

Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

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There is no more fundamental human rights issue than a threat to life on this planet as we know it. There are only two such threats that international policy failure can make real. One is global warming, and the other is annihilation by the most destructive and indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever invented. And nuclear weapons can kill us a lot faster than CO₂.

There is no global issue on which it is more important to make progress quickly than the elimination of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth. The scale of the casualties that would follow any kind of significant nuclear exchange is almost incalculably horrific — not only from immediate blast and longer term irradiation effects, but also the nuclear-winter effect on global agriculture.¹ Yet there is no public policy issue on which it seems harder to make serious and sustained progress. The issues are complex, the technical detail is often impenetrable to the uninitiated, and by and large, both policymakers and publics are — despite an occasional frisson about Iran or North Korea — complacent and indifferent.

The risks

There are three kinds of risk associated with nuclear weapons. One lies in the existing stockpiles of the nuclear-armed states, the second in the possible emergence of new nuclear-armed states, and

the third in rogue states or non-state terrorist actors acquiring nuclear weapons. Of these, the first, the risks posed by the arsenals of the existing nuclear-armed states are the most immediate and real, although constantly downplayed by them and their allies.

Despite big reductions that occurred immediately after the end of the Cold War, and the continuing retirement or scheduling for dismantlement since by Russia and the United States of many more, there are some 16,400 nuclear warheads still in existence, with a combined destructive capability of over 100,000 Hiroshima- or Nagasaki-sized bombs — and in our own Asian region the number of weapons is not diminishing but increasing, with China, India and Pakistan all with active programs.

Around 8,000 nuclear weapons are in the hands of Russia, 7,300 with the United States, and around 1,000 with the other nuclear-armed states combined (China, France, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Israel and — at the margin — North Korea). A large proportion of them — some 4,000 — remain operationally available. And, most extraordinarily of all, over 2,000 of the US and Russian weapons remain on dangerously high alert, ready to be launched on warning in the event of a perceived attack, within a decision window for each President of four to eight minutes.

The key point is that we have been much closer to catastrophe in the past, and are now, than most people know.² Over the years, communications satellite launches have been mistaken for nuclear missile launches; demonstration tapes of incoming missiles have been confused for the real thing; military exercises have been mistaken for real mobilisations; technical glitches have triggered real-time alerts; live nuclear weapons have been flown by mistake around the United States without anyone noticing until the plane returned to base; and one hydrogen bomb-carrying plane actually crashed in the United States, with every defensive mechanism preventing an explosion failing, except one cockpit switch.

One of the most chilling near-misses occurred during the Cuban missile crisis, when we now know, as we did not for many

years, that we escaped World War III on the 2–1 vote of the three senior officers of a Russian submarine. Losing communications with Moscow after coming too close to a depth charge from a US ship blockading Cuban waters, and not knowing whether war had broken out or not, the commander had to decide whether to launch his nuclear torpedo or not — and, overwhelmed by the responsibility, put it to a vote!

Given what we now know about how many times the supposedly very sophisticated command and control systems of the Cold War years were strained by mistakes and false alarms, human error and human idiocy; given what we know about how much less sophisticated are the command and control systems of some of the newer nuclear-armed states; and given what we both know and can guess about how much more sophisticated and capable cyber offence will be of overcoming cyber defence in the years ahead, it is utterly wishful thinking to believe that our Cold War luck can continue in perpetuity. That we have survived for 69 years without a nuclear weapons catastrophe is not a matter of inherent system stability but sheer dumb luck.

As bad as the risks were during most of the Cold War years when there were just two opposing major nuclear powers, they have become dramatically compounded since the proliferation developments that produced India, Pakistan and Israel as new nuclear-armed states in the 1970s, and North Korea in the last decade — in areas of great regional volatility, a history of violent conflict, and less sophisticated command and control systems. These risks would be compounded even more dramatically were there to be further breakouts, particularly in the Middle East in response to the possibility of an Iranian program (a contingency now somewhat less likely following the Iran- US nuclear deal), or in North East Asia in response to North Korea, or by the potential threat posed by a dramatic increase in Chinese nuclear capability.

