

Remarks to 7th World Summit of the Nobel Peace Laureates

Atoms for Peace or for War –
Some Implications for the Nobel Peace Laureates

by

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It is my great honour to address to such an august meeting as 7th World Summit for Nobel Peace Laureates. This year, the meeting is devoted to the nuclear issue under the title ‘Atom for Peace or for War’ that has become exceedingly relevant in view of a series of worrisome developments in many corners of the world.

When we look back the history of nuclear issue, efforts to control the atom have evolved through several stages since the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Though none has solved the problem, there remain reasons for hope, but also for despair

Aside from apathy and indifference, the leading obstacle remains the lack of agreement in the world over the nature of the problem of controlling the atom. At the heart of the problem is the “dual-use” nature of fissionable atoms -- which can be used to produce electricity or mushroom clouds – combined with the unpredictable nature of human behaviour. The challenge of controlling the use of such atoms is therefore part technological, and part political, but in the end requiring human wisdom particularly of political leaders. But no one single solution is adequate for either part of the problem. History documents this well.

The initial method of control was quite simply secrecy -- but the Soviet Union demonstrated the limitations of that approach by detonating its own nuclear device in 1949, an action replicated by several other states in the years to follow. As globalization and IT revolution proceed in remarkable speed, it is increasingly difficult to maintain secrecy. But recent proposals for international control over sensitive technology still prove that secrecy is an important tool to control atom.

In the early post-war years, both the United States and the Soviet Union also proposed various schemes for global nuclear disarmament, but without success – tens upon tens of thousands of nuclear weapons would later be produced. In 1953, President Eisenhower delivered his “Atoms for Peace” speech at the United Nations, which called for the promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy under international “safeguards”. Yet some of this technology filtered into military programmes.

Years later, in 1968, members of the world community signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which stressed the importance of preventing additional countries from acquiring such weapons – a strategy called non-proliferation -- while retaining the goals of peaceful uses and disarmament.

This strategy has suffered its own setbacks – most notably , for example, by the nuclear detonations in South Asia in 1974 and 1998; the DPRK’s withdrawals from the NPT and its nuclear test; disclosure of extensive black market networks led by AQ Khan as well as open markets provided by developed nations; and persisting concerns over the nuclear intentions and capabilities of Iran.

In a completely different international security landscape in the post-cold war, efforts are underway to prevent non-state actors from acquiring nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction largely through initiatives undertaken at the United Nations – notably Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Convention on the Suppression of Nuclear Terrorism. Resolution 1540 obliged all states to adopt controls against the proliferation of such weapons to states or non-state actors.

As one surveys the various approaches being practiced or proposed today for controlling the atom, virtually all of them encompass elements of these five basic approaches; secrecy, disarmament, peaceful use of nuclear energy, non proliferation, non state actors. These are three NPT pillars plus secrecy and Non-State-Actors. Great policy disagreements persist, to be sure, but nobody is seriously dispensing entirely with any one of these five fundamental approaches. The disputes instead centre on the relative balance to be accorded to the various approaches, their proper sequencing, or priority.

International consensus on these five, if not three, basic approaches is not only hard to achieve, but we have seen in recent years growing polarization of views among nations how to achieve the balance among those elements.

Yet the world today is filled with despair over some now-familiar nightmares – including the prospect of other countries acquiring nuclear weapons, the rise of nuclear

terrorism, and the dismal vision of nuclear weapons becoming a permanent feature of international relations. Why such despair, given the common ground that unites all nations?

One reason relates to the basic human preference for simplicity over complexity – we naturally prefer single explanations for events – and single solutions -- rather than complex ones. Politicians find that simple explanations are easier to explain to their constituents. The media like such explanations, because few listeners, readers, or viewers have much time to master the intricacies of complex international issues. It is difficult to balance with so many caveats and nuances. This requires moderation and self-restraints that are directly opposite to expanding egos and pride that you usually display in policy arguments. Though we human kind has demonstrated tremendous development in science and technology, we have hardly made progress in philosophy and wisdom in history. Thus our pursuit of a single solution continues.

Of all the five approaches to the challenge of control, not one of them is alone sufficient to accomplish the job of freeing the world from nuclear dangers. What is needed today is not the fission of these five approaches, but their fusion into a single, coherent, and integrated strategy. Such a strategy would not “trade-off” non-proliferation and disarmament, but pursue them simultaneously as mutually dependent goals.

In this context, I would like to refer to the Yin yang theory of the Orient. It assumes there are opposite forces working in the universe, and ideally they should co-exist in harmony. It would not, however, tell you how to arrive at this harmony and it is left to a wise man to discover.

I recall someone told me the idea behind the Tri-Colour in the French Revolution; Freedom, Equality and Fraternity; when you pursue freedom in the jungle of strongmen and those not, this would inevitably lead into the world of inequality through competition: on the other hand, when you pursue equality in the outcome, then you would have a stifle society of little freedom; there is an apparent trade off between the two notions, which can be bridged with fraternity, or you may say, tolerance or love, then only the world you live would become habitable and enjoyable.

To balance trade-offs, we need some kind of wisdom. The world of atom is full of trade-offs and sometimes opposite considerations. So how can the Nobel Peace Laureates demonstrate wisdom to promote an integrated approach to deal with many challenges of the atom?

You are ideally placed to pursue this goal. You speak with great moral authority, since the common cause that you have all pursued has been the benefit of humanity -- not just the interests of particular states, or the rich and powerful. You have all confronted and overcome great political obstacles and trade offs in your respective fields. These same wisdoms are needed more than ever in rising to the challenges posed by the atom.

Atoms do not decide for themselves whether they will be used for purposes of peace or war – people make such choices. I urge you all to raise your voices on behalf of an enlightened, comprehensive approach to eliminating nuclear dangers.

When you join together and write letters or publish your shared editorial opinions, people listen, as was apparent in the global response to your recent efforts on behalf of the Arms Trade Treaty. Your words can inspire academia to investigate more closely the difficult technological and political challenges in managing the atom. Individually or collectively, you can speak to national. Your words can also inspire constructive activities by a civil society, be it religious group, environmentalist, human rights activist – indeed, all who work for the benefit of others.

The potential gains from this investment in addressing nuclear challenges are extraordinary – they extend well beyond international peace and security, and deeply into the realms of social and cultural harmony. I welcome your collective interest in addressing the theme of this particular meeting and look forward to learning of your many achievements that lie ahead.