

The 20th United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Saitama

27-29 August 2008, Saitama City, Japan

Plenary I: Challenges to the NPT regime and initiatives to overcome them

Session 1: Efforts towards a world free of nuclear weapons

Remarks by

Mark Fitzpatrick,

Senior Fellow for Non-proliferation, International Institute for Strategic Studies

With appreciation to the City of Saitama for hosting this event and to the government of Japan for its sponsorship of it, I wish to thank the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs for organizing this conference and for the invitation to speak today on the subject of “Efforts towards a world free of nuclear weapons.” It is a distinct honour to be invited to Saitama City and to be asked to share the podium with the very thoughtful statesmen and experts here today, both on the podium and in the audience.

Study on Requirements for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World

Perhaps the reason I was asked to join the luminaries in this first plenary is because of the engagement on the subject of this session by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, where I direct the Programme on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. For the past year and a half and by enlisting the authorship of two very capable outside scholars, IISS has been carrying out a focused research study of what the key characteristics of a reasonably secure nuclear-weapons-free world would be, and how movement towards it

might have to be shaped. In carrying out this research project, IISS is grateful for the support of the governments of Norway, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan, and that of the Ploughshares Fund. We are grateful as well for the advice and assistance we have received from many other organizations and individuals, including several here today who took the time to read early drafts of the report and to offer comments and suggested improvements.

The purpose of our project has been to define, as a matter of analysis, what a commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons means in practice, and what would be needed in terms of transparency, verification, enforcement and other conditions to create and sustain such a world that is at least as secure and stable as the world in which we live today. Our aim has not been to establish or advocate a programme of action, but rather to lay a better foundation of understanding upon which debate about prospects and options might be advanced. As laid out in the introduction to the study, the specific objective of the study was first to identify and explore the challenges that exist to the complete abolition of nuclear weapons and second to discuss what states can start doing today to circumvent them.

In announcing Great Britain's support for the IISS study, then Foreign Secretary Margaret Becket in her path-breaking speech at the June 2007 Carnegie Nonproliferation Conference stated the hope that the United Kingdom would be a 'disarmament laboratory.' The government has since made clear that this aspiration continues to be a central element of British policy. Defence Secretary Des Browne told Conference on Disarmament in February that: 'The UK is determined to have a world free of nuclear weapons. But to get there we must first create an international environment that better supports disarmament.' The British government has expressed the hope that our study and others like it can produce ideas that

can contribute to policy formulation, in particular, in order to build up the flesh and muscle around the skeletal agenda announced by Margaret Beckett in her Carnegie speech and expanded upon by Des Browne.

The genesis of the project was an essay by IISS Consulting Fellow Sir Michael Quinlin, published last winter in the IISS journal *Survival*, in which he noted that many visionaries have advocated nuclear abolition, but usually without confronting the complex and tough realities that lead states to want to acquire and keep nuclear weapons. He pointed out that opinion on the issue often tends to be polarised between two extremes: on one hand the 'get rid of them now' school, who talk as though giving up nuclear weapons was a sort of international equivalent of giving up smoking and the cynical-realist school, who point to the impossibility of erasing the knowledge of how to build nuclear weapons and portray the demand as pious verbiage much like proposals for the abolition of sin. A middle course is to take the goal seriously but to recognize that it will entail a long, difficult and as-yet-uncertain road. The IISS believed there was a need for neutral and careful examination of what an acceptable non-nuclear world would look like, and what would be needed to create and sustain such a world that was at least as satisfactory in other respects as the world that exists today. Our objective has been to help foster a wider and more realistic recognition of common ground between the nuclear abolitionists and the sceptics.

The study will be published in the form of an IISS Adelphi Paper, our monograph series, to be published in two week's time and presented in connection with our institute's annual conference in Geneva September 12-14. IISS was very pleased to be able to enlist two outstanding experts to draft the report: George Perkovich, Vice President of the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace, and James Acton, from the Centre for Science and Security Studies at King's College London.

