

Foreword

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We cannot escape history

Abraham Lincoln, December 1862

The opening words of the United Nations Charter, announced in June 1945 in San Francisco, declare that the United Nations exists “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” The UN General Assembly passed its first resolution in January 1946. In the shadow of the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the highest priority of the new international body, was a call for plans “for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”

Since then, the world has agreed on conventions that forbid the development, production, stockpiling, and use of biological weapons (1972) and chemical weapons (1992) and almost all states have committed to be bound by these agreements. But as out-going United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan lamented in a farewell speech in late 2006, the terrible fact is that sixty years on the world still has not agreed on a plan to be rid of nuclear weapons.

Instead of eliminating what Kofi Annan called a “unique existential threat to all humanity,” the world has seen nuclear weapons grow in number and destructive power and proliferate. In 1946, only one country, the United States, was armed with nuclear weapons. But it would not let go what it called its “winning weapons.” An opportunity was lost.

The United States sought to use its new weapon to assert its power in the world. Once the U.S. nuclear monopoly had been broken by the Soviet Union, the risks of its imperial exercise of power become much greater. But the United States did not relent. In fact, in one way or another, every American president for sixty years has reached a point during a crisis of threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

In time, the superpowers had to face the brutal reality of having to manage an expensive, unstable, potentially catastrophic, and at times politically very unpopular Cold War arms race. They agreed to try to manage this self-destructive strategic competition. To placate angry and fearful publics, they passed off what was a necessity as virtue. The distinguished Swedish diplomat Alva Myrdal rightly called it “the game of disarmament.”

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many felt a new world was possible. For former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, “the end of the Cold War has transformed global strategic conditions.” For the public that had supported an anti-nuclear peace movement, it was time to shift their attention to other

things. The U.S. national security decision-makers were now unchallenged abroad and at home. The mask of virtue could be safely shed.

The speed and scale of the shift can be seen in the changing fortunes of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In 1992, the U.S. Congress voted for a moratorium on nuclear testing and called for a test ban by 1996. In 1999, when the treaty was sent to the U.S. Senate for ratification, Henry Kissinger noted that “six former secretaries of defense, four former national-security advisors and four former CIA directors opposed ratification, while four former secretaries of state, myself included, refused to endorse it.” They saw no need to accept even the limited constraint the treaty might impose on American nuclear weapons development.

A larger point was also being made also in this rejection of what President Clinton in 1997 had called “the longest sought, hardest fought prize in the history of arms control.” The officials who had been charged with managing U.S. national security for decades were demonstrating their embrace of the unforeseen opportunity for freedom of action. This idea of “America unbound” has been the basis of the foreign policy of the Bush administration since 2000.

Today, the United States and Russia have about 25,000 nuclear weapons between them, and have been joined as nuclear-armed states by Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and most recently North Korea. Led, again, by the United States, the older nuclear weapons states are beginning to modernize their aging nuclear complexes and delivery systems.

Others may not be not far behind. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has warned that there are another 20 or 30 “virtual nuclear weapons states” that have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons in a very short time span. He observed that, “Should a state with a fully developed [nuclear] fuel-cycle capability decide, for whatever reason, to break away from its non-proliferation commitments, most experts believe it could produce a nuclear weapon within a matter of months.” As if to prove this point, Japan’s Foreign Minister Taro Aso announced in late 2006 that Japan’s civilian nuclear program meant that, “We have the technology to develop nuclear weapons.... But this doesn’t mean we will immediately create nuclear weapons to possess them.”

For Japan and other states with nuclear energy programs, it may take a threat from an existing nuclear-armed state, a change in leadership, a new found desire for national power and prestige, a resourceful scientist, or unexpected access to technology to tip the balance. In a world seen as dominated for the foreseeable future by a handful of nuclear-armed states, it may be only a matter of time.

Why has it come to this? An important part of the reason may be that all states who have or seek nuclear weapons share a common disregard for democracy and their own people. Every state that has developed nuclear weapons has done so in secret from its people. Nor has any nuclear-armed state ever clearly explained to its people what would happen if it carried out

its nuclear war plans. It is little surprise that few citizens in nuclear armed states know that in 1961 the U.N. General Assembly declared that “any state using nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons is to be considered as violating the Charter of the United Nations, as acting contrary to the laws of humanity and as committing a crime against mankind and civilization.”

Instead, every nuclear-armed state claims its weapons are for deterrence. In 2004, Paul Robinson, Director of Sandia National Laboratories, responsible for the engineering of U.S. nuclear weapons, explained “deterrence.” He argued “deterrence ... comes from the Latin root word ‘terre,’ meaning ‘to frighten with an overwhelming fear,’ as in the English antecedent—terror.” In short, to deter means to terrorize. This kind of public candor is almost unknown from officials responsible for nuclear weapons.

