

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT?

Keynote Dinner Address by Professor the Hon Gareth Evans, Convenor of the Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) and Chair of the ANU Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (CNND), to the CNS/Monterey Institute Workshop on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, *PrepCom2014: Taking the Temperature Ahead of the 2015 Review Conference*, Annecy, 14 March 2014

Talking about disarmament is never very good for one's digestion, mine or yours. But I'm afraid I can't forbear from making it the central theme of my remarks this evening, both because of its intrinsic importance and because of its importance for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the NPT Review Conference process (however many of our nuclear-weapon states (NWS) colleagues remain in denial about the central importance, for all its manifestly inadequate drafting, of the Article VI disarmament obligation).

If the NWS continue to talk and behave on the basis that *non-proliferation* is a *shared global* responsibility, but *disarmament* is essentially their *own* business, to be conducted on their terms and in their own time and through their own arcane processes, things really are bound to end in tears at next year's RevCon.

In the *State of Play* report published by the ANU Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament early last year, Ramesh Thakur and I described the situation as we saw it at the end of 2012 in the following rather bleak terms:

Nuclear-armed states pay at best lip-service to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, and none has committed to any "minimization objective," nor to any specific timetable for their major reduction – let alone abolition. On the evidence of the size of their weapons arsenals, fissile material stocks, force modernization plans, stated doctrine and known deployment practices, all nine nuclear-armed states [i.e. the P5 NWS, plus India, Pakistan, Israel and DPRK] foresee indefinite retention of nuclear weapons, and a continuing role for them in their security policies.

Since we wrote that, a bad situation has got worse, with no positive movement on any of the key specific issues of arsenal size, force modernization, doctrine and deployment; no forward movement on the Middle East WMD Free Zone issue; serious backward steps with the collective P5 boycotts of meetings of the General-Assembly mandated Open-Ended Working Group on multilateral disarmament negotiations and the Oslo and Nayarit Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons; and now the comprehensive poisoning of the critically important US-Russia relationship with the crisis in the Ukraine.

One of the most disappointing realities of the last few years, given the critical importance of top-down leadership if any progress is to be made on disarmament, has been the inability of the US in particular, since New START, to follow through further on the aspirations so well articulated by President Obama in his April 2009 Prague Speech. With Obama himself, Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel, this is the most pro-nuclear disarmament team it is possible to imagine.

Yet since New START – which was and remains a real achievement – this administration has been reduced to almost complete impotence by a combination of Congressional hostility; corrosive inter-agency processes; pressure from East Asian and East and Central European allies not wanting any diminution of the role of nuclear weapons in the protection of their own perceived security interests; a willingness to give undue weight to preserving P5 solidarity at the expense of principle; and by Russian hostility – now given a whole new lease of life by the Ukraine crisis – to giving any further ground at all in bilateral arms control negotiations.

Confronted with these realities, it is tempting to become overwhelmed with pessimism, and to abandon the whole disarmament enterprise as a hopelessly lost cause for the foreseeable future, and to concentrate just on whatever progress is achievable on issues for which there *is* more ground for optimism, like the nuclear security agenda to be addressed in The Hague later this month and the negotiations with Iran.

But that would be a counsel of despair. Quite apart from almost certainly condemning the 2015 NPT RevCon to a re-run of 2005, we would be failing to meet our own obligations – whether as diplomats, opinion leaders, or simply individuals conscious of our common humanity – to do anything and everything to reduce and ultimately eliminate the crazy risks the world continues to run so long as any nuclear weapons remain in existence.

So how should we be exercising, individually or collectively, whatever influence we have? What is a realistic – or at least not totally *unrealistic* – global disarmament agenda to be advocating in the present environment? How *can* we work our way back to a situation in which a nuclear weapon free world is a *genuinely shared objective* of *all* the NPT parties, and indeed the outlier states as well?

I think there are five broad objectives which we need to pursue in this respect, which I'll spell out as succinctly as I can.

