

**Global Nuclear Disarmament:  
A Practical Necessity, a Moral Imperative**

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**2010 Chautauqua Lectures**  
**Week Four: Nuclear Disarmament**

Hall of Philosophy  
Chautauqua Institution  
Chautauqua, NY  
19 July 2010

Before I proceed with my remarks today, I wish to congratulate the Chautauqua Institution for selecting “Nuclear Disarmament” as a subject worthy of a week’s discussion at this venerable forum. And of course, I am delighted to be here, for my purpose is to persuade each of you in this audience that global nuclear disarmament is even more than achievable—it is a practical necessity and a moral imperative.

Over a half century ago, Philip Noel-Baker received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on nuclear disarmament. In his 1959 Nobel Lecture, he posed the following question:

*In the age when the atom has been split, the moon encircled, diseases conquered, is disarmament so difficult a matter that it must remain a distant dream? To answer "Yes" is to despair of the future of mankind.*

Well, he asked a good question—one that is in fact often asked today, as a number of commentators and public officials continue to refer to disarmament as merely a dream, vision, or an “ultimate goal.” Yet is it true that nuclear disarmament is essentially what Prospero in Shakespeare’s *Tempest* would describe as “such stuff as dreams are made on”? Is disarmament what Margaret Thatcher once called, “pie in the sky”? Merrily, merrily—is disarmament but a dream? In short, is it now time for us all to despair?

My answer is no—or perhaps more accurately, not yet. But to explain why, I must provide you some background on this issue so that you can make sense of the current debate, and reach your own conclusions about where these facts lead.

Efforts have been underway to control or eliminate nuclear weapons even before they were used in World War II at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 11 June 1945, several Manhattan Project scientists wrote what is known as the “Franck Report”, which warned prophetically that “Unless an effective international control of nuclear explosives is instituted, a race of nuclear armaments is certain to ensue following the first revelation of our possession of nuclear weapons to the world.”

The UN Charter was not signed until 15 days later, just a couple weeks before the first nuclear test in New Mexico, in a desert that the Conquistadores had ironically named, “Jornada del Muerto” or Journey of the Dead Man. Though the Charter appeared before the nuclear age had begun, it did include “disarmament” and the “regulation of armaments” among its goals.

The General Assembly, of course, wasted no time in clarifying what these terms meant. Its first resolution—adopted on 24 January 1946—established the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons and other weapons “adaptable to mass destruction” and created the UN Atomic Energy Commission to “deal with” this challenge. In February 1947, the Security Council created a “Commission on Conventional Armaments”—and literally ever since, efforts at the UN have been focused on the twin goals of eliminating weapons of mass destruction, and limiting conventional arms.

It's quite interesting that as early as 1946, the world community had agreed on some fundamental principles for progress in these fields, even in the early years of the Cold War. There was, for example, widespread agreement on the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, though much disagreement over how to achieve it. There was agreement that this must be achieved globally. And there was agreement that efforts must simultaneously be undertaken to reduce or limit conventional arms.

In 1959, the General Assembly combined these into a concept called "general and complete disarmament under effective international control." And at its first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, the General Assembly established this concept as the world's "ultimate goal" in this field, and it remains so today.

Many people forget that in the early post-war years the official policies of the United States and Soviet Union supported comprehensive approaches to disarmament. On 25 September 1961, President Kennedy gave a great speech in the General Assembly detailing his country's own proposal for general and complete disarmament. The Soviet Union later submitted a similar proposal, and both countries agreed that year on the "McCloy/Zorin joint statement" on this issue.

Yet persisting differences over the details, and worsening conditions of the Cold War—including the Cuban Missile Crisis—led the world to pursue what were called "partial measures," which were intended as stepping stones to a more comprehensive goal: disarmament. These measures included the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (which has still not entered into force), as well as several bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between the US and Soviet Union. There were also a series of treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central Asia—as well as other treaties keeping nuclear weapons out of various uninhabited areas (the Seabed, Antarctic and Outer Space Treaties).

While these measures have still not resulted in eliminating all weapons of mass destruction—neither in completing disarmament nor in gaining universal membership in the key treaties—they together did make substantial progress in that direction. They established unequivocal global norms against the very existence of biological and chemical weapons—notice how we do not hear any states today boasting about their possession of such weapons or how useful they are for deterrence purposes.

