

Nuclear Disarmament: Dream or Nightmare?

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Thank you very much, and thank you for coming to this, for me, embarrassing occasion. I hope that my embarrassment will result in your education.

Hans Corell has already quoted, somewhat, from my most recent paper, which is available to you in the back. I think it might be a good idea if I could expand a little on the major point that I was making in that paper. Namely, is nuclear disarmament a dream or is it a nightmare? When Hans just spoke of the paralysis of not only the Security Council, but I think he could have added the Disarmament Commission in Geneva, which has been in a permanent coma for the last ten years. What came to my mind was the Newtonian principle: that a body in motion remains in motion, and a body at rest remains at rest. I think the Security Council and the Disarmament Commission have remained at rest far too long.

So, in my paper, I gave you first the bad news. I think it's interesting to look at the actual words pronounced by President Obama, in relation to nuclear weapons, and how they have changed over the years. In 2008 when he was full of genuine dedication, I think, to the notion of a nuclear weapons free world, he said that he would make it a central element of American policy. He didn't say how long it would take; it sounded like he meant to make it a central element from the word go. Then in his famous Prague speech of 2009, he said that he was still committed to the notion of a nuclear weapons free world, but it might not be achieved in his lifetime. He was 48 at the time. That is a long lifetime to go. Then he came back to the topic in his speech in Berlin last year, and now he said, "no one knows when that dream will be achieved." So I note a constant de-escalation of commitment.

Along with that goes, as Hans Corell has said, the fact that the nuclear weapons powers, far from taking any concrete steps in good faith as they are obliged to do, as Elizabeth Shafer has demonstrated to you, instead of taking concrete steps, they are taking steps backwards. In 2010, the position of the United States on the employment of nuclear weapons was that the US would move toward a situation where the role of nuclear weapons was limited to deterrence. In the most recent pronouncement by the Department of defense, on behalf of the president, called a strategy of nuclear weapons employment, there's a very alarming statement, which reads something like this: We would like to see the role of nuclear weapons limited to deterrence, which means not to use but to deter, but it's too early for that; we are not there yet. Which raises an alarming question, what other kind of use we are prepared to put nuclear weapons to?

Nobody has mentioned so far the outrageous cost of the nuclear modernization that is taking place right now, not only in the United States, but in other nuclear weapons countries. Depending on who does the estimating, I have seen estimates of a cost of \$600,000,000 over

the next decade, and another estimate by a group of scientists at a cost of one trillion dollars. I know a trillion dollars today is not as much as a trillion dollars was ten years ago, but still it is a lot of money. So there is that. Then there is the fact that we are perfecting our nuclear weapons. Just about a month ago the Department of Defense announced that a successful accuracy test had been achieved with the B-61 gravity nuclear bomb. Not by an explosion, but by some other mysterious procedure that I am not enough of a scientist to share with you.

Then there is the question of security. Not so long ago, an 84 year old nun and her two colleagues managed to make their way through a fence to a building that is supposed to become another site for enriching uranium for the use of nuclear weapons, although right now it's not clear whether that is actually going to happen. But these three wonderful people, radical Catholics, like any number of them before who have engaged in these protests, have been thanked by the government for pointing out the lack of security of this nuclear weapons installation by being convicted of sabotage and getting prison sentences of multiple years, six year in the case of Sister Megan. They were just trying to demonstrate that the nuclear arsenal was not secure.

There are other examples I could give you of why we cannot be very optimistic right now about achieving our goal. But I don't want you to walk out of here more depressed than you already are right now. So let me give you the good news.

The good news is that last year was, in my opinion, the best year for nuclear disarmament in probably the last decade. Why do I say that? It began in February with a two-day meeting in the foreign ministry of Germany, a member of NATO, which is committed to the continuing possession and possible use of nuclear weapons. But this conference, which was a joint governmental civil society conference, another positive thing about it, was called toward a framework of a nuclear weapons free world, a framework and conditions for the achievement of a nuclear weapons free world. My German friends, one of whom is here right now, tell me that this is not unusual for the German government. That is that they take an official policy, on the one hand, and then they do things that don't quite fit that official policy in a good sense, on the other hand.

And that was followed the following month by the big conference in Norway, another NATO country, another conference convened by a NATO government, on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons attended by some 125 countries. And then as Hans Corell has told you the follow up conference in Nayarit, Mexico was in February of this year, again on the humanitarian impact.

I'm not sure that the humanitarian impact, alone, is going to move us forward, but it's not a bad idea to be reminded of the immensity of the horror that would follow, not just from a major exchange with fifty or a hundred nuclear weapons flying back and forth, but just, you know, one nuclear weapon today dropped on a metropolis can kill a million people. So that was a good thing. And in between those two conferences, was something very interesting.

At the mandate of the General Assembly from the year 2012, there was convened the Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament in Geneva, the place where, as I said, discussion of nuclear disarmament has been blocked by the unanimity rule for the last ten or twenty years. So this was an attempt to open the discussion through the back door. In fact, the Open-Ended Working Group, consisting of several governments, produced a very interesting document at the end of its work, which among other things, referred to the central role of law in considering nuclear disarmament, and which outlined a path toward nuclear disarmament. And by the way, I don't see any attempt on the part of the United States and the other P5 to get rid of the rule of unanimity in Geneva. So, they had a very nice excuse for not conducting negotiations, because in principle, that is where they should be conducted.

There is good news, and there is bad news. And the best news from last year is, again, something that's been referred to from this podium before, namely, the Austrian government has announced that it will convene a governmental conference toward the end of this year that is designed to go beyond merely describing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, but which, in the words of the Austrian Foreign Minister, is going to be a paradigm change in considering this problem. Those of us who have been working on this problem are keeping our fingers crossed that paradigm change means we finally get down to talking about a convention outlawing nuclear weapons as chemical and biological weapons have been outlawed.

Now, I can't say that I am very optimistic that the nuclear weapons countries or certainly at least the P5 will participate in the conference. I think what they are going to say is, "Well if the countries that don't have nuclear weapons want to sign a convention saying that they shouldn't have nuclear weapons, that's ok with us, but we are not going to do anything about a convention outlawing nuclear weapons until we can be absolutely 125% assured that it can be implemented and that it cannot in the slightest way be breached." Which is a nice way of saying to the world, "World, better get used to having nuclear weapons around for as long as you're around."

There's a very important article in the current issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists by Kennette Benedict. That's a woman, not a man. Her name is Kennette with two Ts. It's called "The Myth of Absolute Safety." I commend it to any of you who want to do a little follow up on this meeting. And whenever I hear about total security, you know, I'm reminded of a line, pronounced by Hecate in the third act of Macbeth, which I've been trying to understand since I first heard or read it, and I haven't quite succeeded yet. But it seems to be very relevant to what we are talking about here, and it goes like this, "For you all know, security is mortals' chiefest enemy." So, we have, I think, a challenge to try to convince the nuclear weapons powers that if they insist on absolute security, we know that this simply means that they are not to be taken seriously about their commitment to a nuclear weapons free world. Thank you very much.