

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND THE NPT:
The Responsibility of the Nuclear-Weapon States

By

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Global Summit for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World:
Laying the Practical, Technical, and Political Groundwork

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and
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London, England
16 February 2008

As many of you may know, I have been working in the field of nuclear disarmament for many years, and have attended many conferences and seminars on this issue. I have noticed that it has become somewhat of a tradition in such gatherings for keynote speakers to focus their remarks on specific policy issues and then, at the end, to pay a brief tribute to the efforts of civil society to advance this great goal.

Today, I would like to reverse this practice, not just as a courtesy to our hosts, but because I really do believe that this diverse combination of individuals and groups that together comprise “civil society” will have – and indeed are having – enormously important roles to play in bringing the process of global nuclear disarmament to a successful conclusion, for the good of all. They deserve full credit for this work, not treatment as an afterthought.

I look at the dedicated work of Rebecca Johnson and Kate Hudson, consider the sacrifices they have made over many years in the face of great obstacles, and can only feel a great sense of respect for their many efforts on behalf of their fellow citizens of this planet. I also know that they are not alone, and that they are part of a global community that shares the same objective. So it continues to disappoint me that many discussions of nuclear disarmament continue to treat the subject as a rather elitist political matter, of concern to a few diplomats, government bureaucrats, think tank specialists, and die-hard activists among the general public. It is, of course, far more than this.

In poll after poll, people around the world have registered their strong support for nuclear disarmament – they have a stake in its success. This is a point that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made repeatedly in his recent statements. In his message to the annual Pugwash Conference last October, he warned of the potential devastation of weapons of mass destruction and “the very real threat they pose to all of humanity”. Last month, he personally visited the Conference on Disarmament and underscored some of the many ways that progress in disarmament serves to forestall arms races, calm tensions, and free up resources needed to advance the Millennium Development Goals. He also noted how the absence of disarmament can jeopardize many of the most fundamental goals of the UN Charter.

I find it quite significant that the first three words of the Charter are “we the peoples”. This says a lot about who are the intended beneficiaries of the development, disarmament, and collective security provisions of that great document. Virtually all of our work at the United Nations assumes that nuclear weapons will not be used – for how long could economic development, a clean environment, respect for human rights, social justice, humanitarian relief, and the rule of law be sustained in the midst of a nuclear war? Such a nightmare is not at all unthinkable in our world today, which faces many dangers from the thousands upon thousands of nuclear weapons that remain in existing arsenals, military doctrines that contemplate – even prescribe – their use, the proliferation of such weapons to additional states, and the possible threat of nuclear terrorism.

Because of the horrific effects – both human and environmental – from the use of even one nuclear weapon, I believe that the world community must continue to ensure that nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism efforts receive the high priorities they deserve, both in the policies of governments and in the initiatives launched by civil society.

In this respect, I am also convinced that the states that possess such weapons – in particular the two with the largest holdings – bear a particularly heavy burden of demonstrating to the world what they are doing to fulfil the commitments they have made in the NPT to achieving global nuclear

disarmament. A few of them have taken pains to demonstrate their record of compliance, while others have remained silent. None, however, has so far openly admitted that its efforts at reduction are actually required by the specific obligations assumed under Article VI of the NPT. There is a big difference between an action that is consistent with the treaty and one that fulfils an obligation.

This is not to ignore that in recent years the NPT nuclear-weapon states have launched various initiatives – ranging from policy statements to specific practical measures – to convey the steps they have taken regarding disarmament. The Government of the United Kingdom has led the way in the area of verification, as reflected both in its published studies and its recent proposal in Geneva for a technical conference on the subject, which I hope will soon be further elaborated. In addition, the UK has announced reductions of its stockpile, halted the production of fissile material for weapons, joined the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and supported other such initiatives that, I might add, have been welcomed throughout the world. The United States and Russian Federation have also declared their own unilateral and bilateral measures of stockpile reductions. For its part, France has undertaken to cut its own production of fissile material for weapons purposes and to limit the size of its arsenal. And this is not all.

All states possessing such weapons support the goal of global nuclear disarmament. As I noted, almost all appear to be taking at least some steps to limit the size of their arsenals, or at least to place restrictions on their possible use. All are working to improve the physical security of their stockpiles and fissile materials. And all are seeking to improve controls to reduce the risks of proliferation and nuclear terrorism. All are continuing to refrain from nuclear tests. Some are publishing additional details about the size of their arsenals. Whatever other differences that continue to divide these powers, each has at least done something to advance the goal of global nuclear disarmament.

Understandably, such states desire to be recognized for their achievements in these areas, and I am pleased to do so today. The UN General Assembly has also adopted resolutions that recognize areas where progress has been made, as have many leaders who have spoken in several UN arenas. I strongly urge all who work for disarmament in civil society also to acknowledge progress when it occurs, for there is no reason for the process of disarmament to be adversarial, especially when such an approach only leads to new political or bureaucratic hurdles for disarmament.

This brings me to four questions. Are the steps that the nuclear-weapon states have taken sufficient to bring us to a world without nuclear weapons? Are some of these steps likely to take the world away from that goal? What actions are needed now and in next few years for substantial progress to occur? And how can these be implemented?

The first question is easy to answer: no, the existing steps have not been sufficient. Sufficiency implies long-term sustainability, and that requires, among other things, some significant institutional support and budgets. I am referring to the creation of government organizations with specific legislative mandates, budgets, timetables, benchmarks, and public accountability for achieving disarmament goals. There appears to be a gap between the international commitments to disarmament and the domestic institutional means to implement them, especially relative to the infrastructures and budgets devoted to maintaining or improving existing arsenals.

