



World Chronicle

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for Disarmament Affairs

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Future Prospects for Nuclear Disarmament

For thirty-five years the landmark Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, NPT, has been a cornerstone of global security. Its review, a twice-a-decade affair, was recently completed with a failure to come to agreement on any of the treaty's main pillars – preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, advancing disarmament, and assuring the right to peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

What went wrong and where do we go from here? What new commitments are needed to break the nuclear deadlock and what's the cost if they're not secured?

These are some of the questions addressed in this episode of World Chronicle with Nobuyasu Abe, Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an interview programme on major global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

JENKINS: Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins. For thirty-five years the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT, has been a cornerstone of global security. Its review, a twice-a-decade affair, was recently completed with a failure to come to an agreement on any of the treaty's three main pillars – preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, advancing disarmament, and assuring the right to peaceful uses of nuclear technology. What went wrong and where do we go from here? What new commitments are needed to break the nuclear deadlock and what's the cost if they're not secured? These are some of the issues we'll be talking about today with our guest, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Nobuyasu Abe. Mr. Abe, welcome to the show. I want to go to the last of those three questions I raised in the intro. which is that there are those who are saying that the failure to come to an agreement at this conference means that there is a greater threat of runaway proliferation - nuclear proliferation now, than at any time in the last three decades. Do you agree with that? Or is it scaremongering?

ABE: Well there is certainly a danger that proliferation may accelerate because of the failure of this Review Conference. Because the value of the conference, the value of the treaty, some may think that it is getting devalued, therefore you have more freedom to work on proliferation. But I hope many other tools are there to prevent proliferation – therefore, they still work.

JENKINS: Well, I have two guests with me in the studio who are going to see whether those hopes are well founded. We have Jim Wurst, who is the correspondent for Global Security Newswire and Stephen Handelman of the Toronto Star. Steve.

HANDELMAN: Mr. Abe, the Secretary-General has said that the failure – if you can call it a failure – of the NPT, doesn't necessarily mean that the NPT itself is flawed. But one has wonder after seeing what has gone on this spring and in other venues where nuclear proliferation, non-proliferation has been discussed, whether the whole concept, the whole framework of nuclear non-proliferation – the regime so to speak – really needs an overhaul reform. What's your feeling on that?

ABE: Well I think it needs a strengthening, I'm not sure if it needs an overhaul as you would say. It certainly needs strengthening in terms of disarmament questions, in terms of non-proliferation.

HANDELMAN: But is the NPT adequate as it was when it was first conceived? Do you handle the newest threats of proliferation?

ABE: Well I think it needs to be updated. It's a thirty-five year old treaty, the international scene has changed, technology has advanced, therefore it needs to have some improvements, there's no doubt. So, that's why I said strengthening.

JENKINS: Jim.

WURST: Update strengthen, how would you do that? Because there was a number of ideas floating – I'm looking at the speech that was given by the United States at the end, where the Ambassador was referring - quite optimistically actually – saying you've looked at issues in ways in you have never looked at before. You're moving forward and looking forward to continuing a lasting impression on the global non-proliferation regime. Then she goes on to talk about things like Group of 8 proposals, the proliferation security initiative, none of which are treaty based. So is this the future of strengthening non-proliferation ad hoc arrangements, rather than universal treaties?

ABE: Well, let me make one thing clear here. There's nothing against the treaty that when countries get together to work towards the direction of the treaty, to strengthen the measures additional to the treaty –there's nothing wrong with it. But it would be a lot better if we can do so with the blessing of the treaty Review Conference. And it's unfortunate that the conference failed to do so. So some countries may have to continue their works by themselves without backing from the treaty.

WURST: Excuse me, there's an important point here. The NPT is unique, it's the only arms control treaty that creates two classes of state parties – those with nuclear weapons and those without. When you deal with things that are proliferation specific, when you say 'like minded states' you're dealing with only one of the three pillars and maybe two of the three pillars if you're talking about proliferation and peaceful uses. Doesn't that endanger the balance between the three pillars if you have ad hoc arrangements that are dealing specifically with some aspects of the treaty and not others?

