

ACHIEVING A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Address by Senator Gareth Evans, Foreign Minister of Australia, to the Opening Session of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, Canberra, 23 January 1996

The task confronting this Commission is as ambitious and important as any task could possibly be. It is to make the case, if it can be made, as to why the world should now strive for the absolute elimination of nuclear weapons; it is to make the case, if it can be made, as to how such elimination might be achieved in practice; and it is to articulate these cases, assuming they can be made, in such clear and compelling terms that governments around the world will be persuaded to make the necessary commitment and take the necessary action.

I don't think we could have gathered any group of individuals more capable of tackling these challenges. The expertise and experience, individually and collectively, of the Commissioners, and those whom we have assembled to advise you, equip you more than any group ever previously assembled to address the issues before us.

I know that you are united from the outset in your commitment to making this world a safer and saner place. It may well be that you are less united, at least at the outset, in your analysis of the issues and the prescriptions you are inclined to make. But our hope, in convening this Commission, is that the skills, professionalism and open-mindedness that you all bring to this table will ensure that, if common ground can be found, it will be found, and that your final report will be, as far as possible, unanimous.

It is not for the Australian Government to tell you how to do your job, and I certainly don't propose now to do that. We have seen our role in all of this as facilitative, not prescriptive. But it may nonetheless be helpful, as an initial stimulant for your discussions, to spell out the key issues as we see them. If we have it wrong, I have no doubt that you will be the first to tell us.

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The first big issue that has to be tackled is obviously the question of "why". Why, given the global peace we have enjoyed since the nuclear age began, does it make sense now to seek the elimination of nuclear weapons? Why should the present nuclear weapons states give up their deterrent nuclear capability? And why should the present nuclear have-nots renounce their right to acquire it?

The short answers, in Australia's view, are these. No-one's security will be helped by the continued existence of nuclear weapons. And everyone's security will be enhanced by their destruction.

As to nuclear weapons not helping security, these points can be made:

- In the post-Cold War world, and in a globe where the forces of economics and technology are working more and more to unite states in common, cooperative strategies rather than to divide them, the prospect of any of the present nuclear weapons powers launching a nuclear attack on any other is presently negligible, and will remain so. One would not expect any of the nuclear powers to move to disarmament unilaterally, or other than on a step-by-step basis maintaining stable deterrence on the way down - but there is no reason why the threat of nuclear aggression from other nuclear powers should stop any of them from making the commitment to zero.
- No credible case can be made for any state maintaining a nuclear deterrent against the possibility of non-nuclear aggression from another country. One of the most difficult issues for the Commission to tackle will undoubtedly be the stated strategic concerns of countries like France - invaded twice this century - and Israel, vastly outnumbered by its Arab neighbours. But the truth of the matter is that internal and external political constraints have made in the past, and will make in the future, nuclear weapons effectively unusable in any contingency short of a response to direct attack with nuclear weapons against one's own territory or armed forces.
- Nuclear weapons are useless in dealing with the kind of ethno-nationalist conflicts, humanitarian disasters and economic crises that have become the most common security challenges in the post-Cold War world.
- So long as anyone retains nuclear weapons there is always a risk, however small, of their accidental or inadvertent use.

An even more important set of "why" arguments, however, is that a genuine commitment to elimination is crucial to stop nuclear weapons proliferation - not only to the threshold and undeclared states, but to many other countries as well with the technological and economic capacity to acquire them.

- Non-proliferation enhances security simply because with proliferation, nuclear risks are dramatically multiplied - ie the risk of accident or inadvertent misuse by anyone, and the risk of deliberate use by regimes less inhibited than those who have so far governed the present nuclear weapon states.
- Without concrete moves towards the destruction of existing weapons by the declared nuclear powers, it will simply not be possible to embrace the threshold and undeclared states, or anyone else, in the bargain: no-one is going to play until they see the field as level, or at least becoming so.

- Without a serious commitment to elimination by the present nuclear haves, it is not going to be possible to put in place the kind of highly intrusive verification measures that will inhibit potential rogue states and sub-state groups from acquiring nuclear capability.

It is crucial to appreciate in all of this that while achieving elimination is, even on the most optimistic assumptions, necessarily going to take quite some years, stopping proliferation is a here and now 1990s issue. This Commission's mandate is not to draw a blueprint for Utopia - it is to address what is unquestionably a clear and present danger.

