

## **52nd Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs**

*Science <—> Sustainability <—> Security*

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### **Report of Working Group 1 The Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**

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#### **Eliminate or Marginalize?**

Following the end of the Cold War a debate began between those favouring explicit policies intended to eliminate (more properly, prohibit) nuclear weapons on a timescale of practical interest, and those preferring instead to seek the 'marginalization' of nuclear weapons in world affairs, by which was meant the gradual de-emphasizing of nuclear weapons in defence planning. Among the marginalizers were those who were not wholly convinced of the desirability of a nuclear-weapon-free world, and continued to believe that the retention of minimum nuclear forces by a few nations would be beneficial to international security. Others believed that, as a matter of tactics, it would be unwise to concentrate from the outset on the goal of zero for fear of dissipating the political will needed to take even the first important steps to roll back Cold War excesses.

There was widespread agreement, however, on the main requirements of an immediate agenda of reductions and reform of nuclear arsenals and operational practices. For several years, in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s, significant progress was made in reducing nuclear dangers, culminating in the prospect of the verified destruction of warheads in the context of a prospective START III. While for some progress was painfully slow and faltering, headway clearly was being made – nuclear weapons were becoming less prominent in defence planning – and bodies such as Pugwash could look ahead to the problems of moving to low numbers of nuclear weapons and eventually zero.

This was all well and good, but the primary argument against marginalization had always been that a condition of 'low nuclear salience' would not be sustainable. Unless the nuclear weapon states made a nuclear-weapon-free world their

determined and explicit objective, the argument went, then sooner or later progress in disarmament would be derailed and the world would return to high nuclear salience – that is to say, arms racing and proliferation. The precise reasons for returning to high nuclear salience could not necessarily be foreseen. The point was the more general one, that a situation in which nuclear weapons had been marginalized would forever be vulnerable to unavoidable processes of political change. The analogy could be made with a forest fire: as long as embers persist there would be the danger that a change of wind could re-ignite the flames.

### **Renewed Emphasis on Nuclear Weapons**

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan, and developments in US nuclear weapons policy, reinforced by the events of September 11th, were seen by many in the group as potentially presaging just such a return to a new era of weapons development, proliferation and arms racing.

The leaked 2002 Nuclear Posture Review and the recent Bush-Putin nuclear arms reduction treaty, in particular, together with the Bush Administration's open aversion to arms control, convey attitudes to nuclear issues and apparent policy directions disquieting to most if not all of the Working Group. Criticism can, of course, be made of the nuclear policies of many other countries (the continuing deployment by Russia of large numbers of tactical nuclear weapons was deplored, for example), but in view of the dominant role that it plays in world affairs it was considered futile to discuss prospects for eliminating nuclear weapons without 'focusing intensely on the role of the United States.' Among these attitudes and intentions are the following:

- That nuclear weapons are legitimate weapons, which the US plans to retain in large numbers for the indefinite future.
- That the US may be prepared to use nuclear weapons in a widening range of circumstances, in particular in operations such as attacks on underground military facilities, or to pre-empt or respond to chemical or biological weapons attack.
- That the US will invest heavily in its nuclear weapons infrastructure; that new warheads may be developed and nuclear explosion testing may resume.
- That the US is unlikely to allow itself to be constrained by existing arms control commitments, and unlikely to engage in additional meaningful measures of nuclear arms control and disarmament.

Little enthusiasm was expressed in the Group for the Bush-Putin Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), which commits each side to reduce its strategic nuclear weapons to 1,700-2,200 by 31 December 2012 when the treaty expires. The general feeling was that it constituted not much more than a 'statement of intent to carry out actions already planned.' By failing to require

destruction of infrastructure, delivery vehicles or warheads, moreover, and specifying no schedule of reductions between now and the treaty's expiry date, the US has effectively abandoned the bilateral process of verified nuclear disarmament that had been developing through the INF and START agreements and which, it had been hoped, would eventually broaden to include the other nuclear weapon states. Similarly, by flouting several of the 'steps towards disarmament' agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference – for example, in developing ballistic missile defence, withdrawing support for the comprehensive test ban, and planning under SORT to retain thousands of intact warheads and warhead components in reserve, thus ensuring that reductions being made to the US arsenal can rapidly be reversed – US policymaking would appear now to disregard almost entirely the obligation ('unequivocal undertaking') to disarm under Article VI of the NPT.