All of this must change if we are to develop and implement the “common global strategies” that Kofi Annan argued are needed if we are to end the nuclear age. For Annan, the key step is for “all the States with nuclear weapons to develop concrete plans—with specific timetables—for implementing their disarmament commitments.... [and] to make a joint declaration of intent to achieve the progressive elimination of all nuclear weapons, under strict and effective international control.”

But, truth be told, plans for eliminating nuclear weapons are almost as old as the nuclear age. There are plans that date back to 1946. The most recent proposals came in 2006 in the form of a major report, with 60 concrete recommendations, from the independent, international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, led by Hans Blix, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The declaration of intent sought by Kofi Annan exists too. The 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty commits the nuclear weapons states that are signatories (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China) “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” This was reaffirmed in 2000, at the NPT Review conference, where the nuclear weapon states made “an unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.” The nuclear armed states outside the NPT (Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea) have all indicated that they would also disarm, if the conditions are right.

It seems we know what to do, and the nuclear weapons states have said they will do it. The problem is how to make it happen. We need to identify and determine how to overcome the obstacles that prevent progress towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. This is the challenge taken up in *Nuclear Disorder or Cooperative Security*.

The report explains that “the overarching policy goal of this project is to help turn U.S. foreign policy back towards reliance on international cooperation, in part through multilateral treaty regimes, as a means of diminishing

the risks posed by nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to Americans and others around the world.” To this end, it engages critically with the WMD Commission’s recommendations to identify specific changes in U.S. policy that would contribute to the goal of nuclear disarmament.

The core of the report is its detailed analysis of “The U.S. Record” with regard to international arms control treaties and institutions, the development of new U.S. policies such as counterproliferation, the pressure from the weapons laboratories for new nuclear weapons, and the critically important area of new delivery systems for these weapons. This is vital information for informing the nuclear debate within the United States and globally.

Given the role played by the United States in shaping the international political environment, especially on issues of nuclear weapons, it is worth asking whether disarmament demands directed at the United States are any more likely to succeed than the more general international proposals offered by the WMD Commission, and similar efforts that came before it. The record is not encouraging.

A stark measure of the challenge involved in ridding the United States of nuclear weapons was offered by General Lee Butler, who was Commander in Chief of the U.S. Strategic Air Command (1991-1992) and then of the U.S. Strategic Command (1992-1994) with responsibility for all U.S. Air Force and Navy nuclear weapons. For Butler, the continued reliance on nuclear weapons by the United States is due to the nuclear complex. The institutions that make and plan to use nuclear weapons are, he says, “mammoth bureaucracies with gargantuan appetites and global agendas ... beset with tidal forces, towering egos, maddening contradictions, alien constructs and insane risks.” Their powerful lock on policy-making can be seen in the way that nuclear weapons and the nuclear complex have transcended the end of the Cold War.

Nuclear Disorder or Cooperative Security makes an important contribution by taking up the question of the role of grass-roots groups, NGOs, and more broadly social movements in confronting nuclear weapons. Grass-roots anti-nuclear groups have sought for sixty years to educate Americans about the dangers of nuclear weapons. But most ordinary Americans show little understanding of their government’s nuclear arsenal and policies. A 2004 poll found that most Americans have no real idea of the size and character of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. When asked “[h]ow many nuclear weapons do you think the U.S. has in the U.S., or on submarines, that are ready to be used on short notice?” more than half offered an estimate of 200 weapons or less. The United States has over 5,700 operationally deployed nuclear warheads.

Polls have also found that almost 60% of Americans did not know that a commitment to disarmament was part of the 1970 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This is despite the fact that the United States was one of the two original sponsors and the NPT has been a central element of U.S. policy since then, especially in its dealing with third-world states with nuclear ambitions. As surprising is the finding of the scale of ignorance about which other states have nuclear weapons. Large majorities of the U.S. public know Russia and

China have nuclear weapons, but more of them (55%) mistakenly think Iran has nuclear weapons than know that Britain (52%), India (51%), Israel (48%) and France (38%) actually have these weapons. The poll shows over 40% of Americans mistakenly believe Japan and Germany have nuclear weapons.

It is against this background that we must weigh the challenge of contesting and transforming U.S. decision-making, and thus that of other nuclear-armed states, so that all can finally agree that the threat or use of nuclear weapons by any state has no politically, legally, or morally acceptable justification. *Nuclear Disorder or Cooperative Security* rightly observes that “we should expect the road to abolition to be both long and difficult.” The good news, however, is that polling data shows nuclear abolition would meet with widespread public support in the United States; about 70% of the U.S. public supports signing an international treaty to reduce and eliminate all nuclear weapons, including those of the United States. People seem to understand that the bomb should have no place in the world. They understand that the most elementary principles of peace and justice require we must treat all nuclear weapons as created equal.