ABE: Well, I would say during this five year lapse until the next Review Conference comes, people should work both on disarmament and non-proliferation.

So some countries may work harder on non-proliferation, other countries should work harder on disarmament.

WURST: Who's going to work on disarmament?

JENKINS: You know what...I not sure if we're making this quite a sharp as it should be. To clarify...what we're talking about here is that the United States in particular was saying we're making more progress outside of the NPT framework and they gave us two examples. We've denuclearized Libya, we've persuaded the Libyans to give up their programme and we went after Pakistan and we've rolled up A Q Chan's network that was selling nuclear proliferation material around the world. This proves that we can do great things outside the framework of the NPT - you were rather diplomatic in your response to that. But there are a lot of people who say, that if that's allowed to go on, the NPT is essentially dead. And I think Jim's point is, it's not just about preventing more countries from getting nuclear weapons, it is also about persuading the five declared nuclear powers to start to do away with their nuclear weapons. That's the commitment they made as part of the NPT and it's also about helping other nations have peaceful uses of nuclear energy - principally. How have those things been progressing? Is it o.k. for the United States to go ahead outside of the NPT?

ABE: O.k. I don't think the NPT is dead. It is still there and the basic legal obligations that you should not proliferate - you have to work on disarmament - they are still there. It's wrong to think that it's dead.

JENKINS: But there was no progress made at the recent conference.

ABE: It is still there. And there is also some misperception that people think there's multilateralism versus unilateralism and unilateralism is bad and multilateralism isn't always good. But look back into the history. Many countries came very close to having nuclear weapons; they were dissuaded from doing so and joined the NPT. But...

JENKINS: We're talking about South Africa, Argentina, Brazil...

ABE: Not always did they do so because of the treaty. It's not true - very often they were persuaded by some countries not to go nuclear. Therefore, the treaty does not

prevent anybody from outside to do the work outside of the treaty, to make them join the treaty, or comply with the treaty. It's not that simple to say unilateralism versus multilateralism.

HANDELMAN: It may not be that simple but let's look at some of the current countries that are now – depending on how you look at it – flouting the idea of the treaty or ignoring it completely: North Korea and Iran which are the most public violators, or supposed violators - now the times are different. This is not Argentina, Brazil of twenty or thirty years ago. They have distinct arguments to make; Iran quotes the core concepts of the treaty itself that it has inalienable rights to nuclear power. Does anything in the treaty that you see deal with the new issue, the new circumstances that North Korea and Iran present to the world as potential proliferators or potential nuclear powers in waiting?

ABE: Indeed, this is exactly what I meant by technological advances. The kind of technology you need to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. Thirty five years ago it was very difficult to do so but now it has become far easier. Therefore, under those new circumstances, you have to reconsider the kind of framework concerning the peaceful use of proliferation verification. Those things...

JENKINS: Hang on a moment Steve... this is a crucial point in this conference. I think everybody acknowledges that there are some problems with the NPT...that it needs patches. Specifically, North Korea was able to have a nuclear programme which it said was for peaceful uses and then having done all the development work for its peaceful uses at the last moment it said – well guess what folks.. We're pulling out of the treaty – so now all of that research and energy and investment we've done we can use to produce nuclear weapons. We're not breaking any laws because we have pulled out of the treaty. Iran is hinting that it may do the same thing – it wants to develop peaceful uses of nuclear – but it could then pull out of the treaty and weaponize. There are those who say that you can easily put together a patch to fix the NPT treaty, but it will only happen if the major nuclear powers: The United States, Russia, Britain, France, China - go forward with their commitment to reduce their nuclear arsenals, and that they assist developing countries in having peaceful uses of nuclear. We didn't see that sort of compromise happening at the conference and that's why the thing broke down and that's why some people are scared that the whole thing could collapse. Are they right? Is it possible to have a patch? Can this be fixed?