First, we have to challenge head-on, in all our writing and speaking, *the Cold War mindset* which is still so extraordinarily evident among so many policymakers. We all know that, for all its faults and uncertainties and recent resurgence of hubris, our world today is *not* one, if it ever was, in which the governments in Moscow or Washington are likely to hurl swarms of nuclear missiles at each other. Nor is it a world in which China or the U.S. would conceivably ever intentionally start a nuclear war against the other. Even for India and Pakistan, the risk of misjudgment or miscalculation is much greater than that of deliberate nuclear warmongering. And, for North Korea – or Iran, should it ever build nuclear weapons – the risk of the regime initiating a nuclear attack is negligible, given that doing so would result in its certain, non-nuclear, incineration.

But old habits of thought about nuclear weapons, and nuclear deterrence in particular, die hard. Nuclear decision-makers almost everywhere do seem to be stuck in a Cold War time-warp, in which the only focus is on capability, not the much more positive story about intent; where the only scenarios that matter are the absolute worst-case ones, not those bearing any relationship to real world probability; and where the only language of analysis is arithmetical, and not remotely ethical.

In breaking out of that Cold War mindset, the necessary starting point is to challenge, intellectually, the assumptions on which it is based. The arguments for the elimination of nuclear weapons – humanitarian, financial, and above all strategic – must be made, and remade over and over again, if basic attitudes are to begin to change. In bald summary, they are that nuclear deterrence is at best of highly dubious utility, and at worst of zero utility, in maintaining stable peace. That nuclear weapons are simply not the deterrent or strategic stabiliser they may seem, whether the context is deterring war between the major powers, deterring large-scale conventional attack, deterring chemical or biological weapons attacks or deterring nuclear terrorism. That they encourage proliferation more than they restrain it. And that, whatever may have been the case in the past, in the world of the 21st century the risks of retaining them outweighs any conceivable benefits.

This all means, among other things, not letting go unchallenged the line, which we are increasingly hearing from the pro-nuclear weapons advocates, with varying degrees of directness, that Ukraine would not be in the trouble it is now if it had not given up its nuclear weapons in 1994 on the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But the evidence strongly suggests that nuclear weapons simply don't act as stabilizing tools in the real world, and don't act as a deterrent to the kind of adventurism we are now seeing in Ukraine, because the risks associated with their deliberate use are simply too high.

Both sides in these situations fully understand that. Putin knows that if he drives his tanks into Crimea, or even Dnipropetrovsk, there would be no more prospect of a nuclear-armed Kiev nuking Moscow than of Washington doing so. The one thing that Ukrainian nuclear weapons *would* have added to today's mix is another huge layer of potential hazard: from all the risks of system error and human error – miscalculation, misjudgement, mistake – that are associated with the possession of nuclear weapons by anyone.

Second, we have to *make the argument for nuclear disarmament*, and for a timeline in getting there, in a way that is seen as *credible*, not hopelessly *incredible*, by policymakers. And that means, I think, being very careful about how we articulate the “Global Zero” objective, however passionate we may be – as indeed I am – about ultimately achieving a totally nuclear weapons free world. We have to frankly recognise that we will not get to zero as a straight-line process, and we certainly won't get to it by anything like 2030. There will need to be two distinct stages, first “minimization” then “elimination”, with some inevitable discontinuity between them, because of the reality, when it comes to moving from low numbers to zero, that there are not only *psychological* barriers, and *geopolitical* barriers (in the world as we can envisage it for the foreseeable future), but serious *technical* barriers – of verification and enforcement – as well.

Getting to zero will be impossible without every state being confident that every other is complying, that any violation of the prohibition is readily detected, and that any breakout is controllable. Those conditions do not exist at the moment, although important work is being done on verification by the UK, Norway and U.S. and this part of the problem may well be solved over the next decade or so. Enforcement, however, will continue to be a major stumbling block for the foreseeable future, with the Security Council's credibility on this issue manifestly at odds with the retention of

veto powers by the Permanent Five. By all means let us argue for work to be done on a draft Nuclear Weapons Convention to identify and find solutions to these various problems. But don't let's pretend that we're ready in this area for a campaign treaty like the Ottawa or Oslo Conventions on land mines or cluster bombs: we're just not technically there – not nearly there – and pretending that we are is a turn-off, not a turn-on, for the states who we have to persuade.