Thanks in large part to the visionary leadership of Senator Nunn and his fellow statesmen, George Schultz, Bill Perry and Henry Kissinger, the issue of nuclear disarmament is firmly back on the international agenda. But almost all current thinking on the subject is focussed on the process of reducing the number of nuclear weapons from thousands to hundreds. The IISS study authored by James Acton and George Perkovich examines the challenges that exist to abolishing nuclear weapons completely, and suggests what can be done now to start overcoming them. It aims to encourage a conversation on the abolition of nuclear weapons. Specifically, by what means could nuclear weapons be safely prohibited and how could measures to implement such a prohibition be verified and enforced?

The IISS report recognises that the challenges of getting to zero must not preclude many steps being taken in that direction. It thus begins by examining steps that nuclear-armed states could take in cooperation with others toward a world in which the more difficult task of prohibiting nuclear weapons could be envisioned. A fundamental question is how international security can be preserved in a world without nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons have little relevance in deterring the many non-traditional security threats facing the world, from global warming to terrorism waged by non-state actors. Yet traditional threats have hardly disappeared. Preventing major warfare is a role that is often ascribed to nuclear weapons, in that they have helped keep peace between the major powers for over 60 years. Nuclear abolition is not desirable if it were to produce a world that is less stable and peaceful than today's world. The political requirements for preserving future peace and security may

be the most difficult aspect of achieving nuclear abolition. In spelling out these difficulties, the paper does not mean to suggest that nuclear disarmament is impossible, but rather to advance an exploration and understanding of how it could be done safely and securely.

The remainder of the report focuses on the more distant prospect of actually prohibiting nuclear weapons, beginning with challenge of verifying the transition of going from low numbers to zero. It then moves on to examining how the civilian nuclear industry could be managed in a nuclear-weapons-free world in such a way as to avoid rearmament. Imagining that the political-security conditions had been created to motivate an agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons worldwide, the report then explores how such an agreement could be enforced. Finally, the report examines the latent capability to produce nuclear weapons that would inevitably exist after abolition, and asks whether this is a barrier to disarmament, or whether it can be managed to meet the security needs of a world newly free of the bomb.

Challenges to the NPT

It is no exaggeration to say that the global non-proliferation regime is under severe strain. Among other sources of tension, the strains come in the form of nuclear weapons development by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the unyielding pursuit by the Islamic Republic of Iran of uranium enrichment technologies that can be used for nuclear weapons, the approaching end to arms control agreements between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, an expanding fissile material production potential in India and Pakistan and the threat of nuclear terrorism abetted by non-state actors.

Let us hope that the concerned nations of the world, by combining their wisdom, strength, and influence, will be able to manage these challenges before they rupture the non-proliferation regime altogether. Indeed, there is hope. A nascent consensus among major countries has given shape to important new strategies: a framework for countering nuclear terrorism and WMD proliferation under Security Council Resolution 1540, the Six Party Talks format for addressing the North Korean nuclear problem, and a series of Security Council resolutions demonstrating international consensus on the need for Iran to suspend activities relating to fissile material production in order to establish confidence that its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful. However, this unity is still fragile and feeble. It must be strengthened, both conceptually and in application, if the world is to survive the growing threat of nuclear weapons proliferation.

Globally, strategies to combat the spread of nuclear weapon capabilities are undermined by a perception on the part many lesser developed countries that the industrialized nations adhere to a double standard: denying dual-use technologies to the majority while insisting on retaining nuclear weapons for themselves and legitimizing it for their special friends. Notwithstanding the legitimate counter-arguments to the double standards claim, this perception works perniciously against the maintenance of a unified international stance against the current proliferation threats. The acknowledged nuclear weapons states jeopardize the non-proliferation consensus to the extent that they fail to fulfil their own obligations to further the goal of disarmament -- obligations entrenched in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and expanded upon in past NPT review conferences. The danger posed by existing nuclear arsenals is reason enough to recognize the disarmament

agenda. Even sceptics of disarmament should also recognize that the pursuit of non-proliferation requires addressing the legitimate concerns of many non-nuclear weapons states about 'vertical proliferation.'

