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Policy Brief No. 2 **June 2013**

Why Nuclear Weapons Must Be Eliminated

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Summary

The arguments against nuclear weapons – humanitarian, strategic and financial – need constant restating. The core humanitarian arguments are straightforward: nuclear weapons are morally and environmentally indefensible challenges to our common humanity. The strategic arguments require fuller discussion because deterrence thinking is so entrenched: in essence, they are that reliance on nuclear weapons to deter attack is misplaced, any deterrent utility they may have is in any event outweighed by the huge risks associated with their retention, and retention by any state is an encouragement to proliferation by others. The financial arguments are simply that nuclear weapons are an indefensibly costly misallocation of resources. Having these arguments understood and accepted by policymakers may not be a sufficient condition for achieving nuclear disarmament – many technical, psychological and geopolitical obstacles will remain – but it is a necessary one.

Humanitarian Arguments

1. The argument for the moral indefensibility of nuclear weapons is familiar, powerful, and at the core of the case against them. When the first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, it made no distinction between combatants and civilians, old and young, or victims and those trying to help them. Virtually all those within a half kilometre radius were incinerated, boiled or crushed to death, and those in surrounding areas died soon after of burns, wounds, or within months of radiation illness, bringing total estimated deaths to as many as 170,000. And these numbers are small compared with the casualties that may be expected from later generation weapons. However concealed by the language of deterrence, doctrine, counter-value and counterforce strategy, warhead reliability and the like, the moral bottom line is the terrible, indiscriminate human suffering, immediate and longer term, these weapons cause.

2. The almost indescribable horror associated with any nuclear-weapon use informed the very first resolution of the UN General Assembly in 1946, and has been at the heart of all disarmament advocacy since. Humanitarian arguments have been recently gaining new momentum. The 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document expressed "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, and reaffirm[ed] the need for all states at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law." [1]

3. This theme was picked up in a statements made by Switzerland on behalf of 34 countries in the First Committee of the UN General Assembly on 22 October 2012, and by South Africa on behalf of 80 countries at the Geneva NPT Preparatory Committee meeting on 24 April 2013, arguing that "the immense, uncontrollable destructive capacity and indiscriminate nature of these weapons" made them contrary to the rules of international humanitarian law. The position that nuclear weapons breached principles at the heart of this body of law – the distinction between combatants and civilians, proportionality, and precaution – was repeatedly articulated at the Norway-sponsored Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo in March 2013, and can be expected to build further momentum by the time of a planned follow-up conference in Mex-

[1] Final Document: 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, p 19. United Nations, New York

ico. It is a momentum that the nuclear-weapon states – and some of their allies like Australia who have been struggling to find reasons not to join in these statements –will find it increasingly uncomfortable to resist.

4. The humanitarian argument against nuclear weapons use is also based on their environmental impact. As the World Commission on the Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, stated in its report *Our Common Future* in 1987:

> The likely consequences of nuclear war make other threats to the environment pale into insignificance. Nuclear weapons represent a qualitatively new step in the development of warfare. One thermonuclear bomb can have an explosive power greater than all the explosives used in wars since the invention of gunpowder. In addition to the destructive effects of blast and heat, immensely magnified by these weapons, they introduce a new lethal agent –ionizing radiation– that extends lethal effects over both space and time.[2]

5. In addition to these effects, the "nuclear winter" impact of a major nuclear exchange, even one confined to a single region like South Asia, would be globally devastating. With millions of tons of smoke lofted to high altitude and absorbing sunlight, surface temperatures and precipitation would dramatically fall, threatening a significant fraction of the world's food supply – such "nuclear famine" would put at risk the lives of nearly a billion people. The point is also made, by those who calculate nuclear winter impacts, that they involve "self-assured destruction": whether or not a major nuclear attack provokes nuclear retaliation by another state, the damage will have been done – and ensure starvation in the attacking country itself as well as elsewhere.[3]

6**.** Both the direct human impact and the longer term environmental impact motivated the challenge to the legality of nuclear weapons mounted in the International Court of Justice by the UN General Assembly on the initiative of the World Health Organization, which resulted in the 1996 Advisory Opinion on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*. There were many formidable arguments made against legality, including that use of nuclear weapons would be contrary to international humanitarian law because they cannot discriminate between civilians and combatant; would violate the right to life; would in some circumstances amount to genocide; would be contrary to existing norms relating to the safeguarding and protection of the environment; would be a serious danger to future generations; and would be, even in the case of use in self-defence, disproportionate and therefore unlawful in most cases. Reinforcing arguments included that since nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945 it can be inferred there is a rule of customary international law prohibiting this; and that the UN General Assembly has declared the use of nuclear weapons to be illegal and in violation of the Charter of the United Nations.

