

50<sup>th</sup> Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs  
**"Eliminating the Causes of War"**

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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8 August 2000

IN his address to the Pugwash conference the President has basically two choices of what to talk about. He can talk in general philosophical terms about the aims of Pugwash and its role in the world, with the aim of providing enthusiasm for the grass roots. But to do this after Jo Rotblat would be an anticlimax: no-one can hope to emulate Jo at this sort of thing, nor to rival his knowledge and experience of Pugwash. The other choice is to focus on some specific topical problem, close to Pugwash's central interests. The danger here is that this topic is very likely to have been discussed at some length in one of the working groups. Either the President repeats what has already been said or, worse, he disagrees. However I will take the risk. I believe that Pugwash should concentrate on what it does best and in areas where it might actually be effective. Saying the same thing twice or even three times, perhaps with some different nuances, will do no harm and might even give events a push.

Pugwash's central interest has always been with nuclear weapons and the dangers they present. You are all familiar with the general situation at the present time. After the many years of massive nuclear build ups and with world having narrowly escaped disaster sanity began to dawn. Large numbers of treaties were signed, agreements were reached and a rapid decline in nuclear arsenals started. The changing world scene, following the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union, made one even more hopeful and plans to get rid of nuclear weapons altogether began to sound less utopian. Progress along this avenue might be painfully slow, and there could be hiccups, such as the India/Pakistani nuclear tests, but it was possible to remain optimistic. Now that the world was converging economically and perhaps politically the insanity of nuclear weapons would become more obvious and, with the encouragement of Pugwash and others, we could perhaps see light at the end of the notorious tunnel.

Now however one major threat to this peaceful scenario has appeared on the near horizon, which has the potential to take us on a backward path, with untold consequences. I refer to the American plans for National Missile Defence

sometimes referred to jocularly as "son of star wars", though this is no laughing matter. As many of you will know there is a strong American push to develop a small-scale defence system which could intercept offensive missiles from so-called "rogue states". The argument is that, while the major powers no longer threaten each other, there is an emerging threat from smaller countries and that it is possible technically to develop an effective system that would defend the United States against such potential threats. Several tests have already been carried out and a firm decision by President Clinton is expected shortly. He must decide whether to go ahead with full scale development of the system - though a decision on its eventual deployment would not be made till much later. This is the situation as I write, but the decision might have been taken by the time I come to address you - so it is certainly topical.

At a superficial level one can understand the attractiveness of the plan. After all who can object to a defence system aimed at protecting innocent civilians from the bandits of this world? In terms of domestic politics it is hard to oppose. As so often before, what is technically possible becomes politically necessary. It is to be regretted that part at least of the scientific community is behind this project. We have been here before.

The trouble lies in the potential clash with the ABM treaty, viewed by many as the cornerstone of world security at the present time. There are those who argue that any system along the lines of the American plans conflicts with the ABM Treaty and poses a threat to the other major powers. The American military have a difficult argument to make. First they have to convince the President and Congress that the system will work (and so get funded). On the other hand they have to persuade the Russians and the Chinese that it does not work too well, otherwise it threatens their nuclear capability. Technically they may be right, but subtle arguments of this kind do not go down well in the political world, where psychology and intention are much more important.

Inside America the argument seems to have been won by the hawks. All the evidence is that the President has little room for manoeuvre, particularly since his term is coming to an end. In the rest of the world the reaction has been hostile. President Putin, flexing his muscles, has moved quickly to get approval of START II, but has indicated his opposition to the American plans and has indicated his strong support for upholding the ABM Treaty. The Chinese have dropped hints that, if the Americans go ahead, they may feel compelled to upgrade their nuclear arsenal in self-defence. This in turn would worry the Japanese.

In Europe most countries, with the exception of the UK, seem to be opposed to the American plans. The Germans in particular have expressed their concern.

The dangers are clear. The relative stability of recent years may be on the verge of disappearing. We may be about to see a new phase of the arms race. Trust will

vanish and be replaced by suspicion. The whole international climate may become soured.

To an outsider the world may resemble a short-sighted elephant lumbering slowly towards a cliff. Unable to see what is in front of him, but proceeding inexorably to disaster.

And all for what? To defend America against "rogue states". Is this really a serious threat and if so are ballistic missile defences the right way to deal with it? Let me now spend a little time examining this in detail.

The list of potential "rogue states" varies with time and even the terminology changes – they are now “states of concern,” but the list has probably included: North Korea, Libya, Iraq, Syria. What do these countries have in common? First they are all a long way from the United States, secondly they are all run by dictatorial regimes, thirdly they are fairly small and their people are poor.

