



## **BASIC Getting to Zero Papers, No. 1**

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# **Taking Responsibility**

## **what can NPT states realistically do to build on today's momentum behind nuclear disarmament?**

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### **Stages of maturity**

We have heard many analogies for the effort required for states to move towards nuclear disarmament, most involving mountains. All emphasise the undeniable challenge. But in a way it is no more than states passing through a stage of maturity accepting their international responsibilities, just as we all as individuals pass through stages of adult development recognising our complex relationships and playing more sophisticated strategies within society. As we go through life we may look back at our youth with fond memories, but most of us think we could have had a better time of it if we had had our mature heads on. We look on those who display immature behaviour with contempt. To shirk the responsibility of navigating the complexity of disarmament is to display extreme anti-social behaviour and to be profoundly reckless with our world's future.

Nuclear weapon states (NWS) have engaged in significant disarmament since Reykjavik in 1986, and this continues today. Presentations made at the 2008 Preparatory Committee have demonstrated the continued trend in a positive direction. But while this is certainly to be welcomed, it is clearly insufficient to pacify the critics. Some treat these developments with caution, believing that they are down to weapon redundancy and the dynamics between the NWS rather than any globally-responsible commitment under the NPT, and that these states are just as far as ever from contemplating life without their security blanket. This is not entirely fair, but I will come to that later.

There has also been a strong suspicion that while the vast majority of states have made clear commitments not to develop nuclear weapons, for most this is not so much a sign of maturity as a lack of means, or fear of the repercussions. In such a climate, it is no wonder that the NPT

committees and review conferences receive less attention in the global media than they deserve.

But increasingly elite opinion is waking up to the growing dangers, which include leakage of sensitive technologies and capabilities. If states and their representatives cling to their current strategies proliferation is inevitable - sooner or later.

### **Faith in non-proliferation multilateralism**

There is unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, a lack of faith displayed by key actors in the non-proliferation regime. Some already believe that proliferation is inevitable, and resort in the first instance to sanction, threat and military action as a means to slow it down. Such lack of faith in the institutions of the non-proliferation regime corrodes the ability of the international community to work together. The pessimism is self-fulfilling, because proliferation of technologies and military capabilities is the natural state of international relations. In such a world it is only a matter of time before more states, possibly non-state actors, possess the technologies and choose to use them.

But it is too simply realist to see this as inevitable under a force of nature. We can build upon some of the bizarre systemic features of the international system that work against nuclear proliferation. Non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) generally recognise that their acquisition of nuclear weapons would likely cause a regional proliferatory domino effect, reducing security for all, including themselves. This is possibly the strongest disincentive in operation. The acquisition of nuclear weapons also means the possessor moves up a league, and while it may feel glorious, it is also uncomfortable being out of your league. Overnight a state that acquires nuclear weapons becomes a nuclear target for existing NWS, and their security is thereby eroded.

While the naysayers spread gloom about our ability to take control, they must also recognise that we have come a long way from Hobbes' state of nature. And our maturity happens in non-linear spurts, sometimes with breathtaking speed. The rise of the European Union out of the ashes of the Second World War is a clear example. The NPT itself is a heroic international attempt to assert cooperative control of the states of nature. But again, we have to be willing to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going. A static legalistic approach to non-proliferation at the best of times leads to complacency and encourages a stretching of the boundaries. In contrast, a collaborative political dynamic approach with ever-strengthening commitments and confidence in the regime, and a move to universality and equality, holds much greater chances of success.

Because there is a strong pessimism around negotiating any new universal framework and a fear that if the current bargain were questioned it might unravel, there is hostility towards revisiting the fundamentals. As a result, scepticism within many states over the bargain is left unchallenged and the respect for it weakens within many states, particularly in those with an existing scepticism towards multilateralism and a predisposition to resort to threat or force.

## **The link between disarmament and non-proliferation**

Some within the NWS seem to believe that there is no link between disarmament and non-proliferation. Or worse, that disarmament would give incentive to those states challenging the international community to see an opportunity to proliferate with reduced negative consequences, and greater immediate impact in terms of strategic balance.

There is some basis for this fear. If a state wishes to challenge the existing status quo, then the acquisition of nuclear weapons could look attractive, if only as a deterrence for outside interference. NWS have to recognise, however, that this dynamic is clearly stronger if the regional power faces hostile forces with nuclear weapons, particularly if leading politicians actively threaten nuclear annihilation for electoral gain. One of the most powerful drivers to acquiring nuclear weapons for states has been the threat of nuclear use. Russia in the 1940s, China in the 1950s, DPRK in 1990s and later, were responding to the fear of nuclear blackmail. Aggressive and threatening counter-proliferation strategies against NNWS suspected of developing nuclear weapons can therefore be self-defeating, eliciting a robust response that seeks to further develop resistant capabilities. The effective international non-proliferation strategy is to reduce the fear. The United States appears to have learned this lesson with the DPRK, but some draw the wrong conclusion from it - there is nothing systemically special in the nuclear test that forced the change in policy other than highlighting the failure of the previous strategy of threat. It was not a nascent nuclear deterrence - no serious analysts believed DPRK had achieved a realistic, deliverable nuclear deterrent capability. A key move to reducing the fear is to take nuclear weapons out of the strategic calculus.

