

Weapons Threats and International Security: Rebuilding an Unraveled Consensus

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

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On Monday, February 26 The Century Foundation hosted a major international conference on “***Weapons Threats and International Security: Rebuilding an Unraveled Consensus,***” with support from the Italian Foreign Ministry and assistance from The Center for American Progress.

Over the course of the day, a dozen experts and practitioners led lively discussion with over a hundred participants on issues ranging from the recent U.S.-India nuclear deal to the Security Council's confrontations with North Korea and Iran to the relationship between non-proliferation and disarmament

The conference aimed to chart a road map to renewed global commitment against nuclear and chemical weapons dangers, and to identify practical political steps. Findings and conclusions will be circulated to policymakers in coming weeks.

The following is a rushed edition rapporteurs report. Please check all quotations against the final transcript, which will be posted shortly.

Perspectives and Opportunities

Jim Leach, former US congressman from Iowa (1973-2007) and current professor at Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School, opened the conference with a warning that “consensus about the *methodology* of arms control is unraveling.” Leach, a Republican, took note of recent American government opposition to arms control agreements. “This is the first administration since Eisenhower to oppose a test ban; it has opposed the chemical weapons convention and has objected to ten United Nations resolutions in the arms control arena.”

Leach noted that Eisenhower was not on the losing side of a single vote at the U.N. during his term; in contrast, on *ten* resolutions related to arms control in the past General Assembly session, the US was the only state voting no, losing by lopsided votes such as 176-1. “We were the *one* there, in opposition.” This record is dangerous, he argued, because in an era when technology permits disaffected individuals to do “powerful anarchistic things, the case for advancing international law has never been greater.”

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“A corollary of the principle that power corrupts is that excessive military power tempts excessively. Military power is not as relevant to circumstances as we once thought. From an American perspective we should be very cautious about exercising force.”

Meanwhile, the US has erred in Iraq, he said, and faces a dangerous misstep in Iran.

Filippo Formica, Director of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stressed that Italy strongly advocates an elevated role for the European Union on arms issues, recalling that the EU adopted its nonproliferation strategy in 2003 under the Italian presidency.

The principles underlying the regime have not been challenged

“The good news,” he argued, is that despite the frayed consensus on strategy and commitments, “the principles underlying the regime have not been challenged—the NPT is still considered the cornerstone.”

Formica emphasized the need for more restrictive rules governing nuclear fuel cycle. Without the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) additional protocol, which permits more transparent inspections, the entire regime’s effectiveness is constrained. The additional protocol must become a precondition for the supply of nuclear material. Moreover, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) must remain high on the agenda, as the recent North Korean nuclear tests have highlighted.

Ambassador **Jayantha Dhanapala**, former Under Secretary General, U.N. Department of Disarmament Affairs (1998–2003), began his comments with a nod to Al Gore’s academy award the night before, quipping that “inconvenient truths win Oscars, but do not win elections.”

Dhanapala noted that the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists had moved its “doomsday clock” two minutes closer to midnight, both because of the threat of weapons of mass destruction and because of the human-induced climate change. “Consensus has been unraveled” on the nuclear regime, said Dhanapala.

“We *did* have a consensus,” said Dhanapala, citing the Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978 as the “highest watermark.” Moreover, “there was remarkable consensus when the CTBT signed in 1996, and remarkable bilateral consensus when Reagan Gorbachev met in 1986. How can we get back to that consensus?”

There is a fallacy that there are safe hands and unsafe hands, but nuclear weapons in any hands are dangerous. It is not a democracy issue, or a state/nonstate issue, but that nuclear weapons themselves need to be eliminated.

Dhanapala lamented that, with NATO and Russia still emphasizing nuclear weapons as part of their core defense, there has been no attempt to devalue nuclear weapons. Moreover, the failure of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and omission of disarmament from the 2005

World Summit outcome document bode poorly. He cited stalemate on efforts to sign a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) or to negotiate a treaty banning weaponization of space.