It is very hard to make a convincing case that any of these pose a serious threat to the United States. It would certainly take many years before they could begin to mount a threat. Meanwhile their neighbours are likely to get much more worried than the US, electronic surveillance would expose their plans, and the US could use political, economic or military pressure to handle it. You do not need to be a suspicious Chinese to see the weakness in the American argument, and I doubt if many informed Americans really believe in it either.

But let us turn the problem round. Are there better ways of handling these countries? Is it possible to integrate them into the world community so that they cease to have the appearance of outcasts? Can we not use the carrot instead of the stick?

Already the situation is changing on the ground. North and South Korea have started a constructive dialogue and the omens are promising. Syria, under Assad, started to have peace talks with Israel, and these might resume under the new regime. Libya, ostracized for so long because of the Lockerbie bombing, is coming back into the fold. Only Iraq remains a real difficulty and here it has to be admitted that the US (backed by the UK) appears to have no real policy beyond an irregular and uncertain bombing strategy, something which merely perpetuates the present regime.

A political approach, involving dialogue and economic aid, seems much the more sensible policy. The poor inhabitants of these countries would benefit and in due course this might lead to some democratic progress. This would provide much more genuine security for all concerned at a fraction of the financial cost of a ballistic missile defense system. Morality, politics and economics all point in the same direction.

The United States is leading the way in the economic and financial integration of the world. It should be following this up by solving problems politically, using its enormous resources constructively. Hiding behind a Fortress America mentality is totally out of keeping with the new kind of world we are entering in this century.

It is ironic that democratic government, which we all applaud, and which is slowly winning out in the world, is also the source of our major problems. As I mentioned earlier it is American domestic politics which is driving the NMD. National Defence is always a vote-winner and no political party can afford to appear soft on the issue. For this reason it is usually the hawkish parties that can afford to make deals, since their patriotism is less in question. Unfortunately they only do so occasionally and there is no reason to expect a new President Bush to cancel the NMD.

In the UK we see a similar process. The Labour Party lost many elections, according to one theory, because they were opposed to nuclear weapons. This may not be true but Foreign Policy can lose votes and the Government is afraid of taking strong steps. It makes much of the special relationship with the US and so has not joined in the criticism of American policy from other European countries.

But, besides the old democracies, we now have new ones, notably Russia. It is already clear that President Putin has to pay attention to nationalist public opinion and that his room for compromise with America is limited. He cannot be pushed too far. In this sense it was easier to deal with the old regime when the rulers could make their own decisions based on their assessment of the political and military situation. Public opinion could effectively be ignored. I should be clear that I am not arguing in favour of dictatorship, but only pointing out the extra difficulties that democracies sometimes present.

The situation in China is of course different, but looking ahead into the future we may have to deal with a more democratic regime and this may be tougher to negotiate with than Russia, since it is more likely to be a significant economic force. We must hope that, by the time all this comes about, the major security questions will have been resolved.

I have deliberately painted a bleak picture. Is this crisis inevitable and is it as bad as I have suggested? Can we do anything about it?

Although the situation in the US seems set, there are two rays of hope. In the first place the administration is aware of the international hostility to its plans and is sensitive on the matter - hence their attempts to get Russia to accept a watered-down interpretation of the ABM Treaty. If the concerns of Russia and China were also supported strongly by America's allies it is just possible there might be a change of policy. The role of the UK is fairly crucial here. In part this is because of the radar establishment at Fylingdales which is a part of the projected system. But

more important is the fact that the UK has been the strongest supporter of US foreign policy in recent years (e.g in Iraq) and opposition by the UK, adding its weight to the concerns expressed by other European countries, might just cause the US to think again. Clearly such a step by Tony Blair's government would take some courage. It would put a strain on the "special relationship", but in the last resort a real friend must be prepared to criticize. Such criticism, though painful, is more likely to be heeded. I hope this will start a serious debate in the country and lead the Government to reconsider its views.

The second ray of hope, not unconnected to the first, is that the introduction of a major new weapons system is a very long process, taking perhaps up to a decade for full implementation. This gives a lot of latitude for discussion, delay and compromise. My analogy with the trundling elephant was not quite accurate. Rather than going for a cliff he is perhaps just sliding down a long slippery slope. The end may be the same but there is more hope of turning back.

So I hope President Clinton, with or without Tony Blair's advice, decides not to go ahead with the NMD at this stage. But if he does, all is not yet lost and the pressure for modification and compromise has to be maintained.