The International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), which I co-chaired, took the view that a target date of 2025 could be set for the achievement of a minimization objective. This would involve reducing the global stockpile of all existing warheads – now around 17,000 – to no more than 2,000 (a maximum of 500 each for the U.S. and Russia and 1000 for the other nuclear-armed states combined), with all states being committed by then to “No First Use” – and with these doctrinal declarations being given real credibility by dramatically reduced weapons deployments and launch-readiness. That target date was optimistic when we set it in 2009, and is looking even more optimistic now. But it is not wholly unrealistic provided some serious momentum can start to build soon.

That brings me to the **third** point. We have to focus hard on getting *some* movement, *somewhere*, on *numbers*. The obvious place to start has always been bilateral negotiations between the US and Russia – because on any view they each have so many weapons to spare, way above even the most neurotic view as to what constitutes for each a credible minimum deterrent. But such negotiations are obviously for the time being at a dead-end. And it would be Quixotic to imagine any bilateral negotiation between the US and China being more productive given the scale of the current imbalance between them, and the extent to which China's stated concerns about US ballistic missile defence and new generation conventional strike capability mirror those of Russia.

A lack of movement from China will also make it difficult to persuade India to reduce or even freeze its stockpile. Although, if rationality were ever to play a role in these matters, which of course it does not, there is every reason for India and Pakistan to call a halt to the nuclear arms race in which they are engaged and to freeze their present stockpiles at their present relatively evenly balanced, and perfectly credible levels.

If bilateral and multilateral arms reductions are going nowhere for now, the only way of getting reductions in numbers is going to be unilateral. The smart place to start, and one that might conceivably even be domestically politically saleable, would be for the US to wave goodbye to the land-based component of its triad, which is wildly expensive to maintain in an environment where there are huge budgetary imperatives to massively cut expenditure (not least to maintain the operational credibility of the rest of the US defence machine), and which as even the nuclear hawks acknowledge, is far more vulnerable to attack than the sea or air-based components. (Of course, these days, given what we now know about the quality and discipline of their recent management, there is a non-negligible chance of the silos blowing *themselves* up, and not requiring dismantling, but I am not suggesting this is the preferred route to reducing numbers...)

The UK could also make a significant contribution both to the disarmament cause and its own budget by downsizing its Trident-carrying submarine fleet. Of course that does mean no more Continuous At-Sea Deterrence, but the circumstances in which the UK would ever be likely to *need* that capability is not something about which British policymakers have been their normal articulate selves.

The **fourth** thing we should be advocating hard is *movement on nuclear doctrine*, to reduce the role or salience of nuclear weapons in national security policies. This is an area where our dinner sponsors tonight, Japan and Korea, as well as other allies of the US in the Asia-Pacific, and in Central and Eastern Europe, can make a real contribution. [Responding to Tariq's challenge this afternoon] Let me say very directly that those of us U.S. allies, including Australia, presently sheltering – or believing that we are sheltering – under the US nuclear umbrella should be prepared to make clear our acceptance of a much reduced role for nuclear weapons in our protection. So long as we continue to insist that the nuclear option be kept open for a variety of *non-nuclear* threat contingencies, notwithstanding our collective capacity, with US help, for the indefinitely foreseeable future to deal with any of them through the application of *conventional* military force, we are contributing nothing to the achievement of a nuclear-free world.

