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Keynote Speech

By

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"The Home Stretch: Looking for Common Ground ahead of the 2015 NPT Review Conference"

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First of all, I would like to thank the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies and its Director, Professor Bill Potter, for inviting me to speak tonight. Bill is one of the foremost fonts of knowledge on the NPT and has been a tireless advocate for disarmament education – a vital means of ensuring that current and future generations understand and are equipped to deal with the terrible dangers posed by nuclear weapons.

It is a pleasure to be here in Annecy, where CNS's workshops have, for over a decade now, provided a unique forum – one in which those who will shape the future of the NPT can meet together in frank dialogue.

Secondly, I should note that while most practitioners of etiquette claim that there are some subjects that should not be discussed at the dinner table—disappointingly for you, the assembled delegates—nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are not among them. However, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf, a good dinner is of great importance to good discussion, so I do hope you enjoy your meal as we discuss these critical issues.

Looking for common ground – the theme of this workshop – should be a relatively simple task because when it comes to the NPT, we don't have to look too far.

Countless General Assembly resolutions, final documents of NPT Review Conferences, agreed texts in other parts of the UN disarmament machinery and statements in multilateral bodies all arrive at the same conclusions. The international community is in perfect accord about the need to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. And the parties are united in recognizing the NPT as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. The treaty remains an essential mechanism to realise these imperatives.

While there is no doubt about the common value and importance that the parties ascribe to the NPT, it is unfortunately agreeing upon the means to achieve this unifying principle where divergence often creeps into the picture. I shall say more about this later.

The 2015 NPT Review Conference is being held at a time of increasing geo-political complexity that presents both new challenges and opportunities for the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Some of which we have already discussed today.

On the negative side of the ledger we have increased international tensions between nuclear-weapon States, allegations of non-compliance with arms control agreements, the failure to translate commitments into action in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, renewed expressions of support for doctrines of nuclear deterrence, and growing concerns about non-traditional security challenges such as cyber threats, which further complicate the international security environment.

On the positive side of the ledger, we have seen the emergence of new and innovative approaches to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, both for conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Prominent examples of each include the historic entry-into-force of the Arms Trade Treaty and the growing momentum for the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament.

One could say that the current international security climate is Janus-faced.

Amidst this field of positive and negative factors, the Review Conference will, as you all know, attempt to fulfil its collective mandate to assess the operation of the treaty since 2010 and identify areas where which further progress must be sought. The most important tasks the Conference will undertake are a review of the 64-point action plan and an assessment of progress on the Middle East—particularly implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East; both of these were agreed by the 2010 Review Conference as part of the consensus outcome document.

The 2010 Review Conference was a moment of unanimity in nuclear disarmament. The agreed action plan charted a practical path toward a nuclear weapon-free world, including through accelerated progress on the steps towards nuclear disarmament agreed at the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences.

Yet here is where the thread of commonality begins to fray. Over the last five years we have witnessed growing differences between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States over the pace at which the action plan is being implemented.

One the one hand, some states parties continue to support a step-by-step approach to disarmament and see the action plan as a long-term goal subject to periodic reports.

On the other hand, the overwhelmingly majority of states parties do not view the action plan as an open-ended commitment to be completed at some undefined point in the future, when conditions are right. A key purpose of the treaty review process is to strengthen accountability and to ensure that consensus documents in the review process are being fully implemented. And this requires concrete evidence that undertakings made are being fulfilled.

To be frank, these states have a legitimate complaint. The reaffirmation by the nuclear-weapon States in February of their pledge to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons was welcome. So too has been their commitment to provide the transparency and confidence-building measures necessary to achieve this goal. However, such measures are not a substitute for genuine progress in the verified reduction and elimination of nuclear stockpiles or in diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in national security doctrines.

All States parties acknowledge and welcome the fact that nuclear arsenals have been reduced by over 80 percent since the end of the Cold War. However, the majority of non-nuclear weapon States also stress the need for continued action towards total elimination within a specified timeframe and while also satisfying long agreed standards relating to verification, transparency, and irreversibility.

Since the last Review Conference, there has been minimal progress towards this goal. Instead, we have seen all nuclear-armed states advance expensive ‘modernisation’ programmes for both nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, entrenching nuclear weapons in security doctrines for decades to come—as far out as 2075 in the case of some programmes. To put this in context, 2075 will mark the 105th anniversary of the NPT’s entry into force—leaving the world to wonder what happened to the obligation in Article VI to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

The doctrine of deterrence also remains fixed, including through official assertions about the legality of using nuclear weapons, the military efficacy of such weapons and their indispensability as an insurance policy. When coupled with mounting geopolitical tension, these developments pose a sincere and obvious threat to international stability.

For the purposes of this workshop, the insistence on the centrality of nuclear weapons in national security strategies also acts as a barrier to finding common ground by placing an unacceptable strain on the grand bargain at the heart of the NPT: The synergistic interplay between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as mutually reinforcing means for strengthening security, and the understanding that failure to progress one leads to a failure to progress the other.