ABE: That's exactly why the Secretary-General warned before the conference that neither disarmament nor non-proliferation should be taken hostage to each other. He

warned against that but that's exactly what happened. It was towards the end of the conference... because perhaps...one reason...because of the very strict rigid consensus rule; issues were taken as hostage and they could not produce any agreement – that was a great pity. They should have at least - I think -come out with a very strong statement against that kind of withdrawal from the treaty. If you can have that kind of withdrawal the treaty won't be effective.

WURST: Well following that point, now according from a different speech, the Canadian Ambassador - and he was referring to the making the same point that you've just made - that we have let the pursuit of short term parochial interest over-ride the collective long term interests in sustaining this treaty's authority and integrity. And he goes on to talk about intransigents and the demands and priority of many were subordinated to the preferences to the few. Our community is weakened by our refusal to the delinquent to be held in account by others and by the defection from the community of estate without...

JENKINS: Is there a question here?

WURST: Yes, this is pretty strong from the Canadian. In other words the country that doesn't really have an immediate stake in this – so I assume that means you agree with this and on that basis, what do you do? Because you are going to deal with this same kind of intransigents, you're going to deal with the same kind of gridlock at the summit, Conference on Disarmament... any form...What do you do?

ABE: I think exactly because of this failure of the conference, those countries, like Canada, Japan or Germany, say Sweden, those countries who have voluntarily abstained from going nuclear have felt the strongest frustration – including South Africa perhaps. Those countries I think should join their forces together to work towards both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

JENKINS: I mean, at the end of the day the power is in the hands of the United States above all, and the Bush administration is an administration which for good and for bad is a very hard nut. It makes up its mind on an issue and it doesn't bend easily and certainly it was not difficult at the conference to find people who had very strong things to say about the United States and about the Bush administration. Here's one...Alice Slater of the anti-nuclear organization – Abolition 2000, she said, "by refusing to even discuss the commitments it made at past meetings, the United States has turned the world of nuclear proliferation into the wild west with a complete disrespect for the rule of law. The US delegation is using cowboy politics

to sabotage the review conference”. Is that fair? Is the burden principally on the United States? I mean after all Japan and Sweden and these other countries you mentioned aren't nuclear. Where's their power?

ABE: I think she's a little dramatic about the situation. Well indeed many people after the end of the conference criticized the attitude of the United States. There may be a lot to be said about it, but it's not fair to just criticize the United States alone because there are many other countries whose approach and attitudes, contribute to the failure of the conference. So it's not fair, but in the meantime, the country which is the strongest country in the world with the biggest nuclear arsenal gets the most attention. Therefore, you may agree this is the kind of attention that they deserve.

JENKINS: It's not what I think it's what you think. Do you agree?

ABE: I think there was too much drama.

HANDELMAN: But you know for all that the United States has been blamed for the breakup of the conference, it's fair to say that the United States sees multilateral treaties at this stage - under the Bush administration - as particularly unsuited for the current environment and they believe that the only way to stop the new threats, which are proliferation by non state actors – in other words your terrorists or people who are working with state sponsorship is through direct action. Through action either taken in a coalition of countries or alone. Certainly the NPT has proven that it doesn't have the teeth to deal with those kinds of non state actors. Can you see any validity in that kind of viewpoint?

ABE: Well the NPT does have some teeth concerning even non state actors but not comprehensive. Therefore, that's the reason why the Security Council came out with a new resolution 1540; to be exact on the question of proliferation to non state actors could mean the terrorists. So if NPT or any other forum like IAEA, General Assembly for that matter, cannot take effective steps to close the loop holes on proliferation, somebody has to act and the Security Council acted.

JENKINS: This is World Chronicle our guest today is Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Nobuyasu Abe. Let's take a look at this clip of Robert MacNamara – no stranger to nuclear threat- talking at the 2005 NPT Review about the United States nuclear readiness policy.