This proliferation risk more than anything else prompted the change of heart by those quintessential hard-headed Cold War

realists, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Sam Nunn and William Perry, in their famous series of *Wall St Journal* articles since 2007,³ arguing that whatever role nuclear weapons may have played in the past, they were far more dangerous in the world of the 21st century, and it was time to get serious not only about curbing further proliferation but their total elimination.

The third kind of nuclear weapons risk is that rogue states or non-state terrorist actors will get their hands on ill-secured nuclear weapons or dangerous nuclear material, or sabotage nuclear power reactors. This has generated an enormous amount of worldwide attention in the aftermath of 9/11, fuelled since then by the series of deeply troubling developments in the Middle East, and jihadist-driven terrorist attacks in a number of capitals.

Of course, we cannot be complacent about the risks posed by these extremists: should they ever get their hands on the necessary nuclear material, we have to assume they would have no moral compunction whatever about using it. But this debate needs to be conducted a little less emotionally, and a little more calmly and rationally, than has sometimes tended to be the case.

We cannot assume that intelligence and law enforcement institutions will become aware of and be able to intercept every conceivable kind of terrorist conspiracy, but there is a big difference in sophistication and timeline between the kind of coordination necessary to unleash simultaneous Kalashnikov attacks, as in Paris, and that needed to manufacture and explode a nuclear weapon. While the engineering know-how required to build a basic fission device like the Hiroshima or Nagasaki bomb is readily available, highly enriched uranium (HEU) and weapons-grade plutonium are not at all easily accessible, and to assemble and maintain — for a long period, out of sight of the huge intelligence and law enforcement resources that are now being devoted to this threat worldwide — and the team of criminal operatives, scientists and engineers necessary to acquire the components of, build and deliver such a weapon would be a formidably difficult undertaking.

A manifestly less difficult undertaking — and rather more likely to occur, although somewhat surprisingly it has not yet — would be to assemble quantities of non-fissile radioactive material like caesium 137, much more readily available in multiple industrial and medical uses, and detonate it with a conventional explosive like TNT as a ‘dirty bomb’ in the middle of a city. The physical damage would be relatively minimal, certainly by comparison with a fission bomb, but the psychological damage unquestionably great — made so largely by the way this threat continues to be so talked-up by policymakers. Talk the risk down and it will be that much less likely to be realised.

Addressing the risks: the state of play⁴

We have always known that the road to the abolition of nuclear weapons will be long, winding and extremely difficult to travel. All the present nuclear-armed states — including the five who, as members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, are committed to ultimate nuclear disarmament — pay at best only lip-service to that objective. None of the nuclear-armed states has committed to any specific timetable for the major reduction of stockpiles — let alone their abolition. And, on the evidence of the size of their weapons arsenals, their fissile material stocks, their force modernisation plans, their stated doctrine and their known deployment practices, we have to conclude that all of them foresee indefinite retention of nuclear weapons and a continuing role for them in their security policies.

What makes things worse is that, notwithstanding all the high hopes held following the election of President Obama — who made it so clear in his April 2009 speech that he was both intellectually and emotionally committed to nuclear abolition, and who led the most pro-nuclear disarmament US team it is possible to imagine — progress in recent years has been non-existent or worse.

Not long after the negotiation of the New START treaty — which was and remains a real achievement, at least in reducing the number of strategic weapons deployed by the United States and Russia — the Obama administration was reduced to almost complete impotence by a combination of Congressional hostility; corrosive inter-agency processes; pressure from East Asian and East and Central European allies not wanting any diminution of the role of nuclear weapons in the protection of their own perceived security interests; a willingness to give undue weight to preserving P5 (that is, the Non-Proliferation Treaty Nuclear Weapons States) solidarity at the expense of principle; and now by Russian hostility — given a whole new lease of life by the continuing Ukraine crisis — to giving any further ground at all in bilateral arms control negotiations.