But with respect to nuclear weapons the picture is somewhat different. On the one hand, the estimated 23,000 nuclear weapons that reportedly remain are far less than the 70,000 figure that reportedly existed at the height of the Cold War in 1986—and the trend, though still unverified, appears to be continuing downward. Yet this same 23,000 number is roughly comparable to the number that existed when the Superpowers were discussing general and complete disarmament a half century ago. So like the figures in an Escher print who continuously walk step-by-step up a staircase

only to find themselves right back where they started, so too has the “partial measure” approach fallen short in achieving its stated disarmament aim.

I have noticed that some other colourful metaphors have been used over the years to refer to this competition in nuclear arms. The renowned American strategic nuclear theorist, Paul Nitze, once said the nuclear arms race was like “two apes on a treadmill.” And the nuclear weapon scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer famously described the US/Soviet nuclear deterrence relationship as like “two scorpions in a bottle.” These metaphors, of course, are especially troubling today, when not two but nine states are believed to possess such weapons.

This sense of dissatisfaction with the slow pace of progress in disarmament is quite prevalent in the world community today. It is a constant theme in deliberations in disarmament arenas at the United Nations but also at the periodic meetings of the States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—a treaty signed 42 years ago that obligates its parties “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to ... nuclear disarmament”. Yet such negotiations have still not occurred—in fact, not a single nuclear weapon has been physically destroyed as a result of a treaty commitment.

Rather than abandon this goal, however, the world community has in recent years been substantially increasing its determination to move this agenda forward. While nuclear disarmament is far from having been achieved, it is very much alive and well as a desirable goal—and has become a recognized official objective of all states possessing such weapons.

Consider just for a minute some developments just in the last three years:

- In 2007 and 2008, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn co-authored op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal* stating their support for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.
- In 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced his five-point proposal for nuclear disarmament, which included a proposal to commence negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention or a framework of mutually-reinforcing legal instruments.
- In 2009, President Obama delivered his famous speech in Prague underscoring his support for the goal of achieving “the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” The same year, the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament released its detailed report outlining a path to elimination. The Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted a resolution in support of the Secretary-General’s five-point disarmament proposal. Meanwhile, two treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones entered into force, in Africa and Central Asia. The Security Council held its first summit ever that addressed nuclear disarmament issues, and adopted Resolution 1887, which among other things called upon all States—not just NPT parties—to pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament.
- In 2010, the United States and Russian Federation signed a new START agreement, further lowering their levels of deployed strategic nuclear weapons. The United States also released

its Nuclear Posture Review, which reduced the role of nuclear weapons in US national security strategy. The States Parties to the NPT concluded their 2010 Review Conference with a consensus final document that included an action plan for nuclear disarmament as well as a mandate to convene an international conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. At that Review Conference, France and the United Kingdom along with other nuclear-weapon states described their own national actions to limit their nuclear arsenals, including shutting down nuclear test sites and facilities to produce fissile material for weapons, and the United States and United Kingdom provided additional details about the size of their stockpiles. While the Communiqué of the Washington Nuclear Security Summit did not address nuclear disarmament, it did identify ways to strengthen controls against the proliferation of nuclear weapons or their acquisition by terrorists. And I am pleased to say that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will be the first Secretary-General in UN history to personally address the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony on 6 August. These are only some noteworthy developments—and yet keep in mind that 2010 is not yet over.

Throughout these recent years, civil society initiatives have also been on the rise. The Global Zero campaign was launched in 2008 and has been gaining support of countless world leaders and civil society groups worldwide. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has spearheaded a global effort to promote the negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention—the campaign was launched in 2007 by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. In 2010, the Mayors for Peace campaign—led by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with assistance from the Global Security Institute—reported that they have now earned the support of mayors from over 4,000 cities worldwide and expect to reach 5,000 by the end of the year, representing a population of about a billion people. There have been so many other such initiatives from civil society that I cannot possibly mention them all or do justice to the contributions they are making both in educating the public and encouraging positive changes in government policy.

Yet despite all of these heroic efforts, one still encounters stubborn opposition not just to some of the various measures that are needed to achieve disarmament, but in some cases even to the basic goal of disarmament itself. Some people are either unaware of legal commitments their countries have made to pursue this goal, or they have adopted the cynical view that disarmament must simply apply elsewhere.

For literally decades, the same arguments have been recycled over and over in critical commentaries on disarmament. In fact, I have found twelve—let's call them the “dirty dozen.” They assert the following:

1. Disarmament is utopian and impractical.
2. Disarmament is dangerous, undermining nuclear alliances.
3. Disarmament is a lower priority than non-proliferation or counter-terrorism.