And in addressing that danger it is impossible to understate the burden of responsibility that lies upon the shoulders of the present nuclear haves - the declared nuclear weapon states. Resistance is growing, accelerated by reaction to the French and Chinese tests, to what are perceived, for better or worse, as hypocritical double standards by the nuclear weapons states. If a nuclear deterrent capability is necessary for France and Britain, why shouldn't it be necessary for Germany and Japan, or India or Israel or Indonesia, or for that matter Australia? If the distinguishing characteristic of permanent Security Council status has been nuclear weapons possession, why should other states aspiring to that status forego their acquisition? These are the questions to which policy makers in many countries are increasingly going to have to have answers. And it is crucial that this Commission clearly articulate the answers : that nuclear weapons are not a security solution for anyone, but a problem for everyone.

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If we can satisfy ourselves and others, as I hope we can, that the reasons why we should strive for elimination are compelling, it remains to persuade ourselves and the world how this might be possible.

Four general points about this can be made with reasonable certainty at the outset.

- First, we are not going to get to zero, over any time frame, unless both nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots genuinely believe that their security interests will not be threatened by the achievement of that goal.
- Secondly, the international community will need to be satisfied that the process of elimination will not make anyone's security more vulnerable along the way.
- Thirdly, the international community will need to be satisfied that there are adequate safeguards against nuclear breakout and related threats once elimination is achieved, or is in real prospect.
- Fourthly, if real progress is to be made, it will have to be in the context of a new kind of negotiating environment - one in which every category of participant feels

like a stakeholder in the outcome, and does not simply play out the familiar role of either demandeur or demandee.

How does all this translate into policy prescription? There is a mass of material already in circulation upon which the Commission can draw, and it is difficult to keep a sense of the shape of the forest while closely examining all the individual trees. It seems to me, however, that there are four broad agendas, involving differing but overlapping groups of players, that need to be identified and pursued more or less simultaneously - involving respectively the whole international community, regional groupings, the nuclear weapons states, and the threshold and undeclared states. The process as I envisage it is very much interactive: developments in all these agenda-streams will be necessary, and developments in each one of them will reinforce and help forward movement in each of the others.

The Whole International Community. In the global multilateral arena, the next agreement we need will clearly be the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which we hope and expect will be concluded this year.

Without nuclear testing, the nuclear weapon states' ability to modernise their arsenals - by developing new weapons designs, and modifying existing designs - will be seriously constrained.

A CTBT will thus break the spiral of qualitative competition between the nuclear weapons states and open the way for further nuclear weapons reductions. Cessation of nuclear testing will furthermore mean that the nuclear weapon states will find it difficult to maintain the expertise and facilities to develop more sophisticated nuclear warheads.

While it is true that a crude nuclear weapon can be developed without testing, a CTBT will also help restrict horizontal proliferation by removing the testing option for a potential proliferator.

The next global multilateral step after a CTBT will be persuading those countries which have produced fissile material for weapons to cease doing so permanently and accept international supervision of their sensitive nuclear material production facilities so that there is no future increase in the supply of such material for use in nuclear arsenals.

This will be achieved by the negotiation of a "Cut-Off" Convention banning the production of fissile material for weapons. The enrichment and reprocessing facilities in nuclear weapon and nuclear threshold and undeclared states would be either placed under international inspection or dismantled. This would be a major step forward towards the application of international safeguards to all nuclear activities in these states.

Added transparency would also come from the development of a regime requiring all states to declare and account for their present stocks of fissile material.

Additional global multilateral steps designed to boost the goal of a nuclear weapon free world include:

- The further strengthening of IAEA safeguards, in particular by building up the International Atomic Energy Agency's ability to detect illegal undeclared nuclear facilities.
- The further development of assurances from the nuclear weapon states against the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, preferably through an internationally legally binding instrument.
- The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention and wide international application of export controls to materials and technology for weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

The more general point that needs to be made here is that nuclear weapons were not created or used in a political, strategic or economic vacuum. Their eventual abolition will therefore not be achieved in isolation from the wider global and regional political, strategic and economic context. On the contrary, the total elimination of nuclear weapons is only conceivable, and practical, in the context of a newly enhanced global and regional security environment - one in which the concept of "cooperative security" has real resonance.

