

Keynote Address

Responding to the Challenges to the NPT

by

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I would like to begin by commending the work of all who have been involved in the Middle Powers Initiative (MPI), a program of the Global Security Institute. I salute in particular its constructive and non-confrontational approach. MPI’s Article VI Forum appears in the wake of two recent setbacks in the multilateral diplomacy of disarmament - namely, adjournment of the 2005 NPT Review Conference without a final document and the failure of the World Summit Outcome Document to address any issues relating to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) .

In response, Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that the international community seems almost to be “sleepwalking” down a path to a nuclear-armed world, and he specifically referred to the World Summit’s silence on WMD as a “real disgrace”. These strong words captured well a deep sense of frustration in the minds of people who are worried about these grave weapons threats that continue to jeopardize not only international security but also the next generation of mankind.

The legacy of the Cold War is not only seen in the sheer numbers of weapons that remain and that are growing in many ways. It is also seen in the difficulties that global institutions and instruments have faced in adapting to the dangerous emerging security environment. At the heart of these difficulties is a crisis of confidence facing the venerable NPT .

Following the DPRK’s withdrawal from the treaty, the world placed its hopes in the Six-Party Talks -- underway outside the Security Council -- to prepare an effective response .

Yet the concerns not only persist, but have been aggravated by recent missile tests and rumours of a future nuclear test.

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2. Iran, meanwhile, has repeatedly violated its NPT safeguards agreement and has engaged in what the Agency has officially called “two decades of concealed activities”. The Security Council is continuing its efforts to find an effective response to Iran’s manoeuvre to acquire sensitive nuclear fuel-cycle technologies.

While welcoming Libya’s decision to dismantle its WMD , the world has been awakened to an extensive black- market network run by A.Q. Khan.

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Unanswered questions about Iraq’s WMD capabilities led to a war, which was a double blow to the non-proliferation regime, since it exposed the limitations of intelligence information on WMD capabilities, while also demonstrating the failure of diplomacy to settle this dispute by peaceful means.

Other concerns have been voiced worldwide over the failure of the nuclear- w eapon States to live up to their own disarmament commitments under Article VI. Although the number of nuclear warheads has been significantly reduced from the over-kill situation at the peak of the Cold War, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons still remain, many on hair-trigger alert. Nuclear weapons modernization programs are underway, and no possessor state has yet developed a systematic plan to implement its nuclear disarmament commitments. Indeed, several of the “thirteen steps” for nuclear disarmament agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference have been explicitly repudiated by some of these states. Various nuclear doctrines would allow the use of nuclear weapons even against non-state actors or non-n uclear- w eapon States. And the CTBT – signed a decade ago – has still not entered into force.

Such a picture in the nuclear disarmament field has certainly eroded the confidence of many non-n uclear- w eapon States in the sincerity and genuine intentions of the n uclear- w eapon States. One leg of the NPT’s grand bargain has not been fully kept. Meanwhile, many developing countries are pointing to their “inalienable right” to peaceful uses of nuclear energy as provided in Article IV and are contrasting this right with the existence of double standards governing how nuclear technology is shared in the world. In this context, efforts to strengthen export controls in the name of non-proliferation are greeted by many countries with great skepticism .

It is true that this picture I have just described does not reflect many of the NPT’s achievements, especially its role in preventing a mushrooming of the nuclear club to 15-20 members as President Kennedy had once predicted.

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Yet there is a certain irony here – the more worries are voiced over the behaviour of a few non-compliant states, the more likely it becomes that additional states will re-assess their security requirements. And we may already be witnessing the quiet expansion of a new club within the NPT – namely, a growing number of nuclear-weapon-*capable* states, which will create new uncertainties and instabilities. The fact that there are states with nuclear weapons outside the NPT – ones that are now allowed to tap certain technological and commercial benefits even as non-parties – only further jeopardizes respect for the treaty and calls into question its relevance.

Unfortunately, this overall assessment of the NPT environment has been faithfully reflected in key UN fora. The Conference on Disarmament has now concluded this year without any substantive report in spite of the recent new proposal for an FMCT. The First Committee, which opens its next session on 2 October, as well as UN Disarmament Commission, remains divided and deliberations at times resemble a “dialogue of the deaf” as states engage in sterile debates over which should come first, disarmament or non-proliferation.

Even the recent progress in establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia was not free of controversy, as the treaty was signed despite criticisms from three nuclear-weapon states, whose support will be essential in arranging the fundamental security assurances. The Middle East WMD Free Zone that was part of the “package deal” that led to the indefinite extension of the treaty in 1995 has no near-term prospects even for negotiations.

Other more positive developments in recent years include the adoption of Resolution 1540 by the Security Council, which obligates states to control against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including their acquisition by non-state actors. This is a worthy initiative because it requires states to give effect to global non-proliferation norms in their domestic laws and policies. It remains to be seen, however, whether states that lack the technical, institutional, or financial capacity to improve their export controls will have either the will or the means to do so without receiving foreign assistance. It also remains to be seen what will happen to all the data that has been accumulating from the various national reports issued pursuant to that resolution – will it simply be compiled and placed on the shelf for posterity, or will it provide a foundation for analysis and constructive reform?