7. Having analysed all the arguments, the Court decided unanimously that "There is in neither customary nor conventional international law any specific authorization of the threat or use of nuclear weapons"; and by seven votes to seven (with the President's casting vote) that "The threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law." Although the Court added the qualification that it "cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake," it follows from its opinion that there is no circumstance in which a State can be sure that any use it makes of nuclear weapons will be lawful. Their use plainly is unlawful in most circumstances – and may well be unlawful in all circumstances.

Strategic Arguments

Nuclear Weapons are Not the Deterrent they Seem

8. There remains a very widespread perception among policymakers that nuclear deterrence works, that it is of real value to the national security of nuclear-armed states and their allies, and that its benefits outweigh any possible cost. But all the main arguments in favour of nuclear deterrence have, on closer examination, nothing like the force they are usually seen to possess. Nuclear deterrence is at best of highly dubious, and at worst of zero, utility in maintaining stable peace.

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[2] Brundtland Commission, *Our Common Future,*. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (New York: United Nations, 1987). p. 295.

[3] A. Robock and O.B. Toon, "Self-assured destruction: The climate impacts of nuclear war," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 68 (2012), pp. 66–74

9. *Deterring war between the major powers?* The most common deterrence argument is that nuclear weapons have deterred, and will continue to deter, war between the major powers – that the balance of nuclear terror between the U.S. and the Soviet Union maintained peace throughout the Cold War, and has done so since between other pairs of potential belligerents, including India and Pakistan, India and China, and China and the U.S.

10. While nuclear weapons on the other side have always constituted a formidable argument for caution – and fear of their possible use was obviously crucial, for example, in securing the back-downs on both sides that ended the Cuban missile crisis – it is strongly arguable that their impact has been exaggerated. Certainly, for what this is worth, there is simply no evidence that at any stage during the Cold War years either the Soviet Union or the U.S. ever wanted to cold-bloodedly initiate war, and were only constrained from doing so by the existence of the other's nuclear weapons.[4]

11. We know that knowledge of the existence on the other side of supremely destructive weapons (as with chemical and biological weapons before 1939) has not stopped war in the past between major powers. Nor has the experience or prospect of massive damage to cities and killing of civilians caused leaders in the past to back down – including after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the historical evidence is now very strong that it was not the nuclear attacks which were the key factor in driving Japan to sue for peace, but the Soviet declaration of war later that same week.[5] Although the context there was different – terminating an existing war rather than deterring a new one – the point remains that concern about being on the receiving end of the extreme destructive power of nuclear weapons may simply not be, in itself, as decisive for decision-makers as usually presumed. Other explanations may be more important.

12. A plausible non-nuclear explanation for the "Long Peace" since 1945, although this issue is still intensely debated, is that what has stopped – and will continue to stop – the great powers from deliberately starting wars against each other is, more than anything else, a realization, after the experience of World War II and in the light of all the rapid technological advances that followed it, that the damage that would be inflicted by *any* war would be unbelievably horrific, and far outweighing, in today's economically interdependent world, any conceivable benefit to be derived.[6]

13. *Deterring large-scale conventional attacks?* A second familiar argument for the strategic utility of nuclear weapons is that they will deter large-scale conventional attacks. But there is a long list of examples where non-nuclear powers have either directly attacked nuclear powers or have not been deterred by the prospect of their intervention: for example the Korea, Vietnam, Yom Kippur, Falklands, two Afghanistan and first Gulf wars. The calculation evidently made in each case was that a nuclear response would be inhibited by the prevailing taboo on the use of such weapons (on which more below), at least in circumstances where the very survival of the state was not at stake.

14. The confidence that seems to have moved some smaller states, like North Korea, to think that a handful of nuclear weapons is their ultimate guarantor against external regime-change-motivated intervention is not well founded. Weapons that it would be manifestly suicidal to use are not a credible deterrent, nor are weapons that are not backed by the infrastructure (for example missile submarines) that would give them a reasonable prospect of surviving to mount a retaliatory attack. In the case of North Korea, its strongest military deterrent remains what it has always been: its capacity to mount a devastating conventional artillery attack on Seoul and its environs.

