

MIDDLE POWERS INITIATIVE FORUM

“Ensuring Full Implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty”

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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We are heading towards the seventh review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Yet prospects for the realisation of the Treaty’s ultimate objective, the total elimination of nuclear weapons, seem no further advanced than when the Treaty was concluded in 1970.

To assess ways to redress this lack of progress, we need to evaluate the reasons why the Treaty has fallen prey to challenges from the international community in recent years.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty differs from other WMD disarmament treaties in one fundamental respect – equality of provisions. Instead of outlawing nuclear weapons for all member states from the Treaty’s outset (as was the case with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention), it allowed five states to sign the Treaty while still in possession of nuclear weapons, on the understanding that they would achieve the elimination of their nuclear arsenals in time. All other states joined the Treaty under the agreement that they would not seek nuclear weapons, in return for access to the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear technology and a commitment to disarmament from the nuclear weapon states.

The Treaty envisaged a time when all members would be equal under its provisions – nuclear weapon states would have achieved the total elimination of their arsenals, and all would be treated the same under a system which facilitated access to the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology.

Thirty-four years later, lack of progress on bridging this division is causing resentment and suspicion amongst some member states, hindering prospects for collective work towards the joint goals of disarmament and non-proliferation.

The Canberra Commission in 1996 forewarned us of probable deterioration in the NPT regime, unless transparent and irreversible nuclear disarmament measures were undertaken, noting “Nuclear Weapons are held by a handful of states which insist that these weapons provide unique security benefits, and yet reserve uniquely to themselves the right to own them. This situation is highly discriminatory and thus unstable; it cannot be sustained. The possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them.”

The New Agenda Coalition was formed in 1998, against the backdrop of the NPT’s indefinite extension and nuclear tests by non-NPT members India and Pakistan, in an effort to bridge the Treaty’s widening divide by injecting fresh momentum towards the implementation of the NPT’s disarmament commitments.

These commitments, contained in Article VI of the Treaty, were reaffirmed in a unanimous decision by the International Court of Justice in 1996, which found that there exists an obligation on the nuclear weapons states to “pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control”.

In the midst of current preoccupations with global security, the disarmament obligations of the Treaty become even more important. Permitting nuclear weapons programmes to continue over long periods of time fosters a permissive environment for proliferators.

Effective implementation of a transparent verifiable nuclear disarmament process would provide those states possessing nuclear weapons with a mechanism to build international confidence. At the same time, it would negate the pretext of proliferators who seek to justify their need for nuclear weapons on the grounds of fear of the development or use of weapons of mass destruction by their enemies.

With these considerations in mind, the New Agenda has formulated a series of practical proposals in the lead-up to the 2005 Review Conference. These proposals build on the outcomes of the 2000 Review Conference, particularly the 13 steps to nuclear disarmament, which were agreed by consensus.

While the New Agenda proposals are detailed in the group's position paper from the 2003 PrepCom and the omnibus resolution presented at last year's First Committee, the main suggestions for consideration are as follows:

- a forthcoming response to such questions as: what is the threat against which these weapons are retained in their hundreds and thousands, and why, given the costs of maintaining and – under article VI – destroying them, is there little if any evidence of concerted, phased reductions
- irreversible destruction (rather than storage) of non-deployed nuclear warheads
- the potentially significant US and Russian commitments (under the “Moscow Treaty”) to reduce their numbers of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to be made verifiable, irreversible, and transparent
- priority to be given to reductions in non-strategic (“tactical”) nuclear weapons (because these are likely to be deployed away from central control and to be less secure)
- an undertaking by the nuclear-weapons states not to increase the number or types of tactical nuclear weapons deployed, and not to develop new types of weapons or rationalisations for their use
- more accountability and transparency by the nuclear weapons states about the current size of their nuclear weapons arsenals, including – as just noted – a timetable for the concerted phasing out of those arsenals
- urgent resumption of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons
- all nuclear-weapons states to place fissile material no longer required for military purposes under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure that it cannot again be used for military purposes

- further discussion of “negative security assurances”, whereby the nuclear-weapons states formally and in a legally binding fashion agree not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states
- encouragement of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We maintain that a powerful symbol for demonstrating the possibilities of a nuclear free world to the international public is the reach - and potential reach - of nuclear weapon free zones over the landmasses of the globe. The ratification of the Treaties of Rarotonga, Bangkok, and Pelindaba by all States of the region, and all concerned States remains a matter of great importance in the cause of nuclear disarmament
- ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In a world so bereft of effective verification provisions on WMD why is it that this strong treaty still fails to attract significant support to bring it into force?
- upholding the moratorium on nuclear testing, pending the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
- all states that have not yet done so to conclude International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agreements and Model Additional Protocols for full-scope safeguards on their nuclear facilities

We do not accept that any of these actions can be dismissed as hollow idealism. On the contrary, given the estimated vast size of a number of nuclear arsenals, resolve to undertake these steps would significantly improve the psychology under which other states either feel threatened or betrayed by the nuclear weapons states’ selective application of the NPT.

However, in pursuing nuclear disarmament, we also need to recognise that the ground for debate shifted after the terror attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001.

Before that we could and did argue that with the end of the Cold War, the requirement for nuclear weapons had passed. The nuclear weapons states had to justify keeping

their nuclear arsenals. That was the situation during the last NPT Review Conference in 2000, when the New Agenda played a brokering role between the non-aligned movement and the nuclear weapons states, securing agreement on the 13 Steps.

The situation at the 2005 Review Conference will be very different. The debate is likely to centre on non-proliferation and what non-nuclear weapons states are doing to contain and control the spread of nuclear materials and technology, rather than on whether the nuclear weapons states are making any progress on the agreed 13 steps to nuclear disarmament.

The New Agenda's focus on nuclear disarmament will probably continue to provoke accusations of ignoring the threat of WMD falling into the hands of terrorists. Let me assure you, we are not blind to the horrendous possibilities of such a situation. However, we also realise that nuclear weapons, by their very nature, are not useful in deterring terrorists. Indeed, their very existence poses a potential security threat. Non-proliferation initiatives must work in tandem with effective disarmament measures, as part of a mutually reinforcing process. Proliferation of nuclear weapons will only cease when the weapons themselves cease to exist.

The work of organisations such as the Middle Powers Initiative is fundamental in keeping the nuclear disarmament debate alive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the MPI for the inspirational support you have provided to the New Agenda Coalition over the years. Your tireless lobbying at all levels of government and in legislatures helps to disabuse the public of the notion that nuclear disarmament has somehow lost its importance in the wake of proliferation concerns and builds vital constituency support within key governments for New Agenda initiatives.

We must continue our work together, amplifying the disarmament message in our approach to the 2005 Review Conference. A climate of nuclear disarmament, of the pursuit in good faith of effective measures to that end, is surely more conducive to international peace and security than one in which the retention of nuclear weapons (and their possible further development) nurtures grievances, sustains dangerous rivalries and erodes the rule of law.