A shared belief in the need for progress on nuclear disarmament used to underpin an international consensus on the need to combat the spread of nuclear weapons. In recent years, however, disarmament goals have been overshadowed and even sidelined in the discourse of some of the nuclear weapons states and this dimension of the NPT has become an increasing point of contention between the 'haves' and 'have-nots.'

There is a need for a closer congruence among both governments and nongovernmental communities on the interconnections between non-proliferation and disarmament strategies and on the urgency of taking additional steps to begin the process of getting to zero. In some of the nuclear weapons states, there is a belief that too much emphasis on disarmament distracts from the more important threat of nuclear proliferation. It is sometimes argued that the link between disarmament and non-proliferation is weak with regard to both causality and attainment. In one sense, the historical record bears this out. The states that most recently have sought nuclear weapons capabilities do not seem to have been strongly affected by the size of the arsenals in the nuclear weapons states. Even as the global superpower dramatically reduced arsenals in the 1980's and 1990's, several other states launched or accelerated nuclear weapons programs of their own.

Yet it is also the case that disarmament steps contribute to the strengthening of non-proliferation norms. States that have refrained from seeking nuclear weapons but that might have reason for wavering can be strengthened in their resolve to abstain from this course of action and to accept non-proliferation constraints if they see that nuclear weapons states are also undertaking constraints by way of steps to wean themselves of dependency on these weapons. Such complementary steps to strengthen disarmament and non-proliferation norms can produce a virtuous cycle. Both kinds of steps reduce the saliency of nuclear arsenals.

It is demonstrable that some steps that contribute to getting to disarmament overlap with the steps necessary to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. These areas of congruence between disarmament and non-proliferation may be among the most immediately fruitful areas of the IISS study. For example, for a zero stage, states would likely have to endorse the global application of much more intrusive inspection procedures on civilian nuclear programmes than is the case today, or else nuclear-weapon states would not agree to eliminate their last weapons. This is one of the many reasons why the IAEA safeguards Additional Protocol should be universally accepted as a non-proliferation obligation.

Another example of the linkage has to do with how the verification requirements for a fissile material cut-off treaty will contribute to the confidence required for disarmament. Verifying past production of fissile materials is very difficult, given the inherent problems of accounting for all material, including the amounts that can accumulate in facility piping and the inadequate record-keeping counting by the fissile material producing states to date. However, confidence can be increased to the extent there is transparency and multiple layers of accountability and agreements.

In bringing analytical attention to bear on the topic, non-governmental institutes like ours can seek to contribute to restoring the balance of the NPT bargain. The nuclear weapons states that are primarily concerned with proliferation should understand how the non-proliferation goal is strengthened to the extent the nuclear weapons states take steps toward disarmament. The steps that several of the nuclear weapons states have taken and continue to take toward reducing their arsenals and increasing transparency are deserving of greater recognition. On the other side, the non-nuclear weapons states whose overriding priority is nuclear disarmament need better understanding of why non-proliferation steps are necessary precursors to that goal.

In support of the vision of a world not threatened by nuclear weapons, studies such as the one by James Acton and George Perkovich to be published next month by the IISS can hope to contribute to strengthening the understanding on both sides of this connection. The IISS was born in the nuclear age in 1958 and has been deeply associated with nuclear strategy and deterrence thinking throughout its history. Publication of an IISS study on the abolition argument in this, our 50th anniversary year of 2008 hopefully will contribute both in substance and symbolism to the international debate. To save the NPT from a possible path of dissolution all parties must take both the goals of non-proliferation and disarmament seriously.