And these are not the only grounds for gloom. Across Asia, nuclear stockpiles are growing, not diminishing; neither the Six-Party talks process, nor anything else, has done anything to curb North Korea's nuclear provocations; there has been no movement on the creation of a Middle East WMD Free Zone issue; for that reason among others, the 2015 NPT Review Conference fell apart without agreement on anything; there has been continuing complete paralysis of the Conference on Disarmament on the Fissile Material Treaty issue; and a continuing inability to get the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty ratified into effect.

Against all that, about the only positive achievements have been the long overdue and very welcome agreement with Iran to impose real constraints on what may or may not have been its intention to become a nuclear-armed state; the modest success of the Washington, Seoul and Hague Nuclear Security Summits in generating some consensus about the need to ensure that nuclear weapons and fissile material do not get into the wrong hands; and, most encouragingly, since 2013, the hugely welcome rebirth of an international movement campaigning against the catastrophic

humanitarian and human rights impact of any nuclear weapons use, which has strong appeal both intellectually and emotionally, and — at three major international conferences in Norway, Mexico and Austria, and at UN meetings — has won strong support from a great many governments (although not, unhappily, Australia's, as discussed below) and civil society organisations worldwide.

The less good news about the humanitarian impact movement is that, so far at least, it has had much less traction with publics and the governments that matter most than might have been hoped. Policymakers almost everywhere have been re-embracing all the old Cold War language about the utility of nuclear deterrence — the absolute necessity of nuclear weapons to keep the peace, at least between the major powers. And when it comes to visceral, emotional appeal, in the context of old fears resurfacing about Russia and new ones emerging about China, reliance on nuclear deterrence seems to trump the humanitarian and human rights appeal of nuclear disarmament every time.

None of this means that those hoping for a saner nuclear world should throw in the towel. As frustrating as it is, there is no alternative but to grind away with the necessary advocacy across the whole relevant policy spectrum.

At the base level, we have to get serious about *nuclear security*, to ensure that existing weapons and fissile material do not fall into the wrong hands. This should be the easiest of all nuclear policy issues to advance, because nobody is actually against it, either in principle or in practice. But we still need to do better than the orgy of self-congratulation following the series of Nuclear Security Summits (in Washington, Seoul and The Hague since 2010) might make one believe we have done so far. There is now plenty of international regulatory architecture, and plenty of announced national implementation measures, but still not enough transparency or accountability for anyone to be really confident

that enough is actually changing on the ground. And nothing at all has been done about the 85% of the global fissile material inventory that is in military rather than civilian hands.

Moving higher up the mountain, we of course have to stay serious, as most of the world already is, about *nuclear non-proliferation*, including trying to find negotiated solutions to the problem of Iran and North Korea and continuing to try to strengthen critical elements of the non-proliferation regime, as well as introducing meaningful penalties for Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) non-compliance or withdrawal and tougher safeguards that include universal embrace of the Additional Protocol. Also important here are bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force, negotiating a ban on fissile material production, securing nuclear weapon-free zone protocol ratifications, and strengthening non-treaty mechanisms like the Proliferation Security Initiative.

And then, above all, we have to get serious about tackling the top of the mountain — taking serious, credible steps toward *disarmament*, both for its own sake, and to strengthen the hand of those arguing for a tougher non-proliferation regime. The bottom-line challenge for policymakers here was stated in three succinct lines in the Australian-initiated report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons⁵ in 2006, which have resonated internationally ever since:

So long as any state retains nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any nuclear weapons remain anywhere, they are bound one day to be used — if not by design, then by human error, system error, miscalculation or misjudgement. And any such use will be catastrophic for life on this planet as we know it.

This mantra has been repeated subsequently in every major international report addressing these issues, including those of the Blix Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission⁶ in 2006, and the Australia-Japan initiated International Commission on Nuclear

Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND)⁷ in 2009. But none of the present nuclear-armed states accepts its compelling logic. The last part of this chapter discusses the strategies that have to be pursued, including by Australia, if that obstinacy is to be overcome.

Australia's role

In all of these policy enterprises, there is an important role for middle-power states like Australia, not least because of the visibility and to some extent leverage we have as an unequivocal ally of the United States. But while we have on occasion been at the cutting edge of progress, our record overall has been disappointingly mixed.

