

Global Nuclear Disarmament after 2010:
Expressway or Cul-de-Sac?

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I wish at the outset to thank the United Nations Association of New York and its Worldview Institute for inviting me to speak with you today. I know that UNA/USA has a fine reputation for promoting deeper public understanding and support for all the important work of the United Nations. But I am especially grateful for the interest that your Association has shown in our work on disarmament.

In her letter of invitation, your executive director Ann Nicol informed me that this event is part of a ten-week seminar programme organized by the Worldview Institute for young, international corporate executives. The seminar places particular emphasis on the importance of global corporate responsibility. Some of you might wonder what disarmament has to do with your work in international business.

Well, the answer is quite a lot, more than you might expect. Let's take a quick look at the official mandates of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.

Our primary goals—and this applies both to the UN Secretariat and the collective work of its Member States—relate first of all to the historic aims of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction or WMD, which include nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. We also have a mandate to pursue the limitation or regulation of conventional armaments. Together, these are among the oldest goals of the UN organization.

Disarmament and the regulation of armaments are objectives found in the UN Charter and the specific goal of eliminating WMD was a goal included in the General Assembly's first resolution in 1946. In 1959, the General Assembly combined these two primary goals into what has been called “general and complete disarmament under effective international control”. And ever since the General Assembly's first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, this has been the “ultimate objective” of the United Nations in this field.

These fundamental aims of disarmament have also been strongly supported by each of our Secretaries-General, including Dag Hammarskjöld, who often referred to disarmament as a “hardy perennial” at the United Nations, where it remains so today.

Our current Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has shown a particular interest in this subject. On 24 October 2008, he launched a five-point nuclear disarmament proposal that has gained widespread international recognition and support. It has been endorsed by the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, the recent Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, the Non-Aligned Movement, and was recognized in the Final Document of the 2010 Review Conference of States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—this is the only multilateral treaty that requires nuclear-weapon States to “pursue negotiations in good faith” on nuclear disarmament.

That speech in October 2008 contained the most detailed nuclear disarmament proposal that has ever been offered by a United Nations Secretary-General. In brief, he first called on the nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their commitment under the NPT to commence negotiations on nuclear disarmament—specifically on a nuclear weapons convention, or on a framework of mutually-reinforcing instruments with the same end.

Second, he called on the Security Council to become more active in addressing disarmament issues, a subject it has not considered in any depth since the early years after World War II, despite its mandate under the Charter to prepare plans for the regulation of armaments and disarmament.

His third point addressed some additional measures needed to strengthen the “rule of law” in disarmament, including entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, negotiation of a multilateral fissile material treaty, universal membership in the NPT, ratifications of all the Protocols to treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, and other such initiatives.

The fourth element of his proposal consisted of various measures to improve transparency and accountability, in particular to encourage states with nuclear weapons to make public more of that they are doing to fulfil their disarmament commitments, including data on current arsenals, fissile material, and delivery vehicles.

Lastly, he proposed a series of complementary measures, including new efforts to eliminate other types of WMD, to reduce conventional arms, and to establish new norms with respect to space weapons and missiles.

This was by no means an isolated speech by the Secretary-General. In just a few years, he has personally addressed all the key institutions of the UN disarmament machinery, including the UN Disarmament Commission, the General Assembly’s First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, and also the Secretary-General’s own Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

In September 2009, he addressed a summit meeting of the UN Security Council, which adopted Resolution 1887, a resolution that *inter alia* called on all States—not just those party to the NPT—to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

Last April, he addressed the Nuclear Security Summit, which had been convened by President Obama in Washington, D.C. to address nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear security challenges.

In May, the Secretary-General addressed the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which concluded successfully by adopting a 64-point Action Plan, in addition to an initiative to convene a conference in 2012 on establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The Final Document of that Review Conference created specific mandates for the Secretary-General in implementing that initiative.

In addition, last August Ban Ki-moon became the first Secretary-General to speak at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony and to visit Nagasaki. And in September, he convened a special high-level meeting on revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament.

Now just as many of you might still have questions about how the fate of disarmament efforts relates to your work in the business community, some of you might also wonder why the Secretary-General would take such a personal interest in this issue—given the enormous range of important international issues that he encounters in each day at the office. The answers have much in common.

Let's return for a moment to his October 2008 speech, where he called a world without nuclear weapons a “**global public good of the highest order.**” You in the business community know well about how global public goods serve your interests—indeed, how indispensable they are to all your work, and how easy they are to take for granted. Global public goods include a wide range of items or services in this world that serve the interests of all States and that cannot be owned or appropriated by just some of them, or indeed by individual private sector enterprises. They include international peace and security, economic well-being, social justice, and a sustainable environment.

We all know that the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, in just about every definition of this term. We rely on common agreements and understandings when we send communications or when we travel to other countries. We rely on global standards for controlling the spread of infectious diseases, for regulating the flows of capital between countries, and for preventing illicit arms sales and terrorism.

Cooperation in all these fields helps to create an environment in which people can go about their daily lives—and conduct their various business transactions—in confidence, with a high degree of stability and predictability.

I believe that the international business community does indeed understand how it depends upon the existence of a wider international environment in which these global public goods play so important a role. Trade without the rule of law; foreign investments in the midst of conditions of civil wars and rampant terrorist attacks; and attempts to conduct business in regions or sub-regions where national treasures are being exhausted by arms races or local armed conflicts—together, these are hardly conditions that are conducive to growth of international commerce and prosperity. They might provide opportunities for quick profits by illicit arms dealers and their intermediaries, but not the world business community overall.