At the global level, this will mean, among other things:

- continued attention to reforming and revitalising the United Nations, and in particular revamping the UN Security Council;
- cooperative strategies to develop more effective and reliable verification measures for all categories of weapons of mass destruction;
- cooperative strategies to deal effectively with the challenge of nuclear threat and terrorism involving rogue states, terrorist groups and other extra-systemic acquisitions of nuclear explosive capability; and
- cooperative strategies to address the risk associated with the acquisition of major conventional weapon capability.

Regional Groupings. At the regional level, there is much evidence - not least here in the Asia Pacific of a major rethinking about security going on.

There is a much greater recognition that the appropriate response to new threats to security is a cooperative one: the concept of "cooperative security" is thus finding more ready acceptance.

More than ever before, regional states are disposed to look ahead and see whether conflict can be prevented or, if this is too late, whether there are mechanisms to reduce it.

More and more regional states recognise that threats to peace and stability derive from an increasingly complex range of sources, and are comfortable extending the concept of security to include non-military threats.

Some specific regional steps that would contribute greatly to the nuclear weapons elimination objective would be:

- The creation of linkages between existing or potential nuclear weapon free zones in the South Pacific, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa which already cover most of the Southern Hemisphere.
- Continued implementation of the framework agreement between the United States and the DPRK, including the successful operation of the Korea Energy Development Organisation.
- New bilateral or regional measures that build confidence and transparency in South Asia.
- Consideration of a Middle East nuclear weapon free zone or a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, in the context of the Middle East peace process.

The Nuclear Weapon States. While the whole global community has a direct and fundamental interest in the elimination of nuclear weapons, and the regime which manages that process and its outcome, the key responsibility - it must be said again - lies with the nuclear weapon states themselves. It must be recognised that the elimination of nuclear weapons will depend on decisions which they alone can make. And it must be accepted as an elemental truth that so long as any state possesses nuclear weapons, in any number, some other states will have a ready made excuse for aspiring to that status themselves.

We should be under no illusions about the size of the task of nuclear disarmament which confronts the international community. More than 40,000 nuclear warheads exist in the world today, with a total destructive power around a million times greater than that of the bomb that flattened Hiroshima.

Under START I, the United States and Russia have agreed to nuclear reductions which are seeing each country dismantle some 2000 warheads annually. Russia's stockpile is around 25,000 warheads and the United States has about 15,000 warheads. A further 1000 are possessed by the other nuclear weapon states, the United Kingdom, France and China.

When the reductions envisaged under START I are achieved, this will leave in place some 20,000 nuclear warheads.

Under START II, which has yet to be ratified, both parties have agreed to further deep cuts. But even if the dismantlement schedules can be maintained, the five nuclear weapon

states by 2003 would still have around 12,000 warheads between them.

The task of these reductions requires, then, a major commitment from the nuclear weapon states. The START agreements undoubtedly represent a major leap forward in reducing the threat of nuclear conflagration. But they clearly do not remove that threat. The world still needs, if we are to achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a reasonable time-frame, a practical program of nuclear reductions to which all five nuclear weapon states are committed. The nuclear weapon states will need to pursue that program in good faith and with renewed vigour.

Much work remains to be done to identify what that reasonable time-frame would be in practice. Careful, phased reductions will be necessary, with each phase corresponding to a new strategic environment and involving changes in nuclear roles, in the operational status and size of nuclear forces, and in arms control arrangements.

Specifically, we believe that further nuclear arms reductions treaties will need to be progressively negotiated by the United States and Russia, with movement made as early as possible towards the conclusion of START III.

Further down the track, the UK, China and France will need to join the United States and Russia in five-power negotiations to achieve even deeper reductions. The complex political and technical questions associated with moving from the START process to five-power negotiations include issues of parity between the nuclear stockpiles, the timing of negotiations and the sequencing of reductions.

The United States and Russia can prepare the ground for five power negotiations by developing a series of interim confidence building measures. For example, the United States and Russia might share information and expertise with the other three nuclear weapon states on how complex START provisions are verified.

And the task does not end with the dismantlement of weapons. There are further processes that will also have to be pursued to make the reductions permanent and irreversible.

- The weapons components need to be destroyed.
- The weapons grade nuclear material needs to be burnt in reactors, or diluted for peaceful nuclear use.
- At the stage of dismantlement, the nuclear weapon states have a special responsibility for accounting for and protecting the components and weapons grade material.