The Additional Protocol is another positive step forward in restoring international confidence in the credibility of safeguards after the Iraq experience revealed many of the shortcomings of conventional NPT safeguards agreements. Yet the Additional Protocol is only in force in 77 countries, or only about half of the IAEA’s 141 member states. Indeed, even the basic comprehensive NPT safeguards agreement is not in force in 31 non-nuclear-weapon States. While the Additional Protocol is undoubtedly an improvement over earlier safeguards arrangements, it too cannot absolutely guarantee against any diversion of fissile material for weapons or clandestine production at undisclosed facilities.

These challenges are surely not new to this audience. They underscore one fundamental reality in our world today – that its security problems are too extensive geographically and too complex politically to be solved by the actions of individual states alone, no matter how powerful they might be. This is a theme that linked many of the statements made over the last two weeks in the General Assembly in its high-level plenary session – a session that was notably gloomy about the current security situation in the world. But many heads of states more than last year voiced their support for the United Nations activities and stressed the need for its stronger mandates.

This is not to deny that there is indeed a useful place for unilateral actions and a role for ad hoc coalitions. Unilateral decisions, for example, led Libya to abandon its WMD programmes, South Africa to dismantle its nuclear weapons programme, the United States to abandon its own biological weapons programme, Ukraine and other former-Soviet republics to abandon nuclear weapons– and these are just a few examples of how sound national decisions can advance global disarmament norms.

Multilateralism, however, is what is required to consolidate these gains in a coherent global framework that is stable, permanent, and just. It is here that the middle powers have enormously important contributions to make. They enter this process from the moral high ground of those states that chose not to seek weapons of mass destruction – they are practicing what they preach.

Multilateral approaches to disarmament and non-proliferation have, in my view, certain basic principles in common . These are not new and have been repeated many times as basic guideposts particularly in nuclear disarmament. I believe it is worthwhile to mention anew these three principles:

First, there is an immense lack of transparency in this world with respect to WMD, which is typically explained in the name of national security or free trade . This challenge applies especially to existing arsenals, though it is also relevant to many non-proliferation efforts , including export controls. It is often said that “sunshine is the best disinfectant”, so one of the best cures for the ailments created by the black market may simply be to expose the entities involved in such trade. Just as companies value their reputation, so too do countries wish to be seen as living up to their international commitments. In disarmament, transparency requires a visible base-line against which to measure progress, and that will require far greater public reporting of facts and figures of existing nuclear arsenals. Some have proposed the creation of an international nuclear- weapons register – along with a fissile-materials register, these would be sensible objectives for the middle powers to pursue in their consultations with the nuclear-weapon states.

I note with pleasure of the recent development that China would soon come back to the UN Register on Conventional Weapons . This would certainly be a good confidence-building measure. Transparency would lead to accountability and contribute to the security objective.

Second, there is the need to strengthen the rule of law in both disarmament and non-proliferation. In the domain of disarmament, progress has been so slow and limited. But we should not be discouraged. In my view the crucial point is that we must at least stand still and avoid slipping back even further. In this context I would stress the importance of binding international commitments. The heavy crown of disarmament cannot be sustained on a house of cards. We will never make much progress if great uncertainty remains over the willingness or ability of states to keep their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. Accordingly, the irreversibility of both disarmament and non-proliferation commitments is an absolutely essential goal for the middle powers – indeed all states – to pursue. I believe the middle powers should encourage the United States and Russian Federation to ensure that the criterion of irreversibility is built into a treaty to succeed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (Moscow Treaty).

Third, the world should recognize the vital role that verification plays in building confidence in compliance with both disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. The case of Iraq has shown the limitations of strictly national means to verify compliance with WMD commitments, while also highlighting the value of multilateral verification efforts in yielding a more accurate picture of realities on the ground. This would enable the rest of the world to share the same picture so that the actions to pursue would easily obtain international consensus. Though costly, multilateral verification mechanisms are indispensable in building trust and confidence of the world community. IAEA safeguards, as strengthened by the Additional Protocol, are an excellent example of what international verification can do to strengthen international peace and security, as are the verification capabilities of the OPCW, and the continually improving capabilities of the International Monitoring System of the CTBTO's preparatory commission.

Each of these basic principles – transparency, irreversibility, and verification -- has long enjoyed the support of participants in the Middle Powers Initiative and I encourage you to continue to your support, despite persisting difficulties in implementation. The Conference on Disarmament need not agree on each of these criteria as preconditions for commencing negotiations on a fissile-materials treaty, or other instruments relating to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, negative security assurances, or nuclear disarmament. They should, however, at least be subjects for serious deliberation.

The success of the efforts of MPI's Article VI Forum will bring the NPT back to a new historic milestone – namely, the fulfilment of the “grand bargain” that led to the negotiation of the treaty in the first place. This is indeed a worthy aim.

Please accept my best wishes for the success of your consultations and my congratulations for recognizing the need for such an enlightened initiative.