VIDEO BEGINS:

MACNAMARA: Despite the end of the cold war some 15 years ago, U.S. nuclear weapons policy are today essentially what they were when I was Secretary of Defence 40 years ago. If I were to characterize U.S. and NATO policies in one sentence at the risk of appearing simplistic and provocative, I would say they are immoral, illegal, militarily unnecessary, very, very dangerous in terms of accidental or inadvertent use. And destructive of the Non proliferation regime that has served us so well for 40 years.

VIDEO ENDS:

JENKINS: Strong words there from Robert MacNamara who lived of course through the Cuban missile crisis. His point is....it seems to me that – the nuclear weapons states are not living up to their end of the nuclear bargain in making what the treaty defines as good faith efforts towards disarmament. Is he right?

ABE: There is a big argument about it. I think that it is a matter of how much effort there has been made and what is enough or sufficient enough. There is always debate. It's a matter of degree. It's true that the U.S. and Russia had been working on disarmament; they have been reducing their strategic weapons arsenal. That's true and it has to be recognized. But still, people want them to do more and that is also true. Our approach is to press this issue further.

HANDELMAN: Are they not moving fast enough? That's the key question.

ABE: Mmmm.

HANDELMAN: Do you think they are?

ABE: Yes. I think you're right

JENKINS: They are not moving fast enough?

ABE: Mmmm.

WURST: I would like to go back to something you raised a few minutes ago when you talked about Canada, Sweden, South Africa, Germany, etc. making their own initiatives. That sounds suspiciously like a nuclear version of what was done for landmines – which in shorthand is called the Ottawa model. In other words, like minded states develop a regime among themselves without global participation, come up with some sort of agreement – a treaty or whatever – and then try to pull in the other people who were not initially involved. Is that something you think could be realistic in the nuclear field?

ABE: I would say that would be one venue, one way to promote nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation. They have to now work on many fronts and this is one of the

fronts that can work. Kind of like-minded, very strong anti-nuclear countries that can get together and join their forces; one other place is CTBT entering into force...

JENKINS: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty – CTBT.

ABE: Those who have ratified the treaty gets together to discuss how to promote the entering into force of the treaty - and that's a place where in a way...those willing countries are there.

JENKINS: That's not the root that your boss was advocating at the end of the conference. Kofi Annan, he described the conference as having been stuck in paralysis and he called on the world leaders who are going to be gathering in New York in September for the 60th Anniversary session of the General Assembly to do something to break the nuclear deadlock. Presumably, you are working behind the scenes to get hold of these people and convince them that there is a bit of a crisis and they need to do that. Have you had any success? Is that likely to happen in September?

ABE: It's progressing. The Secretary-General came out with a report "In Larger Freedom" last March. Now the president of the General Assembly has to draft an outcome of the September summit which contains a lot of items on nuclear disarmament and non proliferation. So I hope this can materialize.

JENKINS: Yes, but that's not my question. You'll excuse me...you are trying to twist the arms presumably of people in Washington and London and where have you, to come to New York in September prepared to talk turkey on this issue. Prepared to actually make some concessions and to get something back in return. Do you have any sign that that's likely to happen?

ABE: I am not working on arm twisting. I'm working on persuasion...

JENKINS: Alright...

ABE: ...and I'm working with the Secretary-General's office and the presidents office of the General Assembly to formulate this agenda for nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation to be agreed on in September at the Summit.

HANDELMAN: Let's go back for a second to North Korea. There are a lot of things that could be said about this regime but one of the things that is obvious, is that it is at least politically astute - it has a wonderful sense of timing. What will happen to the NPT as well as your efforts to get some behind the scene progress in the Summit, if North Korea explodes a nuclear weapon?

ABE: It would be very damaging to the treaty. But I guess the treaty will not die...

HANDELMAN: Why not?

ABE: The treaty will stay there. The trust will greatly be devalued over countries, especially in the neighborhood of North Korea and the treaty.

JENKINS: Do you think Japan...

ABE: There will be increased discussion in Japan.

JENKINS: You didn't anticipate my question. Japan has been against nuclear weapons ever since World War II. Is there any chance the Japanese will look at a North Korean bomb and say we have to have our own nuclear weapons?