This is especially true when it comes to dangers from the use of WMD or the outbreak of international or domestic conflicts involving the use of conventional arms. Even a single use of a nuclear weapon would have catastrophic consequences—political, economic, humanitarian, and environmental. The indiscriminate effects of these weapons are part of the reason why they were created—they are called “**weapons of mass destruction**” for a reason: creating such effects is exactly what they were designed to do.

So everybody has a common interest in ensuring that these weapons never get used again. There is even today what many have called a “**nuclear taboo**” against any such use of these weapons. Yet how stable is that taboo? Can we rely upon that taboo alone as reliable insurance against any future use? If not, what are the other options?

Nuclear deterrence is often cited as one such option, which bases non-use on the threat of retaliation in kind to prevent a first strike. Yet as fragile as this so-called “**nuclear balance of terror**” was in the bi-polar world of the Cold War—and there were many close calls—it becomes all the more unstable and unreliable in a world of many states with such weapons. The cold logic of *realpolitik* would argue that as long as such weapons exist anywhere, there will be pressures for other states to acquire them. The

International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament—co-chaired by Australia and Japan—had this to say in its final report, issued late last year:

So long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain, it defies credibility that they will not one day be used, by accident, miscalculation or design. And any such use would be catastrophic. It is sheer luck that the world has escaped such catastrophe until now.

Using virtually the same words, this conclusion echoed the findings of the 2006 Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction (Blix Commission) and the 1996 Canberra Commission.

The persistence of nuclear deterrence therefore continues to hinder progress in disarmament. It is a contagious doctrine that has now been adopted in one way or another by nine States. It is a doctrine that has been extended to cover numerous additional States in alliances. And one can rest assured, if more States do acquire nuclear weapons, deterrence will be high on the predictable list of rationales for such acquisition.

Yet deterrence offers no guaranteed solution to any of the key nuclear threats: the threat of use; the threat of their proliferation to other States; and the threats that would come from their acquisition by terrorists. In many ways, it actually aggravates these threats.

For decades, scholars and diplomats alike have been studying this challenge of how to prevent *most reliably* another use of a nuclear weapon. Perhaps the most succinct conclusion of these efforts was contained in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, which stated, “**The Conference reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.**” **The consensus Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference reaffirmed this conclusion, while also recognizing “the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States in receiving unequivocal and legally binding security assurances from nuclear-weapon States which could strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime.”**

Despite such strong language acknowledging the concrete security benefits from global nuclear disarmament—over 20,000 nuclear weapons reportedly continue to exist, with many still on high-alert status. Nuclear deterrence has been repeatedly affirmed by virtually all States that possess such weapons. Some States continue to maintain security doctrines that even reserve the right to the first use of such weapons—for example, to retaliate against a WMD attack, to pre-empt such an attack, or to use them in a conventional war.

Moreover, disarmament will require significant institutional support, involving domestic laboratories, companies, agencies, and organizations mandated to undertake specific responsibilities. Coordination of their various activities will require the adoption of long-term plans, with benchmarks and timetables for achieving them. It will require the disclosure of evidence that weapons are actually being physically destroyed in large numbers, and the publication of substantial new information about the size and disposition of nuclear arsenals and their fissile materials and delivery systems in all possessor States, along with other detailed data on concrete disarmament actions.

In summary, the future of nuclear disarmament will require much more than the repetition of a rhetorical commitment to disarmament as a distant goal. Actions will also be needed at both a domestic and international level to convert these words into deeds. As long as such progress is clear and documented, the brighter will be the prospects not just for achieving disarmament, but also for progress in improving non-proliferation controls.

So, in looking to the future, I do not believe that anybody can predict with any certainty whether the world community is now merging unto an expressway leading to nuclear disarmament, or whether it is taking a detour into a cul-de-sac. Time will tell. In some scenarios, it is conceivable we might even find ourselves one day moving in reverse gear, toward a world in which many additional States will acquire such weapons for the familiar purposes of deterrence, prestige, or perceived political utility.

What will make the difference in shaping these outcomes in a more positive direction? I believe there are three factors that will help the most.

First, there must be enlightened leadership among the States that possess these weapons, including a willingness to demonstrate their commitment to follow through on disarmament commitments, as expressed in verifiable, transparent, and irreversible agreements to reduce their nuclear arsenals and physically destroy warheads. Ideally this commitment will also be registered in the establishment of domestic institutions, laws, and budgets to implement these tasks.

Secondly, I believe there will have to be sustained support from throughout the world diplomatic community, especially among the so-called “**middle-power states**”, to **advance disarmament goals**. This already exists in the General Assembly and it is my hope and belief that it will not only persist but will grow in the years ahead.

And third, progress will also require persistent efforts by civil society—and needless to say, I hope also the business community—to advance disarmament.

Together, these developments will create the greatest chances to put us all on the expressway to a world without nuclear weapons. And because these combined political forces will enable all countries to advance their national interests in concrete ways, I believe they do indeed constitute some basis for hope that we will in fact find ourselves on the right road in the years ahead—and heading in the right direction on that road.

With your own understanding and support here in this audience, let us start this great journey today.