15. There are also cases where the presence on both sides of nuclear weapons, rather than operating as a constraining factor, has been seen as giving one side the opportunity to launch small military actions without serious fear of nuclear reprisal (because of the extraordinarily high stakes involved in such a response): as with Pakistan in Kargil in 1999, and North Korea in the sinking of the Cheonan and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. It may be that – rather than, as the old conservative line would have it, "the absence of nuclear weapons would make the world safe for conventional wars" – it is the *presence* of nuclear weapons that has made the world safer for such wars. There is substantial quantitative, as well as anecdotal,

[4] See, for example, J.E. Doyle, "Why Eliminate Nuclear Weapons?", *Survival* 55 (2013), pp. 13–15.
[5] See Ward Wilson, *Five Myths About Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), pp. 21–53.
[6] S. Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and Its Causes* (London: Penguin, 2011), Chapter 5, especially pp. 288–94.

evidence to support what is known in the literature as the "stability/instability paradox" – the notion that what may appear a stable nuclear balance actually encourages more violence under the shelter of the nuclear overhang.[7]

16. *Deterring chemical or biological weapons attack?* A third argument for the strategic utility of nuclear weapons is that they will deter any chemical or biological weapons attack. This is claimed by some nuclear-armed states and their allies in particular as the reason why Saddam Hussein did not use chemical weapons in 2003, but it lacks plausibility. There are a number of other reasons why the Iraqis may not have used these weapons then, including a perception that coalition forces were well protected against such attack, and a fear of individual force commanders of being tried for war crimes. More generally, given that chemical weapons have nothing like the destructive potential of nuclear weapons – and never will, although the future risk factor is higher with biological weapons – it is difficult to paint any plausible scenario in which nuclear, as distinct from conventional, retaliation would be a proportional, necessary and therefore credible response. The U.S. made no nuclear threat against Iraq, and there is no evidence whatever that it would have done so, or would have needed to, had Saddam's forces used chemical weapons. It is similarly inconceivable that the U.S. would see any need to respond with nuclear weapons should chemical weapons be used now in Syria.[8]

17. *Deterring nuclear terrorism?* The weakest strategic argument of all for nuclear weapons, although it is still sometimes heard, is that they may be needed to deter nuclear terrorism. Nuclear weapons are manifestly neither strategically, tactically nor politically useful for this purpose. Terrorists do not usually have territory, industry, a population or a regular army which could be targeted with nuclear weapons. And to conduct nuclear strikes on another state, even one demonstrably complicit in a terrorist attack, would raise huge legal, moral, political and strategic issues. If a nuclear strike was not contemplated in Afghanistan after 9/11, when would it ever be?

18. *Militarily unusable.* The more general point that runs through many of these responses to the arguments for nuclear deterrence is that nuclear weapons really are inherently unusable – and because key players know that, even if so many are reluctant to openly concede it, nuclear deterrence has nothing like the power it is commonly assumed to have. Military commanders have long understood that there are formidable practical obstacles involved in the use (and by extension threatened use) of these weapons at both the tactical and strategic level, not least the damage they can cause to one's own side and to any territory being fought over.[9]

19. *Politically taboo.* Beyond the practical obstacles, there is the profound normative taboo which unquestionably exists internationally against any use of nuclear weapons, at least in circumstances where the very survival of a state is not at stake. Since the early 1950s – when it began to sink in that their destructive capacity really was infinitely greater than anything previously seen – such deliberate use has been seen as inconceivable by the leaders of any country thinking of itself as civilized, and wanting to be thought so by others. Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy rejected military advice to use nuclear weapons in the Korean War, the Taiwan Straits crisis, and the Cuban missile crisis, respectively, and the force of the taboo has if anything since grown. Even John Foster Dulles said that if the U.S. had used nuclear weapons in Korea, Vietnam or against China over Taiwan, "we'd be finished as far as present-day world opinion was concerned."[10]

20. There is some very recent published research[11] suggesting, a little alarmingly, that the nuclear taboo is not felt nearly as strongly as previously thought by the U.S. public. But among policymakers worldwide the taboo seems, in the judgment of at least this practitioner, to be as strong as ever. And it is confidence in the existence of that taboo – and the effective unusability of nuclear weapons that goes with it, for one's opponents as well as

[7] R. Rauchhaus, "Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53 (2009), pp. 258–77.