Even when there is no strategic relationship between a NWS and a potential proliferator, the relationship between disarmament and non-proliferation can still be strong. The rhetoric at NPT meetings can too quickly be discounted as hot air - it can reflect the expression of elite and public opinion within potential proliferating states. As Des Browne acknowledged here in February, perceptions in proliferating states are important, for it is there where the potential proliferation decisions are made. It's worth repeating his words:

"Our chances of eliminating nuclear weapons will be enhanced immeasurably if the Non-Nuclear Weapon States can see forward planning, commitment and action toward multilateral nuclear disarmament by Nuclear Weapon States. Without this, we risk generating the perception that the Nuclear Weapon States are failing to fulfil their disarmament obligations and this will be used by some states as an excuse for their nuclear intransigence."

NWS need to abandon all attachment to their arsenals if we are to have any hope of preventing proliferation. The rather fantastic belief that nuclear weapons have been a civilising force within Europe would surely have even more attraction in those states that currently suffer from violent conflict, external threat and strategic inferiority. The belief that nuclear weapons present a hedge or insurance against future threat, expressed by the British government in its domestic debate over the replacement of Trident, demonstrates a lack of faith in the NPT process to deliver security that undermines others' commitment to it. The hedge is implicitly directed against particular states, which encourages a self-fulfilling mutual suspicion. Even

when a NNWS may not currently feel direct threat from nuclear attack by a NWS, these strategic relationships are fluid, and few states rely upon current intent on the part of potential enemies when making long-term strategic procurement choices.

The continued possession of nuclear weapons heightens the possibility of leakage of technology - a direct relationship with proliferation. And nuclear deterrent chain relationships have a habit of lengthening as more states, under strategic threat, contemplate the nuclear option when it comes within their reach.

Last, but not least, the indefinite preservation of status and power by NWS through possession attracts other states to the elite club - a global dynamic not affected by particular strategic relationships. So while strategic relations in some cases may not be direct, the linkage between disarmament and non-proliferation is clear.

### **Beauty and the beast - a proliferation of proposals**

Participants in this conference will be familiar with the elite civil society initiatives in the United States involving key participants with strong political influence. This has attracted the attention of governments too. A series of statements by the British government over the past year, for example, has picked up the theme, initiated studies, and proposed realistic collaboration between P5 states. The proposal made by Des Browne for a technical conference of P5 nuclear labs to discuss the verification modalities may appear to some to lack the necessary ambition - but it is undeniably a positive contribution if we are to develop the necessary mechanisms essential for confidence in disarmament. President Sarkozy's recent speech also outlines a programme of action, proposing significant P5 movement in advance of 2010. Taking the international community by surprise, this is a milestone in changing the political atmosphere.

P5 states need to collectively take up Sarkozy's challenge and consider developing the political commitment necessary to give faith to others that they believe in the objective, to achieve progress and to reverse the dynamics driving proliferation. Sarkozy's list includes:

- Universal ratification of the CTBT
- Transparent dismantling of all test sites
- An immediate moratorium on the production of fissile materials for military purposes and serious negotiations within the CD towards a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty
- Greater transparency between the P5
- Negotiations on a treaty to ban short and intermediate range surface-to-surface missiles, and
- Implementation of the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation

Following Britain's lead in December 2006 when the government announced its immediate intention to reduce Britain's arsenal to 160 warheads, Sarkozy announced that France would reduce their stockpile to under 300.

There are a whole host of additional proposals floating around that could add to the list of potential measures to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in doctrine. These would include further significant cuts, the abolition of tactical warheads (most notably NATO's shared-deployed free-fall bombs in Europe and Russia's tactical warheads), collective P5 declarations of no-first use, abandoning the policy of launch on warning and a phase out of their more vulnerable systems - particularly land-based silos - to facilitate a reduction of readiness, and mutual restraint on the modernisation of systems that is perhaps the most controversial of NWS current activities.

Perverse strategic US and Russian doctrines, largely intact after the end of the Cold War and governed by fewer arms control treaties, are perhaps the most fruitful place to start. With over 95% of the global nuclear arsenals in the hands of these two states, and 1300 US and 2000-odd Russian warheads on high-alert status, this relationship must surely be a central focus for immediate attention. The warming of the relationship has been hampered, and could yet be reversed, by these strategic doctrines and consequent lack of trust between the two. We must therefore hope that recent positive initiatives are rapidly consolidated.

If the P5 are serious, they will convene special private sessions backed up by public statements of intent to hammer out differences of perspective and approach, with the intention of sustained negotiation around achievable agreements. At a later date it may also require occasional invitations to be extended to the NPT hold-outs.