No doubt the recent adventurism of Russia in Ukraine will make it harder than ever to persuade Central and Eastern Europeans that they can live comfortably with less nuclear protection, although that response is one that, as usual, owes more to emotion than reason. No doubt, too, it is easier, psychologically and politically, for Australia than others living in more troublesome neighbourhoods to play a leadership role in this respect. But it would add very considerable momentum to the disarmament cause for Canberra to come out strongly in favour of the U.S. adopting not just a declaration that the “sole purpose” of nuclear weapons was to deter *nuclear* attack (as we have done, at least under the previous Labor Government) but a “No First Use” posture, and I will continue to harangue my government to do just that

In Japan, the DPJ Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada dipped a toe in the direction of reduced reliance on US nuclear protection, and LDP Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, rather more adventurously for that side of politics, has more recently made some similar noises. This has not been an easy issue for Japan to deal with, torn between the horror of its 1945 experience and its passion for nuclear protection, but a more robust commitment to really leading the way on nuclear disarmament – not just through general rhetoric but by adopting specific path-breaking policies – would I believe pay it real dividends. And so would a similar policy choice by the ROK.

There is a **fifth** and final issue on my wish-list, and that is to persuade the NWS to rethink their resistance to the humanitarian consequences movement, now generating such worldwide momentum. To find common ground on this is not only obviously ethically right, but would much improve the atmospherics in the lead up to the 2015 RevCon and help it breaking down in a welter of recrimination on the issue.

The unhappiness of the NWS with any talk of humanitarian impact is not a new phenomenon: this is an issue on which they have *always* felt uncomfortable – not because they don't understand the ethical issue but because they fear the consequences of it becoming central to the argument about the future of nuclear

weapons. The extent to which it has been banished from official discourse was brought home to me, in one of my most formative personal experiences, when, as a young Australian minister in the early 1980s, I received my first official briefing on United States nuclear strategy. It was given to me, in the bowels of the Pentagon, by a man with a white dust jacket and a pointer who looked uncannily like Woody Allen. His language was disengaged and technical – all about throw-weights, survivability, counter-force, and counter-value targets. And he had absolutely *nothing* to say, any more than anyone else in Washington did, about the countless real human beings who would be vaporized, crushed, baked, boiled, or irradiated to death if a nuclear war ever erupted.

The initiative that has been taken by the Swiss and Norwegian and Mexican and other governments, and a legion of NGOs, to bring back to centre stage our understanding of what these weapons actually do to real human beings, is profoundly worthwhile. If the campaign to raise the consciousness of policymakers and publics about the awful downside risks posed to our common humanity by nuclear weapons, has the result of diminishing the credibility and acceptability of the nuclear deterrent on which so many policymakers mindlessly rely, that is exactly what all of us should be applauding.

And if one of the results of this process is to create some momentum towards an ultimate legally binding treaty banning nuclear weapons – although as I've made clear I think any credible such treaty is, realistically, decades away – that's a consummation devoutly to be wished.

What I think has been profoundly indefensible has been the resistance that has been mounted against this initiative by the P5; and also the ducking and weaving and trimming and obfuscation that has been demonstrated by a number of countries – my own, Australia, I am sad to say, in the forefront of them – who have not wanted to offend their superpower nuclear patrons by signing up to the mainstream declaratory statements.

I remember my friend and former colleague, US Secretary of State Jim Baker, once saying to me, in another context, "Well sometimes, Gareth, you just have to rise above principle". Maybe he was right: sometimes you do have to make uncomfortable compromises to achieve defensible results. But I can't believe that – whatever the procedural context – being seen to contest, or deny, or simply to be trying to evade acknowledging the sheer horror of nuclear weapons, the most indiscriminately inhumane ever devised, can *ever* be remotely defensible. And nor do the politics of it – in terms of poisoning the atmosphere for 2015, and inhibiting the capacity of the NWS to advance their own priority issues – seem very smart.

It's time for the NWS, and all the nuclear armed states, and all those states (including my own) who think of themselves as sheltering under the nuclear protection of other states, to get *serious* once and for all about disarmament. For them to continue to insist, as they do, that everyone else do as they say and not as they do, doesn't begin to be a recipe for reducing the terrible nuclear weapons risks the world continues to face, and certainly doesn't help the non-proliferation agenda. All the world hates a hypocrite, and it's time, once and for all, for the hypocrisy to stop.

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