ABE: There will be that debate, but I think it will not be easy at all for Japan to change its course and decide to walk the same way as North Korea did.

JENKINS: Even the debate is a huge move away from where Japan was ten years ago, you couldn't even mention the subject. It was taboo, am I right?

ABE: Right. But now it is more open because of this new situation on the Korean peninsula.

HANDELMAN: But there is clearly a growing risk of de-stability in Asia as well as other key areas of the world, if North Korea does explode a nuclear weapon. How...

ABE: It would drastically heighten the tension in the region and may start an arms race in the region. Because other countries will have to counter the new threat.

HANDELMAN: When you say an arms race, you're really talking about a remilitarization of areas like Asia and perhaps the Middle East and places like that, if the NPT collapses.

ABE: The Middle East is a different situation...

HANDELMAN: I know but...

ABE: But as far as North East Asia is concerned, perhaps testing will start a new situation.

WURST: Well let's bring that up then. Let's go back to the Middle East because that was one of the key sticking points that was part of the extension agreement in 1995 and it was one of the problems with this conference – how to refer to universalizing the treaty. Which means obviously, not only India and Pakistan but Israel and the Middle East; the concept of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East - which of course brings in Israel - which is the

only country with unsafe guarded facilities. Since the Security Council, parties to the NPT all endorse the concept. How do you move that concept to reality?

ABE: That's exactly one area I think we need to work. Certainly the Review Conference did not present anything this time. The programmes are there as you just mentioned, the IAEA in Vienna is working on this. They have a specific resolution to work on this idea of Middle East nuclear free zone. Mohamed El Baradei, the Director General is working on it but unfortunately, recently he has failed to organize a very good meeting. But we still have to work on it.

JENKINS: Israel doesn't even acknowledge that it has the bomb. It must make his job rather difficult.

ABE: Right, you have to go over that technical question. It may take a couple of tricks to do so.

HANDELMAN: You have been involved in the diplomatic trade for an awful long time. You were in terms of non-proliferation – you were involved in disarmament discussions with the CTBT from early on. Do you get personally disheartened at the way things are going? You've been at this for what?...ten, fifteen years by now.

ABE: I tell myself to work on disarmament - you have to be basically optimistic. If you are very realistic it's better to have arms in your hands. Is that right? The generals, admirals, they always say we need more weapons. But you have to be idealistic and you have to be a little optimistic.

HANELMAN: The world is going in a different direction from when it started out talking about disarmament and proliferation.

ABE: Yes, there are ups and downs.

JENKINS: Is there an essential flaw in this agreement that the major powers will move towards disarming themselves of nuclear weapons in exchange for the countries that don't have nuclear weapons - agreeing to forgo those weapons? Is there a flaw in that? And I guess an allied question is do you believe that there is any way that you can permit countries to go the route of going through the nuclear fuel cycle without permanently leaving open the door for them to then go from there and weaponize those nuclear materials. Is there any way for you to close that door so you can go so far and no further?

ABE: Well Mohamed El Baradei in Vienna for example, is working on this idea. The uranium enrichment process or spent fuel processing process can be used to produce

nuclear weapons material. Therefore, today now, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is prudent not to allow all the countries to have those processes. But still allow countries to enjoy the benefits of nuclear energy. This is a new question and you have to have good brains assembled and let them come up with good ideas, how to overcome this question of preventing proliferation but allowing countries to enjoy nuclear energy.

JENKINS: Well does it come down to inspections?

ABE: That's one thing, but there can be other ways to deal with it...

JENKINS: Which you can't tell us about?

ABE: Inspections, verifications are last things to confirm. Things are going well but before that you have to design what process countries should pursue.

JENKINS: Are you optimistic about that?

ABE: Well, I am counting on the wisdom and skill of people in Vienna.

JENKINS: Nobuyasu Abe, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations thank you for being with us for this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest today has been Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Nobuyasu Abe. He was interviewed by Jim Wurst of Global Security Newswire and Stephen Handelman of the Toronto Star. I'm Tony Jenkins, thank you for joining us and we invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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