Yet Dhanapala cited hopeful developments as well: the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed calling for nuclear weapons abolition by former senior US officials George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, and William Perry, “whose views represent a significant change of thinking at that level”, as well as the little-known establishment of a Central Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, which the U.N. Department of Disarmament Affairs was able to assist five countries in negotiating, despite strong opposition by three nuclear states. Equally important, Dhanapala also noted that four of the nuclear powers--Russia, Britain, France, and the United States—will choose new leaders within the next 20 months, and that new political leadership could lead to a new agenda.

In discussion, participants raised a number of issues with the opening speakers. **Sérgio Duarte** (Brazil) asked about the seeming Washington taboo on talk of "disarmament," or even mention of the word. **William Potter** (USA) and **Jonathan Granoff** (USA) asked pointedly about the degree of Italian support in the Nuclear Suppliers Group for the US-India deal or its possible contingency on CTBT conditions. **Khaled Shamaa** (Egypt) took note of the "Alexandria Quartet" and pressed for a road map to a non-nuclear Iran. **Hans Blix** (Sweden) observed that the real criterion for political order is the monopoly on the control and use of weapons, and contrasted order based on power (Mars) with that based on law (Venus).

Session 1: Looking to 2020: Proliferating threats, static regimes?

Joseph Cirincione, Senior Vice President for National Security and International Policy, Center for American Progress, opened the session on the current state of affairs by asking, “How bad is it, and what specific steps can restore?”

Michael Krepon, Co-founder and President Emeritus, Henry L. Stimson Center, responded, “It’s been worse. We’ve bounced back, and we can bounce back again.” He noted that things looked grim in 1945, he said, again in 1949 with the Soviets' atomic bomb, followed by the development of the hydrogen bomb. Then there was the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and the tensions of 1983 when the US and USSR pressed new quick-strike weapons and arms control talks had broken down.

“Nuclear danger of the past was more intense, but it’s more complicated now,” he said. He argued that the notion of “arms control” was an outdated concept from the 1960s that arose as an alternative to disarmament, simply to limit the nuclear arms race. But the notion of an “arms race,” too, is outdated, he argued, since countries will respond to nuclear development by perceived adversaries by escalating asymmetrically rather than vertically. The only vertical growth today is in India, Pakistan, and

We are never going to agree about what constitutes a space weapon. A marble can be a space weapon when moving ten times the speed of a bullet.

China, he argued, and there only at a moderate rate. He expressed confidence that the proposed development of a nuclear "bunker-buster" bomb "is dead," and asserted that the US nuclear weapons labs are losing personnel and influence. Dismissing claims that we are headed for an era of space rivalry, Krepon was sanguine that Congress would not buy in, since "all it takes is a couple crude weapons to mess up space. You don't need an arms race in space, and it is not going to happen. We have entered a world of asymmetric warfare, not arms races."

Proliferation, Krepon argued, is driven by insecurity. We need to address it by creating systems to address insecurity—for example a "code of conduct for space-faring states" that will prevent the creation of persistent space debris.

Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Secretary-General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, noted that "in 1945 we would have thought that you need global regime to control all weapons or they will inevitably spread." And yet, that never happened—additions to the nuclear club have been rare and several nations relinquished their arms. What, he asked, were the positive elements that prevented us from going over the brink?

At the start of the 1990s, Cotta-Ramusino argued, the non-proliferation regime was on a forward trajectory: there were no new nuclear weapon states and the sense of positive direction on disarmament. But by the late-1990s things had changed, with India and Pakistan (followed recently by North Korea) demonstrating nuclear status. Meanwhile, the third leg of the bargain—disarmament—was abruptly cut off.

"Now we are witnessing the consequences of the dreadful mistakes made in this period," he said, arguing that the failure to embrace multilateral approaches to controlling weapons was a core cause. The notion has spread that "disarmament is not really relevant" that it bears no direct correlation to non-proliferation.