Some NWS may fear that disarmament will create an unrealistic expectation of further progress. NWS point to the lack of appreciation of progress made so far, and the mounting pressure they are experiencing to take further steps to show good faith. But what is there to fear from mutual multilateral disarmament? Unrealistic demands can easily be ignored - NWS have had little trouble doing exactly this in most disarmament fora up until now. Much of the current criticism focuses not on the lack of progress in reducing numbers, which is certainly to be welcomed, but rather on the modernisation process that increases capabilities and demonstrates an expectation on the part of NWS that their possession will continue indefinitely. The school bully is to be applauded for mending his ways, but cannot expect rewards if he continues his behaviour in a less extreme or more subtle manner.

An international political focus on disarmament gives NWS the platform to publicise the achievements they have made on the road to disarmament, and gives them grounds for demanding respective moves on the part of NNWS to live up to their side of the dynamic bargain and strengthen universal non-proliferation measures.

### **Stronger non-proliferation measures**

The need for NNWS to take an active role in promoting disarmament and developing necessary

international mechanisms for confidence in a future nuclear weapon free world should not be underestimated, particularly in the context of a global expansion in nuclear power. This responsibility is too often neglected by those keen to shine the spotlight on the obvious need for NWS to engage in disarmament.

Confidence that civilian facilities will not be used for military purposes requires much greater levels of inspection even than the Additional Protocol, but with only 82 states operating the Additional Protocol, we are far from the universal application even of this essential tool. Of course, states may be more amenable to tighter inspection measures if they were universal and if NWS engaged in more serious disarmament, but this should not be an excuse to obstruct progress. The majority of States parties are expressing a strong desire for increased support for the IAEA and stronger verification measures. We need to look on this as a dynamic process - ever-closer global verification procedures conducted by a growing and ever-more effective IAEA.

Iran, already under intense scrutiny and the focus of exhaustive verification procedures, is inadvertently playing a leadership role in creating the verification building blocks necessary for a nuclear weapon free world. Iranians have it in their power to transform the frame of their identity to one of international *leader* using proactive cooperation with the Agency in developing intrusive inspections, rather than reluctant *victim* of burdensome verification. This could not only achieve a breakthrough in the current dispute, neutralise any threat of military intervention, and exercise their rights to develop sensitive technologies; it could also create a model for everyone else to follow. Eventually we will all need to accept costly intrusive procedures if we are to insist on our rights to exploit the nuclear energy. We will all also have to cooperate in internationalising the fuel cycle: to avoid accusations of discrimination and to genuinely protect activities from diversion this requires universal involvement - no exceptions. This will require a move away from the concept of supplier and recipient at the root of many of the proposals on the table today.

Of course, just because we have rights does not mean we have to exercise them - states need to be alive to the alternative means of ensuring diversified access to clean and safe energy. Many are more appropriate to their needs though perverse incentives push decision-takers onto the nuclear route.

The international community will also need a more coherent and transparently non-discriminatory system of enforcement in advance of suspected infringements if the legitimacy behind Security Council decisions is to be sufficiently strong to elicit adherence. This requires discussion of the principles of enforcement in such fora as the NPT Review Conference and the UN General Assembly. While it is clearly tempting for those with stronger influence in the UN Security Council to leave debate to the particulars when a crisis occurs, this will only reduce legitimacy and open them up to accusations that they use their positions to exert power over others within the international community, or use their position to promote other policy objectives. It will also mean that the Security Council is less likely to agree over the gravity of alleged infringements and the necessary response, and potential proliferators may be more

prepared to take the risk of international action in the hope that disagreement would paralyse enforcement.

### **Keep the toys in the pram - abandon threats**

Just as aggressive counter-proliferation threats can be counter-productive, so too can threats of non-cooperation with developing non-proliferation mechanisms, whether in the hope that hold-out states can be pressured into joining the NPT regime or to accept inspections, or that NWS would be persuaded to take disarmament responsibilities more seriously. Non-cooperation will play into the hands of sceptics believing that international agreement is impossible, and will give the impression that resistant states lack any interest in the intrinsic benefit of non-proliferation mechanisms beyond what they can extract from their strategic competitors.

Key steps in the disarmament process also involve fundamentally the NNSW. Iran, Egypt and Indonesia need to unconditionally ratify the CTBT and engage with the monitoring network - the problem is not exclusively with the United States and China. There is a strong and honourable history behind the establishment of nuclear weapon free zones - but it is not just the refusal of recognition by NWS that hampers their operation. Several African states have yet to ratify the African NWFZ for it to come into force.

### **Conclusion**

The stages of adult development are more complex than we realise. But if we are to rise above the earlier stages of opportunism and self-interest, realise our full potential as human beings, and survive, we are going to need to abandon the finger-pointing of blame and focus more credibly on our shared interests and responsibilities.