[8] ICNND, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers* (Canberra: International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2009), endnote to para 6.18, p. 238.,

[9] ICNND, *Eliminating Nuclear Threats*, para 6.2.

[10] Quoted in Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 173.

[11] D.G. Press, S.D. Sagan, and B.A. Valentino, "Atomic Aversion: Experimental Evidence on Taboos, Traditions and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons," *American Political Science Review* 107 (2013), pp. 188–206.

oneself – that may be thought to explain why so many military risks have been taken over the years in defiance of that supposed deterrent.

Nuclear Weapons Encourage Proliferation More than they Restrain It

21. An important strategic argument for the utility of nuclear deterrence that needs to be addressed is that possession of and willingness to use nuclear weapons has contributed to non-proliferation, at least in one context, viz. "extended nuclear deterrence." The willingness of the U.S. to commit its nuclear capability to protect allies from possible attack has long been thought to be crucial in dissuading especially Japan and South Korea from acquiring deterrent nuclear capability of their own, and there is force to this claim, although strong anti-nuclear sentiment in Japan continues to act as a disincentive to any government going down that path.[12]

22. But it can be equally strongly argued, certainly in the context of the U.S. and its allies, both in Asia and the Pacific and in Europe, that extended nuclear deterrence could be replaced by "extended deterrence" – that is with the U.S. dropping its nuclear umbrella component, but guaranteeing allies full protection against any threat contingency through its conventional weapons capability, which is presently overwhelming, and will be hugely formidable for the foreseeable future even in a world of greater conventional arms balance. While this is not to underestimate the political and psychological comfort involved in having nuclear weapons notionally available to respond to nuclear attack, or attack by other weapons threatening the very survival of the state, it is hard to argue objectively that any actual diminution of allied states' security would be involved, not least because of the unlikelihood in practice (given the humanitarian taboo, and environmental risks, including of self-assured destruction) that nuclear weapons would ever actually be used in practice.

23. A more robust response to the argument that nuclear deterrence has contributed to non-proliferation is that the contrary is more likely to be true. Successive international commission reports – the Canberra Commission in 1996, Blix Commission in 2006, and the Australia-Japan ICNND in 2009 – have argued that so long as any state retains nuclear weapons others will want them, and that progress towards elimination is crucial to ensure non-proliferation. Successive NPT Review Conferences have made it clear how strong is the perceived connection between disarmament and non-proliferation, and how difficult it is to strengthen the non-proliferation regime so long as the nuclear-weapon states are reluctant to make significant progress towards elimination.

24. That view has been endorsed in what some might think an unlikely quarter, the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, the 2009 final report of which observed that "other nations may not show the nuclear restraint the United States desires or support non-proliferation efforts if the nuclear weapon states take no further agreed steps to decrease their reliance on nuclear arms."[13] When one's goal is to achieve a world with less rather than more nuclear weapons, bloody-minded resistance to strengthening the non-proliferation regime may be anything but a rational response to disappointment over slow progress on disarmament, but in the experience of this practitioner it is unquestionably a reality.

The Risks Outweigh any Conceivable Benefits

25. It does not follow from any of the arguments going to the lack of utility of nuclear deterrence that policymakers should be comfortable with their continued existence. So long as any are retained by anyone, the risk is all too real of stumbling into a nuclear exchange through accident, miscalculation, system error, or sabotage, and any such exchange would be potentially catastrophic for life on this planet as we know it. Whatever the utility of nuclear deterrence might be thought to be, it has always been an extremely fragile basis for maintaining stable peace, for three main reasons.

26. First, nuclear deterrence depends on rational actors on both sides, each making rational judgments about the risk factors involved. Political actors and circumstances can

[12] See generally A. O'Neill, *Asia, the US and Extended Nuclear Deterrence: Atomic Umbrellas in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2013); R. Medcalf, (ed), *Weathering Change: The Future of Extended Nuclear Deterrence* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2011).