It is necessary but not sufficient that the most powerful country has the least need for nuclear weapons. It's a place where we can start.

Ramusino cited a series of dire questions: What are we doing with tactical nuclear weapons? What does it mean that the nuclear weapons states want to keep hundreds or thousands of strategic warheads indefinitely? But he also emphasized there are actionable steps forward, including CTBT ratification and de-alerting active arsenals.

Christopher Chyba, Director of the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University, argued against excessive pessimism that might create a perception that it's already too late. He said an "unintentional alliance" has emerged "between those who oppose NPT and those who are advocates but show its failures." "I hear from my students that it is a 'given' that the NPT has failed. We should not accept that—we want to go down kicking and screaming with respect to saving the NPT."

"The United States," he argued, "needs a nuclear weapons policy that provides a *comprehensive* approach to managing nuclear risks." There is a need for a bottom up

review to assess all dangers, from chemical weapons to nuclear theft and smuggling, to the potential consequences of eschewing disarmament commitments. Our current arsenals don't address these risks—and may in fact accentuate them.

Krepon argued that--despite the view by many in the arms control community-- that one of the best things that has ever happened to devalue the importance of nuclear weapons has been to give the U.S. Strategic Command control over conventional arms. Some have said such a change would blur the line between nuclear and convention arms; the result, however, has been precisely the opposite because the shift has led planners to realize exactly how unusable nuclear weapons are in practice. In addition, Krepon was encouraged that the world has developed two great "toolboxes" to address today's challenges: intrusive verification (such as what is used in START II treaties) and Cooperative Threat Reduction mechanisms.

Chyba added that those interested in arms control cannot be seen as pursuing the same old agenda. On many occasions, "we have predicted the sky is falling—but the sky has continued not to fall." A comprehensive look at our security might lead to valuable tradeoffs that would otherwise seem unpalatable—for example, an agreement to build the Reliable Replacement Warhead in return for the ratification of the CTBT.

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Each of the panelists agreed that part of the problem was that we are all about "should" and "must", but not about "how". "How do we get these things we want?" is the key question.

Joe Cirincione noted that the confrontations we face in North Korea and Iran have a deep past, and that "since the end of the Cold War no new country has started a nuclear weapons program—and several have given up their arms." **Krepon** agreed, but noted that "the pivot is the Iranian program." "If the bomb fits into the Sunni-Shia problem, that will reverberate in so many places in the Islamic world—which is all the more reason to really focus on Iran." **Cotta-Ramusino** urged greater caution vis-à-vis Tehran, noting the "potentially very dire consequences; not an abstract idea, but the collapse of a system and the physical collapse of a country if things go in the wrong direction." Rhetoric is escalating, creating climate of mutual distrust and damaging the possibility of solution. Sanctions are not in themselves the answer, and can only work if they in the end give way to openness.

In discussion, **Nicolas Roche** (France) reminded participants that there has been notable progress on Article VI; in the 1990s France had curtailed its nuclear program and arsenals.... **Jeffrey Laurenti** (USA) challenged the panel to assess the threat of nuclear-armed terrorists and to outline how the international regime can strengthen security against them....

Session 2: A porous wall?

Jeffrey Laurenti initiated the pre-prandial session by noting that energy demands outstripping fossil fuel capacity are reviving nuclear energy as the power source of the future. How do we maintain a wall against proliferation if we plan to use nuclear energy more in the future?

Sérgio de Queiroz Duarte, the Brazilian diplomat who presided over the stalemated 2005 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference, was skeptical that the wall blocking crossover from peaceful energy to weapons could be maintained without a stronger safeguards system.