On *non-proliferation*, both sides of politics have long been consistently forceful advocates for a stronger international prohibitory regime, including effective testing bans: the Howard Coalition government, for example, played an important role in bringing the CTBT to final conclusion in 1996. Although realpolitik has occasionally intruded, as with the acceptance of uranium sales to India without adequate guarantee of non-diversion to military uses, both sides of politics have supported the Proliferation Security Initiative, an informal mechanism designed to constrain countries like North Korea, and other enterprises like the NPDI (Non-Proliferation and Disarmament) coalition of like-minded countries, which has made the right kind of noises even if not doing much of practical substance.

But on disarmament, the depressing reality is how much of Australia's commitment to ridding the world of nuclear weapons has waxed and waned with changes of government: this ought to be a completely bipartisan issue, but it has not been. While there are obvious limits to the influence any non-nuclear-armed state can have, here as elsewhere in our foreign policy, we have too often been too quick to accept those weight limits, and to succumb to the instinct to never, ever, do anything that could

possibly limit the capability or willingness of the United States to use nuclear weapons in our defence.

Australia did not over-reach when, under the Keating government, we initiated the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, which with a formidable cast of international characters (including Robert McNamara and the former head of the US Strategic Air Command, General Lee Butler) first made a strong intellectual case for a nuclear weapons-free world. But we badly under-reached when the incoming Howard government retreated from the report and the international middle-power initiatives it spawned.

Nor did we overreach when the Rudd government joined with the Fukuda government in Japan to initiate the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), which the present author co-chaired with the former Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi and which produced a far-reaching but very realistic blueprint for getting, step by step, to a nuclear weapon-free world. Nor would we be over-reaching if we actively pursued internationally the kind of disarmament advocacy described in the concluding section of this chapter.

Where we have most spectacularly sold ourselves short in recent years and undermined much of the international credibility won by the Canberra and ICNND Commissions has been in our official response, under the Coalition government, to the international humanitarian consequences movement that, as described above, has been making waves since 2013. Our recent lack of serious commitment to nuclear disarmament has never been more obviously, or unhappily, on display than it was during the meeting of the UN's First Committee in New York in October 2015, when we took what our Chinese colleagues might have called a 'Four Noes' position in voting negatively on four important new humanitarian impact-related resolutions coming before it.⁸

Our first ‘No’ was to vote against the Austria-led ‘Humanitarian Pledge’ initiative, calling for a commitment ‘to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons’, supported by 128 other nations.

Our second ‘No’ was to abstain on a second Austrian resolution, supported by 136 members, stating ‘that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances’, our particular objection being to the last phrase. As Sweden pointedly asked us: ‘When would it be in the interest of humanity that nuclear weapons are used? Under what circumstances?’

Our third ‘No’ was to vote against a South African resolution, supported by 124 states, which declared nuclear weapons to be ‘inherently immoral’ — on the ground that this, like the Austrian resolutions, sought ‘to marginalize and delegitimize certain policy perspectives and positions’. To which the only possible reply is: ‘Exactly’.

And our fourth ‘No’ was to oppose a Mexican resolution, seeking to establish a General Assembly ‘open-ended working group’ to ‘negotiate with a view to reaching agreement on concrete and effective legal measures to achieve nuclear disarmament’; and abstaining even when the draft was amended to substitute ‘substantively address’ rather than ‘negotiate’, in a resolution which attracted 135 member states.

In all these enterprises Australia was either the leading, or a leading, voice in a group of around 20 states, most believing themselves to be protected by the US nuclear umbrella, all anxious to claim a continuing major security role for nuclear weapons, and none of them willing to do anything which might even help *begin* a process of drafting a treaty for their elimination.

The challenge of disarmament

The biggest challenge for policymakers, in Australia and world-wide, is generating serious momentum towards, and ultimately

achieving, complete nuclear disarmament. Of course, we need to continue to wrestle with non-proliferation and nuclear security, but the main game must always be disarmament. There are five broad strategies that need to be pursued in this respect.