4. Disarmament is irrelevant—certain states or non-state actors will never comply.
5. Disarmament is best seen as only a distant goal.
6. Disarmament deprives us of nuclear weapons to keep the order and deter war.
7. Disarmament is unenforceable.
8. Disarmament is unverifiable, as cheating will occur and go undetected.
9. Disarmament would open the way for conventional wars.
10. Disarmament would lead to an expensive increase in conventional arms.
11. Disarmament should only apply to states that are unreliable.
12. Disarmament ignores the reality that nuclear weapons cannot be disinventured.

Needless to say, each of these arguments has strong rebuttals. Disarmament critics at times appear to think that disarmament is simply the blind act of unilaterally giving up a given type of weapon, based on trust alone.

The opposite is true. For decades, the world community has been in agreement that disarmament requires strict international verification. It requires full transparency not just of existing stockpiles of warheads, but also of their fissile materials and delivery vehicles. It requires controls to ensure irreversibility—to prevent the spectre of “cheating,” which has bedeviled past disarmament initiatives. It demands that disarmament commitments be framed as legally binding obligations—we will never get to a nuclear-weapon-free world based strictly on unilateral political declarations, toasts, mere promises of future actions, or wistful metaphors of distant goals. I believe it also requires that disarmament commitments must be deeply rooted in domestic laws, regulations, institutional structures, and budgets. Ideally, agreed prohibitions on certain uses of nuclear energy should even be included in national Constitutions, as in Brazil. The idea here is that States are responsible for living up to their own commitments—and they’ve got to be able to document this for the rest of the world. In short, nuclear disarmament is a global goal, but it needs national infrastructures of support.

As for the claim that nuclear disarmament would open the way for conventional wars, this too was anticipated some six decades ago—this is precisely why the concept of “general and complete disarmament” combines both nuclear disarmament and the limitation and regulation of conventional arms.

And then we come to the strange claim about disarmament being utopian. I cannot imagine a more naïve argument than an assertion that global nuclear threats can be effectively addressed by non-proliferation or counter-terrorism measures alone. This is one of the most unrealistic claims I have ever heard in my entire career. There is no question that nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism pose grave international challenges—and there is also no question that these are global challenges. Yet how in the world can full multilateral cooperation be achieved in these areas without progress in disarmament? Do proponents of these policies seriously believe that the entire world will accept their monopoly on the possession of nuclear weapons forever? Will the nations of the world stand by and simply watch as nuclear weapons are heralded by some countries as vital for their own

security, essential for deterrence, and a prized status symbol—yet all to be denied to other countries? Is this the basis for forming a global consensus? Obviously not.

It is just extraordinary to see the balance of power, pre-emption, missile defense, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, endlessly increasing military expenditures, and rhetorical tributes to nuclear disarmament as a distant vision—all being offered as sufficient to address global nuclear threats. Even more ironic, these prescriptions are typically described as being practical and realistic. In this situation, the disarmers emerge as the realists, and the disarmament critics offer nothing but fantasies.

I do not by any means deny that disarmament will be a difficult challenge to complete. I know there are certain technical problems that must still be solved—including the means to account for all past production of fissile materials, the ability to detect the clandestine production and storage of such materials, and the safe and reliable destruction of warheads and their sensitive components and design information. I know there are certain political and psychological barriers to overcome—challenges involving the grounding of disarmament responsibilities into domestic laws, regulations, and institutions, and additional reforms in military training and doctrine. I know that perceptions must change about nuclear weapons being the ultimate guarantee of security or the hallmark of a country's status in the world community.

None of these will be easy to solve. And all will require enlightened leadership of the states that possess nuclear weapons, and strong support both in the international diplomatic community and in civil society.

Yet are these really so unthinkable, given all that has happened in this world just in the last three years? We need to stop fixating exclusively on the possible risks of nuclear disarmament, and start thinking more both of its actual security, economic, and environmental benefits, as well as the genuine risks of the alternatives to disarmament.

The choice is not between disarmament and comfortable national security. The choice is between disarmament and a scramble for the world's deadliest weapons. This is why disarmament must be here to stay—and why disarmament itself cannot be disinvented.

So I appeal to you here today, listen to the critics of disarmament, but follow your own common sense and ask yourselves if you really want your children to inherit a world jeopardized by these horrible, indiscriminate weapons of mass annihilation. I urge you to accept that disarmament is indeed a practical necessity and a moral imperative. It is our legacy, our destiny, our duty, and our responsibility to future generations. It is the right thing to do, and it will work better than any alternative to address our gravest security challenge. The ancestors and original architects of the Chautauqua Institution would surely agree—and I am sure they are with us today.