[13] Congressional Commission, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, p 66. (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009).

change, and it cannot be assumed that complete rationality will always prevail in the stress of a real-time crisis. As Hedley Bull has said, "mutual nuclear deterrence … does not make nuclear war impossible, but simply renders it irrational." And as he also wryly put it, a rational strategic man is one "who on further acquaintance reveals himself as a university professor of unusual intellectual subtlety."[14]

27. Second, nuclear deterrence depends on there being no human or system errors. There is a major risk not only of human error or misjudgment under stress, but of miscommunication (the risks here now compounded by the sophistication of cyber weapons) and of basic system error, with harmless events being read as threatening (as, for example in 1995 with Russia's President Boris Yeltsin advised that he should immediately retaliate against an incoming NATO missile, which proved to be a Norwegian scientific rocket launch).

28. Much archival evidence of the Cold War years – when command and control systems on both sides were thought to be highly sophisticated, and were more so than are some between potential nuclear adversaries today – has now revealed how close to calamity the world regularly came, much more so than was understood at the time. It is not a matter of good policy or good management that the world has avoided a nuclear weapons catastrophe for nearly seventy years: it is sheer dumb luck. These risks are dramatically compounded when nuclear armed states maintain nuclear weapons on dangerously high "launch-on-warning" alert status – as is still the case, more than two decades after the end of the Cold War, for almost 2,000 weapons in the U.S. and Russian arsenals.

29. Third, new technical developments may make old calculations redundant. There is a risk, in particular, that new generation conventional attack weapons, or missile defence systems, will be developed that will be so sophisticated and powerful as to create real doubts in states' minds about the survivability of their retaliatory, second-strike capability. In an extreme crisis situation this could encourage such states to strike first; and at the very least is likely to encourage them to expand their nuclear armouries, with all the potential that has for setting off new nuclear arms races.

30. Even for those who will never abandon the position that nuclear weapons – and the fear of mutually assured destruction that went with them – were crucial in avoiding war between the Soviet Union and U.S. for nearly five decades, it is hard to argue that things have not changed. The threats with which the world is most concerned now – terrorism, biological weapon attack, cyber-attack, climate change and health pandemic – are not those which nuclear weapons can in way help to address.

31. As the threats have changed, so too have the risks associated with the retention of nuclear weapon stockpiles. As Lord Browne and Ian Kearns argue in a 2012 European Leadership Network policy brief, "the nuclear order that is emerging, of smaller global nuclear weapon stockpiles overall, but of weapons distributed across more states in more unstable regions, has the potential to be less stable than the Cold War and is more likely, as a consequence, to see nuclear weapons used."[15] This was the central argument made in the hugely influential series of articles written since 2007, most recently in March 2013, by the four U.S. statesmen – realists all – Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn, concluding that with the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons had outlived whatever utility they might have had:

> It is far from certain that today's world can successfully replicate the Cold War Soviet–American deterrence by "mutually assured destruction" – the threat of imposing unacceptable damage on the adversary. That was based essentially on a bipolar world. But when a large and growing number of nuclear adversaries confront multiple perceived threats, the relative restraint of the Cold War will be difficult to sustain. The risk that deterrence will fail and that nuclear weapons will be used increases dramatically.[16]

[14] The first quote is from Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 234; the second from Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1961), p. 48..

[15] Des Browne and Ian Kearns, "NATO, Russia, and the Nuclear Disarmament Agenda: Reflections Post Chicago," (London: European Leadership Network (ELN), 2012), p. 5; http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2012/08/07/a7e51c12/NATO%20Russia%20and%20Disarmament.pdf

[16] George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "Next Steps in Reducing Nuclear Risks," *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 March 2013, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324338604578325912939001772.html.

Financial Arguments

32. At the other end of the moral spectrum to the humanitarian arguments, perhaps, but no less powerful in practice for that, there is the argument that nuclear weapons are indefensibly costly.[17] As estimated by Global Zero researchers Bruce Blair and Mathew Brown in 2011 – from manifestly imperfect but the best available data – the full cost (including mitigating health and environmental consequences) of worldwide spending on nuclear weapons by the nuclear-armed states was then running at $104.9 billion: in that year the U.S. spent $61.3 billion, Russia $14.8 billion, China $7.6 billion, France $6 billion, UK $5.5 billion, India $4.9 billion, Pakistan $2.2 billion, Israel $1.9 billion and North Korea $0.7 billion. They further estimated, taking into account planned worldwide upgrading of nuclear arsenals, that aggregate spending by these states over the next decade will exceed $1000 billion, or *one trillion* dollars.[18] These extraordinary amounts raise questions both about the military utility of this expenditure, and its opportunity cost.