Asked about the effectiveness of the world's inspections system, **Gustavo Zlauvinen**, Director, of the International Atomic Energy Agency's United Nations Office, quipped that "If I were a salesman I would say it's perfect. But it is not." Inspections are increasingly difficult since "technologies that thirty years ago were in the hands of a few are easier to access" and the "emergence of a black market has put a lot of strain on verification efforts."

"We lack a central enforcement system by which non-compliance is resolved. What we have today, member states that are defendants are also the judges. This is a contradiction, and is not helpful."

There are contradictions within this system, **Zlauvinen** said, but "this is the one we have, and we have to accept that." What would be the perfect scenario to have a high level of confidence? When countries, such as South Africa, have offered full cooperation, we were able to provide confident assessments. We need access to all possible information, including other sources such as national intelligence—but how do you treat info coming from other sources? The only international organ empowered to review and enforce compliance—the Security Council—has not worked efficiently because of its members' divergent interests.

The more legal authority our inspectors have, to ask for analysis of materials, the greater our credibility.

William Potter, Director of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, noted that there are all kinds of cleavages on disarmament issues between states. At the 2005 Review Conference, even like-minded states did not convey a sense of community of interest. The P5 never issued a joint statement and the Non-aligned Movement was torn in many directions and more fractious than any coalition, even if these rifts were not obvious to outside observers. The New Agenda Coalition, which had united in the past to advance a disarmament agenda, was there in name only, as member states pursued different agendas.

Potter argued that the greatest threat facing the world today is nuclear terrorism. "We've been quite lucky, but we can't

Our salvation to date has been the lack of middle men to connect supplies with end users.

count on that luck." He noted that the seizure a year ago, recently announced, of 100g of highly enriched uranium in Georgia is extremely troubling.

Potter expressed particular concern over the weapons risk from spread of nuclear energy. Potter decried a bilateral deal with India that would throw out three decades of non-proliferation policy without consulting allies—and then the pressure on those allies to rubber-stamp the change in policies in the nuclear suppliers group. The European Union adopted a common policy during the 1995 NPT review conference, particularly with regard to Article 12, which specifically requires IAEA full-scope inspections as a pre-requisite to nuclear supply. We should reward good nonproliferation behavior; the US-India deal does precisely the opposite.

There is, in principle, an inalienable right to peaceful use, but there is an undeniable tension with proliferation. Avoiding conflict “will require prudent exercise of the inalienable right.” In effect, the NPT discriminates against non-nuclear energy alternatives. We must not exaggerate the benefits of nuclear power or minimize the costs—for many states, it doesn’t make much sense economically to exercise their right to nuclear power, especially when it comes to enrichment (since it is much cheaper for states to purchase enriched uranium than to enrich it themselves.) This does not mean an erosion of the Article 4 right to peaceful use, but a recognition that that enshrined right too often obscures real assessment of the relative value of nuclear options.

Duarte was unfazed by the criticism that, on proliferation issues, developing countries at the UN acted like ostriches, reluctant to acknowledge a problem and take enforcement measures to rein it in. He cautioned against expecting too much of sanctions as an instrument for resolving such standoffs. And he warned against ad hoc self-appointed posses of states "vigilant" to disrupt suspected proliferation, since they risk becoming "vigilantes." He expressed impatience with critics who suggest that, as an oil-rich country, Iran should not have a nuclear power program. “It is not,” he said, “for some countries to decide what does not make economic sense for other countries. It is the duty of each country to provide its people with a dependable source of energy.”

Ad hoc coalitions have a touch of vigilantism. The only way to remain vigilant without becoming vigilantes is to operate under the rule of law.

Zlauvinen noted that Iran has a confidence deficit. “They have a history of not reporting all the details, which is why we’re pushing for additional protocols to minimize the gap of confidence.”