The Threshold and Undeclared Nuclear Weapon States. A central threat to the objective of non-proliferation is posed by the position of the threshold and undeclared nuclear weapon states. And their continued refusal to join the NPT regime is of grave intrinsic concern not only in terms of proliferation, but also in terms of other key aspects of progress towards

nuclear disarmament, not least reductions by nuclear weapon states and the conclusion of major multilateral instruments such as a CTBT.

Accordingly, a major challenge is to close the gap which exists between those states - both nuclear and non-nuclear - which have supported and continue to support the NPT regime, and those few states who do not only remain outside it but whose policies directly challenge it. Action to address this situation - to achieve the universalisation of NPT obligations - must include consideration of the NPT opponents' security concerns, and an associated demonstration that possession by them of a nuclear weapon capability diminishes, rather than enhances, their security.

In this context, the international community has witnessed several recent examples of how this might happen. South Africa took the unilateral route in renouncing and eliminating its nuclear weapons. Argentina and Brazil developed a bilateral approach to reassuring each other of their nuclear intentions.

It must be recognised that the universal acceptance of non-proliferation obligations through membership of the NPT will be essential to all three stockpile reduction processes to which I have referred - ie by US-Russia, by all five declared nuclear powers, and by the threshold/undeclared states.

A New Global Nuclear Compact. What I have just taken you through is an extensive, and perhaps rather daunting, list of international negotiations and processes which can advance the goal of a nuclear weapon free world, taking into account the issues that must be resolved if that goal is to be achieved.

But something more is needed, I think, to give the world the necessary momentum and political will. When it comes to the elimination of nuclear weapons, the saying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts has a particularly resonant, catalytic meaning.

What is needed now is really a new global nuclear compact. By this I mean a shared global understanding and commitment by both the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states to enter, in good faith, into the necessary set of separate but related negotiations and processes - bilateral, regional and multilateral - on the basis that their overall, holistic purpose is to fulfil the promise that we shall live in a world free of nuclear weapons.

The sort of global compact I have in mind would not be a treaty or formal arrangement. It would not seek to replace or transcend well established global norms such as the NPT. Nor should it be seen as advocating the sort of tight, sterile linkage that holds one negotiation or process hostage to the conclusion of another. On the contrary, it would be a high level political understanding between governments - perhaps eventually expressed in written declaratory form - about what it is we are seeking as a total outcome of the various relevant negotiations and processes. Against such a background it should be much easier

to give shape and content and momentum to those processes.

Without the sort of global understanding or compact I am talking about, it is going to be very difficult indeed to create the new kind of negotiating environment that I spoke of at the beginning, one in which each player feels like a stakeholder in the outcome. And unless every player does feel like a stakeholder, and negotiates accordingly, the goal of a nuclear weapons free world is going to remain very elusive.

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Even the most perfunctory history of arms control negotiations shows us that the road to final success is often unpredictable, paved with good and bad intentions alike. Apparent breakthroughs may prove to be time consuming cul-de-sacs, while seemingly impossible obstacles may be overcome at the last minute more by high-level political will than dazzling technical expertise.

It may be that, at the end of the day, if the elimination of nuclear weapons is achieved, the precise path by which the world gets there will differ significantly from the blueprint which we hope will be developed by this Commission. But none of this is an argument for simply letting history take its course, and making no effort to shape it.

If anything is to happen it will only be because governments want it to happen, and governments need ideas and blueprints and stimulation and persuasion if they are to act. Political will does not spring from a vacuum: it needs cultivation and stimulation by the force of ideas.

This Commission is uniquely well-placed to develop those ideas. You have the eyes of a great many people around the world upon you, and a high burden of expectations to discharge, but I and the Australian Government have every confidence that you will meet these challenges.

The time-table is short and a great deal of work has to be done. You will need to prioritise very hard, but feel free to make demands of us. The Australian Government - through the Commission's convenor, Ambassador Richard Butler, and the secretariat established to assist you - stands ready to offer all the help we possibly can to ensure the success of your endeavours.

We hope and expect that there will be a vigorous exchange of ideas from Commissioners, but at the end of the day we also very much hope that you will be able to find consensus on a worthwhile package of analysis and prescriptions.

We eagerly await the results of your discussions and your final report. I and the Australian Government have every belief that your deliberations will make an historic contribution to - and in fact be a watershed stage in - the achievement of a nuclear weapons free world.