33. As to military cost-benefit, the history of the nuclear age provides ample evidence that nuclear weapons do not enable reductions in spending on conventional forces. As discussed above already, in the context of strategic arguments for nuclear disarmament, the indiscriminate, highly destructive (including self-destructive) power of nuclear weapons renders them unusable – except possibly as an absolute last resort in the most desperate of circumstances. Generations of military leaders have decided, on perfectly rational grounds, that they cannot serve as a substitute for capable conventional forces. Now, in the current – and likely continuing – global climate of financial stringency, nuclear forces, rather than supporting conventional capabilities, risk undermining them. The wisdom of using large proportions of defence budgets on weapons that are essentially unusable and which make a highly doubtful contribution to meeting contemporary security challenges is coming increasingly into question.

34. As to social cost-benefit, there is a real issue as to whether some or all of the money being spent to little purpose on nuclear weapons would be better directed to non-military use, both internationally and domestically. One area where savings could be employed more productively internationally would be to help achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals: the OECD in 2012 estimated that achieving unmet goals by the 2015 deadline would cost around $120 billion. Within nuclear-armed states there are many examples of how nuclear weapons budgets could arguably be better spent. In the U.S., for instance, $400 million – the 25 per cent projected increase for stockpile support – would provide more than 10,000 university students with four-year scholarships. And in Pakistan, for $815 million – a little over one-third of its present nuclear weapons-related expenditure – 11,000 schools could be funded.[19]

The Power of Argument

35. It has to be acknowledged that all these arguments, however persuasive, will not by themselves be enough to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Three big hurdles stand in the way, not impossible to surmount over time, but very difficult. *Geopolitically*, an environment will have to be created in the key regions of North East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East stable enough for no country to have any serious concern about existential threats to its existence, even if not all sources of potential tension have disappeared. *Technically*, 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 – conditions which do not presently exist. And *psychologically,* it will be very difficult for some states to give up the status and prestige they see as inextricably associated with nuclear weapons possession.

36. That said, it does seem clear that having the arguments against nuclear weapons understood and accepted by policymakers is, if not a sufficient condition, certainly a necessary one for any significant move down the path towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. The battle will not be won by rhetoric, however powerful, or appeals to emotion, however defensible. It

[17] These arguments are further developed in APLN/CNND Policy Brief No. 1 (June 2013) *Nuclear Weapons: The Opportunity Costs* http://apln.anu.edu.au and http://cnnd.anu.edu.au .

[18] Bruce Blair and Mathew Brown, "World Spending on Nuclear Weapons Surpasses $1 Trillion per Decade," Global Zero http://www.globalzero.org/files/gz_nuclear_weapons_cost_study.pdf . All figures cited are in U.S. dollars.

[19] Adrianna Wolaver, "The Real Price of Nuclear Weapons," Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, 2010), http://wagingpeacetoday.blogspot.com.au/2010/08/real-price-of-nuclear-weapons.html.

will be won by the power of good ideas – that a world without nuclear weapons is both desirable and ultimately achievable – supported by the power of evidence-based argument in putting to the test bad and outmoded ideas, like the utility of nuclear deterrence in the world of today.

37. Arguments matter in government, and international relations, because they have real political force. Not only because they can be inspirational, but because they provide a frame of reference for policymakers to take one course rather than another – enabling them to articulate clear and credible reasons to the various constituencies they have to satisfy for the course they choose to take. Delegitimizing nuclear weapons – to the point where their possession is universally seen more as an occasion for embarrassment than pride – will take time. But the process of contesting their legitimacy cannot begin too soon or be pursued too vigorously.

The Author

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APLN and CNND

The **Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** comprises over thirty former senior political, diplomatic and military leaders from fourteen countries around the region including nuclear-weapons possessing states China, India and Pakistan. The objective of the group, convened by former Australian Foreign Minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group Gareth Evans, is to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high-level policymakers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated. See further http://apln.anu.edu.au

The **Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (CNND)** contributes to worldwide efforts to minimize the risk of nuclear-weapons use, stop their spread and ultimately achieve their complete elimination. It works in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and acts as the Secretariat for APLN. The director of the Centre is Professor Ramesh Thakur, former UN Assistant Secretary-General, and it is assisted by a distinguished International Advisory Board chaired by Professor Gareth Evans. See further http://cnnd.anu.edu.au

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