In discussion, **James Arrowsmith** (USA) expressed dismay at the seeming rush to embrace nuclear energy as a "solution" to energy insufficiency when the risks of crossover remained high. **Steven Schwartz** (USA) raised the idea of a nuclear fuel bank, as did **Samgun Lee** (Korea), who also noted that nuclear power is essential for a country like Korea that must import "99 percent" of its energy. **Hans Blix** (Sweden) observed that, for all the worry about a peaceful nuclear program going military, the historical experience with weapons proliferators is that they embark on a nuclear program for

weapons first, and only as an after thought create civilian uses -- Israel's nuclear program even today is still only for weapons, and not power; the Iranian and North Korean cases are a new phenomenon. "Iran is a different case, and that seems to be the concern today. But the notion that [civilian] nuclear *power* leads to *weapons* is not borne out by history."

On the nuclear fuel bank **Duarte** responded, "It is a very good idea--provided it works. For it to work, it must be able to prevent undue pressure or influence upon whichever authority controls the fuel bank." We have a resolution mechanism at the World Trade Organization (WTO), and something similar could work. If you can make assurance, then it's a good idea. On which comes first, the peaceful or the military nuclear program, **Potter** disagreed with Blix, arguing that almost without exception, every country that has pursued peaceful program also seriously contemplated a nuclear weapon program.

Session 3: Sustainability of nonproliferation in a two-tiered world

Janne Nolan, Professor at Georgetown University, presided, asking "How sustainable is nonproliferation in a two-tiered world?"

Hans Blix, former IAEA director-general, chair of the UNMOVIC weapons inspectors in Iraq, and chair of the Stockholm-headquartered WMD Commission, answered that stopping the *spread* of nuclear weapons without touching the existing arsenals of states that already have them is not stable or sustainable. Nuclear states would never have gotten the others to agree to the NPT in 1968 without the disarmament commitment. Nor would the treaty have been extended in 1995 had the goal not been a nuclear weapon free world. "The failure to move forward amounts to a breach of faith on their part—they have abandoned the effort to move to a nuclear weapon free world through multilateral and bilateral measures."

We know the steps, Blix argued, which have been laid out in numerous reports, including recently by the WMD commission.

Jayantha Dhanapala asserted, "We live in a two-tier world: upstairs and downstairs. I live downstairs." We can only overcome these two tiers by having a meaningful set of norms. Treaties perform critical function.

The NPT must be adhered to in its entirety, not piecemeal.

He added that we need to have a reinforcement of the central bargain of the NPT. We need to make sure that these norms are being maintained or we risk further proliferation. The U.S.-India deal contributes to erosion of these norms

Regarding an international fuel bank, **Blix** noted that an IAEA panel addressed the issue but did not come up with a solution. Certain questions

The IAEA cannot guarantee there are no hidden nuclear installations in Iran. But we can't guarantee that there are not in Algeria, or South Korea either.

remain unresolved: Who puts the fuel in? Who decides who can buy for a particular purpose?

Henry Sokolski, Executive Director, Nonproliferation Policy Education Center, opened by arguing that there may in fact be desirable inequalities as well as undesirable inequalities. Pressing for disarmament could have negative repercussions. “Pushing hard on this is a mistake,” since if the U.S. gave up its arsenal, it would need to reassure its allies, such as Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, or they would pursue nuclear arsenals of their own.

Sokolski argued that, paradoxically, increasing the inequality of the United States military power *vis a vis* other countries could provide the security that these allies need, even in the absence of nuclear arsenals.

Moreover, not all states should be equal in the access to nuclear enrichment facilities. “We should not be required to spread unnecessary nuclear technologies. We need to make sure that all the costs are internalized, including security, subsidized, IAEA safeguards, real costs of decommissioning, etc.” When one factors these in, the true costs of nuclear power should be clear – and nuclear power should receive no more subsidies than other forms of energy.

It may actually be necessary to promote certain desirable inequalities.

Nolan asked whether now might be a more propitious time to move toward marginalizing nuclear weapons? Is it possible now to wage a campaign of systematic devaluation of their utility -- perhaps by explaining operation hazards and restraints? For example, the U.S. Army has an “absolute loathing” of integrating nuclear weapons into its forces. At what point do we need to take into account the disparity of US conventional forces in the context of other countries seeking whatever they can to counteract this disproportionate power?

