

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Societal attitudes are indeed changing even though moving to a nuclear weapons free world represents a tectonic shift in how the world operates. The very powerful are being asked to give up that which makes them very powerful and this has never been done before in the history of the world. Nonetheless, historical momentum towards the abolition of nuclear weapons is building up. Opposition by nuclear diehards is still strong, but the public will of the vast majority of the world must prevail.

We must constantly appeal to the conscience of humanity to take steps to ban those weapons that would destroy all life on the planet. There *is* a global conscience and we must – through art, films, books, the Internet and all forms of modern communication – reflect, inspire, deepen and utilize the feelings within all civilizations that the threat of mass killings cannot be tolerated.

The abolition of nuclear weapons is no longer just a lofty goal, a noble aspiration, an idealistic thought. It has become the irreducible essential for survival. It is the paramount human rights issue of our time. Peace is impossible as long as the threat of nuclear war hangs over our heads. A Nuclear Weapons Convention prohibiting the production as well as use of all nuclear weapons in all circumstances is urgently needed. It will be constructed once governments' long love affair with the bomb finally ends.

