

Statement to the 3rd Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference
1 May 2019

Chair,

Nearly fifty years after the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the international community remains woefully distant from a credible process that would make even the most optimistic observer believe that the abolition of nuclear weapons is within sight.

To this day, nuclear weapons possessors extol the value of nuclear weapons in safeguarding their national interests, but expect no one else to embrace the same rationale. They demand immediate, consistent compliance with non-proliferation obligations, but disregard their own responsibility to disarm. They consider the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons by some states unacceptable, but are content to accept the nuclear-weapons programs of military or economic allies—even outside the NPT framework.

Those with nuclear arsenals have resisted, avoided, or ignored not only their treaty obligations, but the groundswell of support for nuclear abolition from all corners of the planet. They consider themselves at the same time arbiters and direct beneficiaries of global norms around the acceptability of nuclear weapons. And they are not alone in their recalcitrance.

A subset of non-nuclear weapons states maintains policies that are disconcertingly aligned with those of nuclear weapons possessors. States that participate in nuclear alliances, such as NATO, are wantonly complicit in obstructing progress toward nuclear disarmament. These nuclear-dependent states agree with nuclear weapon states when they claim that they maintain their arsenals not only for their own security, but also for the security of their allies. Indeed, they give nuclear-weapons states cover.

Like their nuclear-armed allies, they insist on a strict step-by-step process for nuclear disarmament. Steps like the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which six out of nine nuclear-armed states have failed to ratify. Or the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament, which has been deadlocked for more than 20 years.

Like their nuclear-armed allies, they claim that international security conditions are not ideal for nuclear disarmament. But the sobering reality is that they may never be. Nuclear disarmament must be pursued under international security conditions that are predictably less than perfect.

Like their nuclear-armed allies, they boycotted the process that resulted in the historic adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, undermining the very rules-based multilateral order they claim to support.

Like their nuclear-armed allies, they called the ban treaty process divisive, when it simply shed light on longstanding divisions between nuclear haves and have-nots—divisions that continue to be exacerbated with the blatant disregard of disarmament obligations, and which the ban treaty specifically intends to remedy.

Like their nuclear-armed allies, they continue to embrace nuclear deterrence as a valid security policy, thereby legitimizing the weapons held by the possessors. Now those possessors are engaged in a multibillion dollar modernization of their nuclear arsenals, which will inevitably extend the shelf-life of nuclear weapons and push the abolition goalpost even further.

How can this not be seen as contrary to the goal of nuclear abolition? How can the placement of U.S. nuclear weapons on the territories of NATO members be compatible with the objective, the spirit and the specific provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty? Does anyone believe that proliferation concerns will ever be fully allayed while nuclear-weapons states cling to their arsenals?

Chair,

Nuclear-dependent states have been allowed to reside in two camps for much too long. When it suits, they present themselves as responsible international actors that are nonnuclear-weapon states under the NPT. At the same time, they are party to, and explicitly endorse, security arrangements that run contrary to the letter and spirit of the NPT, as well as the broader goal of nuclear abolition.

As things stand, their purported support of nuclear abolition can only hold true in the most ethereal and noncommittal way possible. Because, in practice, they are effectively enabling their nuclear-armed allies. It is thus imperative that they muster the courage, the foresight and the audacity to work with friends and foes in the formulation of common security arrangements that do not rely on the threat of nuclear annihilation—and to signal that nuclear weapons are unequivocally unacceptable, even for their allies.

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