First, not just the emotional but the intellectual case for abolition has to be made, to challenge head-on the Cold War mindset that is still so extraordinarily evident among so many policymakers. Old habits of thought about nuclear weapons, and nuclear deterrence in particular, die hard. Too often the only focus is on capability, not the much more positive story about intent — the extreme unlikelihood that any state will deliberately initiate a nuclear war. Too often the only scenarios that matter are the absolute worst-case ones, not those bearing any relationship to real world probability. Too often, the only language of analysis is arithmetical, and not remotely ethical. All the arguments for the elimination of nuclear weapons — humanitarian, financial, and above all *strategic* — must be made, and remade over and again, if basic attitudes are to begin to change.⁹

In bald summary, the strategic arguments are these. One, that nuclear deterrence is at best of highly dubious utility, and at worst of zero utility, in maintaining stable peace: that because of the obvious risks associated with their deliberate use anywhere at any time, and the almost universally accepted taboo on such use, nuclear weapons are simply not the deterrent or strategic stabiliser they may seem, whether the context is deterring war between the major powers, deterring large-scale conventional attack, deterring chemical or biological weapons attacks, or deterring nuclear terrorism. Two, that they encourage proliferation more than they restrain it, because — to repeat the Canberra Commission mantra — so long as any country has nuclear weapons, others will want them. And three, that whatever may have been the case in the past, in the world of the 21st century — with multiple nuclear weapons powers, several with extremely

fragile command and control systems, the risks of retaining them outweighs any conceivable benefits.

This all means, among other things, not letting go unchallenged the line, often heard from pro-nuclear weapons advocates since Russia's annexation of Crimea, that Ukraine would not be in the trouble it is now if it had not given up its nuclear weapons in 1994 on the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nuclear weapons do not act as a deterrent to the kind of adventurism we have seen in Ukraine, because both sides understand that the risks associated with their deliberate use are simply too high. Putin knows that even if he drives his tanks into Donetsk, there would be no more prospect of a nuclear-armed Kiev nuking Moscow than of Washington doing so. The one thing that Ukrainian nuclear weapons *would* have added to today's mix is another huge layer of potential hazard: from all the risks of system error and human error — miscalculation, misjudgement, mistake — that are associated with the possession of nuclear weapons by anyone.

Second, the argument for nuclear disarmament, and for a timeline in getting there, has to be made in a way that is seen as credible, not hopelessly incredible, by policymakers. And that means being very careful about how the 'Global Zero' objective is articulated, however passionate one may be about ultimately achieving a totally nuclear weapons free world. We have to frankly recognise that we will not get to zero as a straight-line process, and we certainly won't get to it by anything like 2030, the target date urged by many abolitionists. There will need to be, as the ICNND argued, two distinct stages, first 'minimisation' then 'elimination', with some inevitable discontinuity between them, because of the reality, when it comes to moving from low numbers to zero, that there are not only psychological barriers and geopolitical barriers (in the world as we can envisage it for the foreseeable future), but serious technical barriers — of verification and enforcement — as well.

Getting to zero will be impossible without every state being confident that every other state is complying, that any violation of the prohibition is readily detected, and that any breakout is controllable. Those conditions do not exist at the moment, although important work is being done on verification by the United Kingdom, Norway and the United States, and this part of the problem may well be solved over the next decade or so. Enforcement, however, will continue to be a major stumbling block for the foreseeable future, with the Security Council's credibility on this issue manifestly at odds with the retention of veto powers by the Permanent Five (that is, United States, China, France, Russia and United Kingdom).

By all means argue for work to be done on a draft Nuclear Weapons Convention to identify and find solutions to these various problems. But a 'campaign treaty' like the Ottawa or Oslo Conventions on land mines or cluster bombs is not likely to be productive. While a treaty simply prohibiting a class of weapons may generate some moral momentum, when it comes to a treaty that can actually be implemented, pretending that we have met the conditions needed to achieve this when we manifestly have not is a turn-off, not a turn-on, for the weapons states and their supporters who have to be persuaded.