Let me be clear, I am not diminishing the need for all states parties to faithfully comply with their commitments under Pillar Two of the Treaty. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, especially, the potential for non-state actors to acquire such weapons remain among the most serious threats facing the international community. Non-proliferation tools such as the Nuclear Security Summit and UN Security Council Resolution 1540 have been vital elements in countering these threats.

However, we must ask, can this grand bargain realistically be expected to sustain another six decades of lop-sided implementation?

The perpetuation of a double standard— which requires ever-stricter non-proliferation controls, while demanding no similar standards for the fulfilment of disarmament commitments—could have three especially detrimental consequences for the Treaty regime.

The first is the potential erosion of non-proliferation norms and practices. This has obvious ramifications for such vital non-proliferation measures as the universal adoption of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Additional Protocol.

The second consequence is that if nuclear-weapon States continue to impose conditions—such as the need to retain a nuclear deterrent until global conditions are safer and strategic stability is ensured before engaging in good faith multilateral disarmament negotiations—then they must accept that other states will also accept the false logic of this security chimera. The risk of proliferation grows every additional day that states insist the doctrine of nuclear deterrence is essential for their security.

As the United States sagely noted during one of the early debates on nuclear proliferation in the General Assembly's First Committee[1]: "The nuclear powers cannot expect other nations indefinitely to deny themselves such weapons as they may believe are required for their defence if they, the nuclear powers, refuse to accept the responsibility of halting their own build-up of nuclear weapons and refuse to begin the process of their destruction."

The final consequence that I see emanating from a failure to respect the NPT bargain is that governments will lose faith in the Treaty as a forum for advancing their interests. There is therefore an urgent need for the Review Conference to address how to strengthen the Treaty so that all States parties continue to see benefit in remaining a part of it.

And here I would like to return to the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament. This approach—which continues to gain momentum and support—has resulted in a new

[1] US Department of State, Documents on Disarmament, 1960 (Pub. No. 7172, July 1961) (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 372.

common understanding of the catastrophic consequences that would result from even a limited use of nuclear weapons.

However, the perspective has done far more than simply increase our understanding of the devastating impact of nuclear weapons. It has created new constituencies for nuclear disarmament—uniting medical practitioners, climate scientists and relief workers with the peace and security community. It has brought a new sense of urgency based on the failure by nuclear-weapon States to address seriously the commitments they have undertaken, as they continue to preserve, improve and rationalize their nuclear arsenals.

As you well know, the humanitarian consequences resolution at last year's First Committee attracted 155 sponsors and the third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by Austria in December, was attended by 158 States. These numbers constitute roughly 80 per cent of the NPT's membership. They cannot be ignored.

This overwhelming majority of States parties now believe that humanitarian considerations should be at the centre of all future disarmament deliberations. For other parties to remain deaf to this call could have damaging consequences for the role of the NPT as the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

It is my hope that the potential consequences I have just outlined will spur all states parties to find common ground and implement the disarmament commitments contained in the action plan. In my view, this should be a top priority for the Review Conference—to discover a common path for implementing the action plan in the most expeditious manner possible.

Of course, shoring up the NPT bargain is not the only aspect of the Treaty where states parties need to forge a common approach. The so-called "Middle East Resolution" to create a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and All Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, agreed in 1995, and the subsequent commitment in 2010 to hold a conference to advance the issue were essential elements of, first, agreement to indefinitely extend the NPT and, second, to a successful conclusion to the 2010 Review Conference after the failure of the 2005 Review Conference.

This is, again, another issue on which States parties agree with the overarching principle but have failed to find the common ground in implementing it.

Indeed, to date there has been a disappointing lack of progress on holding the conference, the blame for which cannot be laid at the feet of any one country. Nevertheless, states parties to the NPT—and not just the region—are deeply frustrated with the lack of progress in implementing the commitments to this zone.

I want to express my continued support to the conference facilitator, Mr. Jaakko Laajava, who has done his utmost to achieve results on a complex and difficult task. I urge regional states to work with the co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution to ensure all parties' concerns are met and to seek renewed efforts to hold the conference as soon as possible.

Failure to make progress on the conference is not only undermining a key basis on which the NPT was indefinitely extended, but also has implications for regional security and broader international peace and security.

I suppose all of this begs the question—what would constitute a successful Review Conference in 2015?

First of all, a successful Review Conference would—inter alia—establish a common expectation for what the regime should look like in 2020—its fiftieth anniversary.

Secondly, a successful outcome will underscore that states parties recognise their national interests are best served by faithfully implementing all of the Treaty's goals.

Thirdly, a successful outcome in May will require all states parties to remember their common goal—a world free of nuclear weapons—and the primary role this goal will play in reaching what should be our most common of grounds: our common security.

To achieve these outcomes, the Review Conference must establish a sense of direction and urgency coupled with real results and the acceptance that the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons are undeniable.

If the action plan is to serve as a road map to a world free of nuclear weapons, all states parties must work together to outline how they propose to reach the final destination in the shortest possible time.

In conclusion, I would like to pledge my absolute support to the Review Conference's President-designate, Ambassador Taous Feroukhi, in reaching a successful outcome. She has a challenging road ahead of her, but also a willing and ready partner in the United Nations. I hope that all States parties will offer the same support.

Thank you.