The nuclear confrontation in South Asia is, of course, of more immediate grave concern. There has been an apparent willingness on both sides to take enormous risks since nuclear weapons were introduced into the region, with nuclear threats being made during periods of great tension that have seen massive and sustained military confrontation along a long border. The possibility that a conventional war could escalate to nuclear use clearly cannot be discounted.

Tensions have diminished from the most recent crisis point in the spring of this year, but the presence of nuclear weapons means that the situation is still very dangerous and a further 'cooling off period' is needed. There was some discussion in the group of measures that might be taken to reduce the nuclear risks, including an agreement on non-deployment of nuclear forces given that neither nation yet deploys nuclear weapons on a routine operational basis. It was argued that this might be easier to achieve than an agreement on no first use of nuclear weapons, which Pakistan would find difficult to accept, although India has set out its long-term intention to deploy land, sea and air-based nuclear forces.

In briefly discussing the situation in Iraq, the Group stressed the urgency of bringing the UN weapons inspectors back to the country. In varying degrees, those who expressed an opinion warned against the grave risks of a military attack to change the Iraqi regime.

### **Recommitment to Nuclear Disarmament**

While regretting the content and tone of recent US policy, not everyone in the group was inclined to draw the same conclusions about the appropriate way to respond. There were some, for instance, who cautioned against exaggerating the significance of current adverse developments; taking a longer-term perspective, the role of nuclear weapons may still be seen to be diminishing and the nuclear establishment atrophying, they argued. While it would have been preferable had

the SORT agreement provided for the destruction rather than storage of decommissioned nuclear weapons, the treaty does at least prescribe a continuing reduction of deployed weapons and, in this respect, should be welcomed. Similarly, although the NPR might be 'needlessly imprudent,' the recommendations that it makes will not necessarily be put into practice. After all, it seems hard to understand why the US would want to widen the role of nuclear weapons (the great potential equalizers) when, as demonstrated in recent wars, it has quite unrivalled conventional military capabilities. A similar point was made about the decision of India to develop and deploy nuclear weapons, given the likelihood that Pakistan would do the same.

But this was not the prevailing sentiment in the group. The wider view was that the actions of the US, India and Pakistan among others could best be explained as evidence of a continuing belief in the value of nuclear weapons as a source of security. Longstanding fundamental questions about the utility and legitimacy of nuclear weapons remain unresolved. Until these issues are addressed, discussion of the details of nuclear weapons policy will be peripheral and, ultimately, ineffective.

In this context there were a number of impassioned pleas, which found a resonance in the group as a whole, amounting to a call for Pugwash to recommit itself to the elimination of nuclear weapons, and together with the broadest possible coalition of like-minded bodies launch a campaign aimed at rekindling public interest in the nuclear issue. First and foremost this should be because reliance on nuclear weapons is immoral. They are the worst of all weapons, carrying a unique threat to civilization. Second, it should be on the basis that nations must adhere to international law, including the obligations undertaken under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in particular. In the meanwhile what should be sought is a consensus that the sole legitimate purpose of nuclear weapons, for as long as nations retain them, is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by others, which is to say attempts should be made to persuade each of the nuclear weapon states to announce policies of no first use.

Nothing will be accomplished if further proliferation of nuclear weapons is not prevented. A key function of Pugwash, therefore, should be to help provide the ideas, research and argumentation needed to protect, strengthen and revitalize the global non-proliferation regime. Among the suggestions put forward in the group for Pugwash activities in this respect were the following:

1. that Pugwash does all that it can to ensure that there is not a resumption of nuclear explosion testing by any nation (should the United States begin to test again, for example, then this would almost certainly be followed by testing by other nations with potentially extremely adverse consequences for arms control and disarmament);

2. that Pugwash study the means to strengthen enforcement of the non-proliferation provisions of the NPT;
3. that Pugwash study the means to foster the development of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as any other supplementary regional arrangements, including, for example, zones free of weapons of mass destruction; and
4. that Pugwash provide a source of innovative thinking on means to increase multilateral and international cooperation in the nuclear field, including but not limited to a revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament, and covering areas such as de-alerting of nuclear weapons, global material controls and accounting, anti-terrorism, and the science and technology underlying verification and other aspects of nuclear arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

If the conclusions reached by this group are accepted, then logically Pugwash would hold a continuing series of workshops on nuclear forces debating these and other issues, and aimed at achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world, comparable to those concerned with nuclear arms limitation and control held in the Cold War period.