Sokolski answered, regarding the appeal of nuclear weapons, that we’ve turned a corner where “even the people promoting the development of new nuclear weapons are fairly apologetic.” They claim that these new weapons will allow us to downsize the nuclear base, to eliminate testing. This defensiveness is not just a crafty stratagem to appeal to the public; they also understand that these weapons are not foolproof. Hawks, even more than doves, are saying that deterrence cannot be relied upon.

Blix recalled that, in 1991, IAEA inspectors found that Iraq had been successfully deceiving the IAEA about its nuclear program and secretly enriching uranium. People in the US, especially on the military side, concluded that this was evidence that the safeguards system was not working and not reliable. Since the IAEA as a watchdog didn’t find it, the view became, “let’s

States have gone after nuclear weapons for security reasons—it’s not as if they’ve been tempted like naughty children to cross the border into weaponization.

take care of it ourselves.” Thus began the strategy of counterproliferation, which takes as its basis the notion to do it “one way or another,” and as its model the Israeli strike on the Osiraq reactor. Blix emphasized, however, that in the run-up to the second Iraq war, international inspectors came closer to the truth than military intelligence. We must realize the limitations of the use of the military, he said, which can lead us into tremendous dangers and bloodshed.

Blix cautioned that we can overstate the unraveling of the NPT. There are strains, but on the whole it has been a very successful treaty. We have had failures in Iraq and Libya, but Ukraine, Belarussia, and South Africa have all been walked back, and Iran and North Korea are subject to international observation. In any event, the security environment has changed with the end of the cold war; states are not looking to acquire territory or expand empires. “I don’t quite see the big sources of conflict today. It’s absurd,” he said, to suggest that countries would be going to war over exchange rates or global warming or immigration.

Sokolski commented that “if, as a result of pushing military science, you could reduce the need to rely on nuclear weapons, I would favor it. As Albert Wohlstetter showed, most of the key nuclear reductions were the result of nuclear science.” He was not, however, sanguine about the future of the NPT. “Regarding the NPT, I feel we’re being a little too self congratulatory here--We’re not on a good vector here. The idea that we can keep track of these materials is a fallacy. The head of the IAEA, Mohammad El Baradei, has said we can’t do it. It has to do as much with Article IV as with Article VI.”

Samgun Lee (Korea) asked about the continuing refusal of some nuclear-armed countries to offer “no first use” declarations. **Sokolski** noted that the Russians have embraced no first use, Pakistan has embraced it, and China was considering embracing it. It has to do with intimidation of potential adversaries, he suggested. Does it make sense? “Frankly, it’s one of the things you want to see change.”

If you push too hard on disarmament immediately you risk encouraging allies to proliferate--timing matters.

Session 4: Conclusions

Joseph Cirincione drew together the many strands of the day’s debate, which he described as a balanced discussion between hope and despair. In the end, he said, we should side with the optimists. “It took us sixty years to get here,” he observed, “and I’d say we’re about halfway there.” We’re at a pivot point—the decisions we make over the next few years—especially in Iran and North Korea—are going to make a dramatic difference, and could tip the balance. If we fail, things could tip the other way, and we could head for a new wave of proliferation, a return to the nightmare world of two or three dozen nuclear-armed military establishments that John F. Kennedy feared.

Cirincione noted that the next several years provide opportunities to influence policies of new governments. For example, the next president of the United States is going to have a very different non-proliferation strategy because the current strategy hasn't worked, and there's a broad recognition that this has to change. "There's a rich menu of ideas," he said, and we're counting down to those changes in the United States, Russia, Iran, and elsewhere, as new presidencies, congresses, and parliaments take shape.

Carl Robichaud, 27 February 2007