

Nuclear Weapons and the “D-Word”

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Despite years of efforts by the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace, and International Security—which include countless issues of its publication, *Disarmament Times*—a great deal of public discourse about nuclear weapons still focuses only on the risks of the spread of such weapons to other states or their acquisition by terrorists.

These are of course legitimate concerns and they do merit the attention they have been getting. But my purpose here is to emphasize the importance of disarmament—the “D-Word”—as a means to strengthen international peace and security.

Fortunately, I am not alone in recognizing the need for greater attention to this issue. We have been witnessing a cascade of nuclear disarmament proposals in recent years. Joint op-eds by George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn have rekindled a public debate on this subject, and other such editorials have since appeared by statesmen in other countries. Building on a legacy that includes reports by the Palme, Canberra, and Blix WMD Commissions, Australia and Japan have established the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, which will issue its report early next year. The European Union has launched its own disarmament proposal, as have the governments of France and the United Kingdom. The “Global Zero” initiative has inspired widespread support from civil society and distinguished former leaders from around the world. And these are just a few such initiatives.

This outpouring of interest in disarmament is quite welcome—we are now facing about the brightest prospects for progress in many years, if not decades.

Yet I am concerned that there appears to be a tendency in some of these proposals to multiply the number of preconditions that must be satisfied before disarmament can ever be achieved. At this rate, I could see disarmament finally succumbing to a death by a thousand preconditions.

Some say we must first bring the risks of nuclear proliferation and terrorism down to zero, then tackle disarmament.

Others say, first produce world peace and solve forever the problem of war.

Some say, let’s view disarmament as simply a distant, visionary goal.

Others, meanwhile, urge the re-definition of “zero” by allowing the continued retention of “virtual” nuclear weapons.

Still others say they intend to keep their nuclear arsenals as long as such weapons exist, a circular argument leading to the perpetuation of all such weapons.

So, amid all these approaches, how can we identify serious disarmament proposals? To help in answering this question, I offer “the seven D’s,” which are important if not indispensable elements to achieve that goal:

- (1) **Destruction**—the essence of disarmament is the physical elimination of a designated class of weapon, not simply non-deployment.
- (2) **Deterrence**—disarmament does not allow the retention of doctrines of nuclear deterrence, even those of the “minimum” variety.
- (3) **Disclosure**—states must at some point declare their weapons, along with relevant facilities and materials, for disarmament to be transparent.
- (4) **Domestication**—disarmament commitments must be rooted in domestic law, policies, budgets, and institutional support.
- (5) **De-legitimization**—reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security policies, while also eliminating them as a source of status or prestige.
- (6) **Demonstrable verification**—protection against non-compliance through rigorous verification arrangements.
- (7) **Duty**—implementation of disarmament as a legal duty, not just as a discretionary political gesture.

I do not believe that every constructive disarmament initiative must necessarily satisfy each of the seven D’s, but I do believe that the more of them that are satisfied, the greater will be the likelihood that the initiative is a bona fide disarmament proposal, and not something else intended merely to manage the balance of nuclear terror. The only “D-word” that absolutely must not be omitted or replaced, however, is *disarmament* itself.

If pursued with strong support from civil society, within and among the family of nations, I believe that genuine disarmament efforts will lead us to a new age of peace and progress. With the help of the seven D-s, you will at least know such efforts when you see them.