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Let me now turn to another matter, also involving nuclear issues, but of more immediate concern to Pugwash. As you know one of the strengths of Pugwash has been that, even in the most difficult times, it has acted as a forum where serious discussions could take place on controversial issues. During the long period of the Cold War, Russian and American scientists were able to meet and deal with very sensitive issues of nuclear weapons. Our ability to arrange such meetings has been an essential part of our mission and the Nobel Peace Prize recognized this fact.

One would think, that in the much improved international climate of the present time, things would be easier and that there would be no difficulty in getting visas for the participants at our meetings. In the past such difficulties were not unknown. Getting into Eastern Europe was not easy and, during the McCarthy period, the US posed similar barriers. I remind you of all this just to emphasize how surprised we were to find that the British Government has refused a visa to a distinguished Pakistani scientist who wanted to attend this meeting in Cambridge. He has attended many Pugwash meetings in the past and we would very much have welcomed his presence here. The security situation in Asia continues to cause concern and the views of well-informed Pakistani colleagues would have been valuable.

All of us in the British Pugwash group are embarrassed and perplexed by the action of our own Government. Since there are general issues involved let me explain the situation at greater length.

This audience does not need reminding that two years ago India and Pakistan both conducted nuclear tests and effectively joined the list of acknowledged nuclear powers. This caused shock and consternation round the world and the Pugwash Council, after much deliberation, issued a statement which deplored the India/Pakistan action but which also criticized the main nuclear powers for dragging their feet on steps to reduce nuclear armaments. This failure of the nuclear weapons states to fulfil their obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty was certainly a significant contributory factor in the Indian and Pakistani decisions.

The reaction of the 5 nuclear powers continues to be myopic and legalistic. They formed a club, drew up the rules and then objected when some outsiders refused to join on these terms. Instead of recognizing the realities of the new situation and trying to accommodate the views of India and Pakistan they play the role of the aggrieved party. India and Pakistan did not play by our rules, so they have to suffer. In particular the UK Government refuses to allow any Pakistani nuclear scientist to enter the UK. The grounds for this policy are legalistic and specious. It is claimed that, as a country that has signed up to the NPT, the UK has undertaken not to assist any non-nuclear-weapon-state to acquire nuclear weapons. The weakness of this argument is transparent. India and Pakistan already have nuclear weapons, so they do not need UK assistance. Moreover the embargo on nuclear scientists includes attendance at Pugwash conferences, hardly the place where state secrets are on sale. All this is reminiscent of the bad old days of the Soviet Union and McCarthy America. Good legal reasons were always given, but if the basic assumptions are shaky no amount of sound reasoning is convincing.

So, on behalf of the UK Pugwash group, I have to apologize most abjectly for the fact that an important participant was not able to attend this meeting. Next year the Pugwash conference will be in India and I very much hope that the Indian Government will behave in a more civilized and enlightened way.

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Since I am the last speaker at this Pugwash Conference let me make a few general comments about what we have achieved and where we go from here.

Every annual conference besides bringing together the old Pugwash hands and enabling them to discuss the familiar issues also acts as an opportunity to attract new members from different backgrounds. As the world changes and presents new challenges so we need to broaden our expertise if we are to respond appropriately. New people and new ideas are needed and one great source of both is of course Student/Young Pugwash. It is always refreshing for those of us, of the older generation, to have the company of the students. Their enthusiasm, commitment and contribution is a significant factor in the success of the conference.

Tomorrow morning, when most of you are on your way home, or enjoying a holiday in this country, the Pugwash Council will meet to consider the outcome of this conference. Ideas and proposals which have emerged during your discussions will provide an input to the Council debate and will help us decide on the best ways of pursuing the Pugwash agenda. In general, we know what we would like to achieve. The real question is: how can we make a real difference? There are long lists of desirable objectives and many methods by which we can try to reach them. Our task is to select those which are most likely to be effective.

As you know Pugwash is an unusual organization. It is not a structured organization with well-defined membership. Anyone who has attended a Pugwash meeting can consider themselves a “Pugwashite.” We come from many countries and many backgrounds. There is no criterion to identify a “Pugwashite.” In principle we are open to all who are prepared to engage in rational argument. I like to refer to Pugwash as a community rather than as a movement or organization. The term captures the spirit better than other descriptions.

In conclusion let me make some general comments about the future. The world of the 21st century is a more inter-connected world and it is also one of fast political, economic and military change. This makes for uncertainty all round. Democracy may be slowly winning out but, as I have indicated earlier, this does not necessarily make things easier. Science is coming to be ever more dominant and this means that the responsibility of scientists will increase. They will have to use their collective voice internationally to argue for sanity. There are many channels through which this can be done - the more complex world we live in means that authority and power are more diffused. But Pugwash with its distinctive history is certainly an important player and I hope and trust that it can find its proper role in the exciting times ahead.