The ICNND took the view that a target date of 2025 could be set for the achievement of a *minimisation* objective. This would involve reducing the global stockpile of all existing warheads — now over 16,000 — to no more than 2,000 (a maximum of 500 each for the United States and Russia and 1,000 for the other nuclear-armed states combined), with all states being committed by then to 'No First Use' — and with these doctrinal declarations being given real credibility by dramatically reduced weapons deployments and launch-readiness. That target date was optimistic when my Commission set it in 2009, and is looking even more optimistic now. But it is not wholly unrealistic provided some serious momentum can start to build soon.

Third, there has to be a hard focus on getting some movement, somewhere, on numbers. Of course Australia's voice will have limited impact on this issue, but it should still be heard. The obvious place to start on numerical reductions has always been bilateral negotiations between the United States and Russia — because on any view they each have so many weapons to spare, way above even the most neurotic view as to what constitutes for each a credible minimum deterrent. But such negotiations are obviously for the time being at a dead-end. And it would be quixotic to imagine any bilateral negotiation between the United States and China being more productive given the scale of the current imbalance between them and the extent to which China's stated concerns about US ballistic missile defence and new generation conventional strike capability mirror those of Russia.

A lack of movement from China will also make it difficult to persuade India to reduce or even freeze its stockpile. Although, if rationality were ever to play a role in these matters, which of course it does not, there is every reason for India and Pakistan to call a halt to the nuclear arms race in which they are engaged and to freeze their present stockpiles at their present relatively evenly balanced, and perfectly credible levels.

If bilateral and multilateral arms reductions are going nowhere for now, the only way of getting reductions in numbers is going to be *unilateral*. The smart place to start, and one that might conceivably even be domestically politically saleable, would be for the United States to wave goodbye to the land-based component of its triad, which is wildly expensive to maintain in an environment where there are huge budgetary imperatives to massively cut expenditure (not least to maintain the operational credibility of the rest of the US defence machine), and which as even the nuclear hawks acknowledge, is far more vulnerable to attack than the sea- or air-based components.

The United Kingdom could also make a significant contribution both to the disarmament cause and its own budget by downsizing its Trident-carrying submarine fleet. Of course, that does mean no more Continuous At-Sea Deterrence, but are there any circumstances in which the United Kingdom would ever be likely to need that capability? British policymakers have not been very articulate or persuasive in arguing for that need, and despite the caution which continues to prevail about any reduction in UK capability, it is very important, in the context of building momentum for disarmament worldwide, to keep that option alive.

Fourth, there must be a serious move to reduce reliance on the US nuclear umbrella. This is where Australia could probably make its biggest single contribution to the global disarmament debate. This issue goes to the very heart of the question as to whether we are really serious about nuclear disarmament. If we are not serious about doing what we can to reduce the role or salience of nuclear weapons in our own national security policies, then we should stop pretending that we are really serious about ultimately achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

Those of us US allies, including Australia, who are presently sheltering — or believing that we are sheltering — under the US nuclear umbrella, should be prepared to make clear our acceptance of a much reduced role for nuclear weapons in our protection. So long as any nuclear weapons continue to exist, it is not unreasonable for us to want to be able to rely on US nuclear protection for *nuclear* threat contingencies. Although the arguments for the utility of nuclear deterrence have been grossly exaggerated, it has to be acknowledged that there is some psychological comfort involved in being able to retaliate in kind against nuclear attack, and that, for Japan and South Korea particularly, the continued availability of the US nuclear umbrella to defend against nuclear threat contingencies has been politically important in stilling those voices who would like to see each country develop a nuclear weapons capability of its own.

But when it comes to *non*-nuclear threat contingencies, whether they involve chemical or biological or conventional or cyber weapons, surely it is time for us all to step back. We know that, with the US help on which we can all reasonably rely, we have the capacity for the indefinitely foreseeable future to deal with any such contingency, however severe, through the application of *conventional* military force. And we should now all say so, in so many words. Because so long as we continue to insist that the nuclear option be kept open for a variety of non-nuclear threat contingencies, notwithstanding our collective capacity to deal with them by non-nuclear means, we are contributing absolutely nothing but rhetoric to the achievement of a nuclear-free world. Extended deterrence does not have to mean extended *nuclear* deterrence.