To this institutional deficit I would add an inspirational deficit. To the extent that it is able to achieve its goals in a reliable and credible manner, disarmament has the potential to enjoy massive and

durable public support, certainly more so than expenditure of vast sums on behalf of weapons whose basic morality, legality, and utility is widely open to question. Nuclear weapons cannot deter catastrophic terrorist attacks, nor are they likely to serve any function in response to such attacks. Yet their perpetuation generates new types of terrorist risks relating to the loss or theft of a nuclear weapon or related material, or to attacks on nuclear facilities or vehicles transporting such items. Physical security controls can only go so far in reducing such risks, but never as far as disarmament.

With respect to my second question, yes there are some steps that are contrary to the cause of disarmament. I would include in this category the following –

- the articulation of long-term plans – at times with time horizons in multiple decades – to retain or improve existing nuclear arsenals, coupled with the lack of any operational plans whatsoever to implement nuclear disarmament;
- the development of new types of nuclear-weapon delivery systems;
- the promulgation of nuclear doctrines that reserve the right to the first use of nuclear weapons, even against non-nuclear-weapon states, or to preempt a possible future attack involving other weapons of mass destruction or even conventional weapons;
- the repeated re-affirmations of nuclear deterrence as vital to national security; and
- the refusal to negotiate or discuss even the outlines of a nuclear-weapons convention.

In this light, the often-heard claim that nuclear stockpiles are at the “minimum” level needed to sustain deterrence is not reassuring, especially to the extent that it offers a model national security posture for other countries to emulate, as indeed they have. The claim by the current possessors that they must retain their nuclear capability because they do not know what threats might arise in the future could easily be made by any would-be nuclear state.

Nuclear doctrines, it appears, are somewhat contagious and tend to proliferate right along with the weapons themselves. The prospect of a world of States, each with its own “minimum” nuclear deterrent, could scarcely serve the interest of international peace and security. And if history teaches us anything, the prospect of perpetually freezing the number states with such a deterrent is not bright, recognizing that nuclear weapons have now spread to some eight or nine states since they were first used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As for my fourth question concerning what steps are needed for substantial progress in disarmament, any movement away from the previous list of items toward enhancing national security through non-nuclear means would advance this goal. Thus, weapons stewardship programmes would progressively give way to disarmament stewardship initiatives, which would include such activities as developing enhanced means of verifying compliance with disarmament commitments, promptly and reliably detecting possible violations, protecting against the reversibility of disarmament obligations, and ensuring the availability of alternative means (both diplomatic and military) of defending legitimate security interests without using nuclear weapons.

It is also important for the public and the world community to witness the progress of disarmament, through transparency measures involving more than just unilateral national declarations of reductions, but sufficient detail for the world to conclude that un-deployed weapons are in fact being taken apart and destroyed.

My last question, concerning the requisites for implementing such steps, requires that elusive term “political will”, by which I mean sustained political support, especially in the nuclear-weapon states – including from civil society, from the legislatures, from national leaders, from among the nuclear-weapon-states themselves, and from concerned members of the world diplomatic community. This is one of the reasons why I have welcomed the Hoover Plan – a nuclear disarmament initiative jointly proposed by the former high-level U.S. officials, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. Here in the UK, there is clearly a level of interest in nuclear disarmament at the highest level of government and in Parliament. There is strong support in civil society. There is also diplomatic engagement elsewhere in the world community, including through Britain’s participation in the Norwegian Initiative to explore new avenues for progress in disarmament and non-proliferation.

In my remarks today, I have offered, in bare outline, some of the responsibilities that the nuclear-weapon-states must bear in order to achieve concrete progress in nuclear disarmament. I accept that this progress will also require *parallel* efforts in nuclear arms control – including de-alerting – as well as new efforts to reduce the risks of proliferation and nuclear terrorism, but I do not agree that progress in disarmament should be held hostage to the prior solution of all these other problems, nor should such progress await the dawn of world peace. Progress in disarmament makes its own independent contribution to both peace and security, and I believe that contribution has been highly underestimated.

Reflecting back on the outbreak of World War I, Sir Edward Grey once wrote:

The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them -- it was these that made war inevitable. This, it seems to me, is the truest reading of history, and the lesson that the present should be learning from the past in the interest of future peace, the warning to be handed on to those who come after us.

Today, we are witnessing in the world another enormous growth in armaments, with global military spending now well over \$1 trillion and continuing to grow. This is an extraordinary development in the post-Cold War world and in stark contrast to a goal found in Article 26 of the UN Charter, namely “the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.” While nuclear disarmament will not *alone* guarantee a major reduction in this spending, it will help to reduce the motivation for states to seek such weapons, it will advance both nuclear non-proliferation and counter-terrorist efforts, and it will alleviate some of the mistrust and lack of confidence that has inspired arms races in the past.

Almost fifty years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the goal of “general and complete disarmament”, which aims at the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the limitation of conventional arms to levels sufficient to maintain national security and international peace keeping operations. The States parties to the NPT agreed in their 2000 Review Conference that this was their “ultimate goal”. While nuclear disarmament should still be the most urgent priority, a parallel complementary effort is also needed to limit the production, trade, and use of conventional arms. The British proposal of an Arms Trade Treaty – which has long been advocated by groups in civil society – is a clearly a step in the right direction.

Writing from the UK before the signature of the NPT, Leonard Beaton stated that “The greatest incentive to a wide spread of these weapons is the conviction that it is inevitable.” Today, I would like to propose a corollary: *The greatest incentive to a wide spread of these weapons is the conviction that disarmament is unachievable.* I believe that it is indeed possible to achieve, thanks to cooperative actions by enlightened governments and sustained support and pressure from civil society. To all the groups and government officials in attendance today, I urge you to continue your efforts to advance nuclear disarmament. It is a worthy cause indeed, and not one to be borne by the nuclear-weapon states alone.