Fifth and finally, the nuclear-armed states and their allies have to be persuaded to rethink their resistance to the humanitarian consequences movement, now generating significant worldwide momentum, because it is so obviously ethically compelling. The unhappiness of these states with any talk of humanitarian impact is not a new phenomenon: this is an issue on which they have *always* felt uncomfortable — not because they do not understand the ethical issue but because they fear the consequences of it becoming central to the argument about the future of nuclear weapons.

The extent to which it has been banished from official discourse was brought home to me in one of my most formative personal experiences when, as a young Australian minister in the early 1980s, I received my first official briefing on US nuclear strategy. It was given to me, in the bowels of the Pentagon, by a man with a white dust jacket and a pointer who looked uncannily like Woody Allen. His language was disengaged and technical — all about throw-weights, survivability, counter-force, and counter-value targets. And he had absolutely *nothing* to say, any more than anyone else in Washington did, about the countless real human

beings who would be vaporised, crushed, baked, boiled, or irradiated to death if a nuclear war ever erupted.

The initiative that has been taken by the Swiss, Norwegian, Mexican, Austrian, New Zealand and other governments, and a legion of NGOs, to bring back to centre stage our understanding of what these weapons actually do to real human beings, is profoundly worthwhile. If the campaign to raise the consciousness of policymakers and publics about the awful downside risks posed to our common humanity by nuclear weapons has the result of diminishing the credibility and acceptability of the nuclear deterrent on which so many policymakers mindlessly rely, that is exactly what should be applauded.

And if one of the results of this process is to create some momentum towards an ultimate legally binding treaty banning nuclear weapons — although any credible such treaty is, realistically, decades away — that is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

I remember my friend and former colleague, US Secretary of State Jim Baker, once saying to me, in another context, ‘Well sometimes, Gareth, you just have to rise above principle.’ Maybe sometimes one does have to make uncomfortable compromises to achieve defensible results. But it is hard to believe that being seen to contest, or deny, or simply to be trying to evade wholeheartedly acknowledging the sheer horror of nuclear weapons, the most indiscriminately inhumane ever devised, can ever be remotely defensible.

It is time for all the nuclear-armed states, and all those states, including Australia, who think of themselves as sheltering under the nuclear protection of other states, to get serious once and for all about disarmament in all the ways here described. For these states to continue to insist, as they do, that everyone else do as they say and not as they do, does not begin to be a recipe for reducing the terrible nuclear weapons risks the world continues to

face. And it certainly does not help the non-proliferation agenda. All the world hates a hypocrite, and it's time, once and for all, for the hypocrisy to stop.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, A Robock and OB Toon, 'Self-assured destruction: the climate impacts of nuclear war', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 68, no. 5, pp. 66–74, 2012, at <http://climate.envsci.rutgers.edu/pdf/RobockToonSAD.pdf>
- 2 See, for example, Chatham House Report, *Too close for comfort: cases of near nuclear use and options for policy*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, April 2014, at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/199200>
- 3 Conveniently collected at <http://www.nuclearsecurityproject.org/publications/wall-street-journal-op-eds>
- 4 For a full analysis see G Evans et al., *Nuclear weapons: the state of play 2015*, Canberra, ANU Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2015, at <https://cnnd.crawford.anu.edu.au/publication/cnnd/5328/nuclear-weapons-state-play-2015>
- 5 See *Report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons*, Canberra, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1996, at <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/1173946>
- 6 See *Weapons of terror: Freeing the world of nuclear, biological and chemical arms*, Report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Hans Blix, Chair, 2006, at http://www.blixassociates.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Weapons_of_Terror.pdf
- 7 See *Eliminating nuclear threats: A practical agenda for global policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), Gareth Evans & Yoriko Kawaguchi, Co-Chairs, Canberra, 2009, at www.icnnd.org
- 8 For a full account, with references to all relevant resolutions, see T Wright, 'Australia's role at the UN General Assembly's First Committee in 2015', ICAN Briefing Note, November 2015, at <http://www.icanw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Australia-BriefingNote.pdf>
- 9 All these arguments are developed at length in G Evans, 'Nuclear deterrence in Asia and the Pacific', *Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 91–111, 2014, at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/app5.11/full>