

**Nuclear Disarmament:
'How to Bridge the Gap Between Nuclear Weapon States and Non-Nuclear Weapon States'
Remarks by Tim Caughley (UNIDIR) at a side-event organised by the Hiroshima Prefecture
on 2 May 2017 in Vienna during the NPT Preparatory Committee Meeting**

In recent years, the debate on nuclear weapons has been dominated by differences over both the pace of disarmament and how to accelerate it. A humanitarian focus on the risks and consequences of a nuclear conflict or an accidental detonation has accentuated the need for taking nuclear disarmament forward. As we know, the means for doing so, however, are highly disputed including amongst the parties to the NPT.

Acutely aware of the humanitarian impacts and risks of nuclear detonations, the Hiroshima Prefecture has been active in canvassing ways to nurture a bridging of the longstanding divide between nuclear weapon-possessing states and non-nuclear weapon states. UNIDIR welcomes the opportunity to work with the Prefecture in this bridge-building role. The first paper of this collaboration between the Hiroshima Prefecture and UNIDIR offers two perspectives aimed at encouraging a greater understanding of points of view that will need to be taken into account if the common goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear armaments is to be achieved.

The first of the two papers was contributed by former Ambassador Paul Meyer of Canada. Ambassador Meyer's paper notes the perilous nature of the current international security context and inherent proliferation risks in Asia and Europe. He observes also that the inability to convene the conference on the Middle East WMD-free zone that was promised at the 2010 NPT Review Conference has weakened the authority of the NPT, a key bulwark of non-proliferation. Avoiding a reversion to a second cold war or a breakdown in the global non-proliferation regime embodied in that Treaty (or both) will require some dedicated corrective action on the part of nuclear weapon states and non nuclear weapon states alike. This would require:

- a critical assessment of the efficacy of nuclear deterrence;
- a fuller consideration of providing extended deterrence without reliance on *nuclear* weapons; and
- a determined politico-diplomatic strategy to reinvigorate the global machinery for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

His paper considers each of those elements in turn.

Meyer observes that nuclear weapons have been described as 'the great equalizer' in contemporary security affairs—that they can be seen as providing a comparatively small state (e.g., North Korea) with a defence against a militarily superior adversary by threatening a devastating blow that would outweigh the benefits that such an adversary could hope to achieve. He notes, however, some limits to the deterrence doctrine and suggests that the assumption that the mere possession of nuclear weapons provides an effective deterrent for the possessing state is not borne out historically.

Meyer writes that proponents of the abolition of nuclear weapons need to consider alternatives to *nuclear* deterrence in a world still marked by armed conflicts. He notes that the specific military objectives traditionally assigned to nuclear forces are increasingly vulnerable to a new generation of conventional weaponry. Indisputably the road to a world without nuclear weapons will be a long and winding one. It will require the vision to identify a way forward despite the current strategic environment.

Meyer concludes that in the near term the restoration of basic solidarity within the NPT community is a pre-condition for advancing both the goal of transcending reliance on nuclear deterrence and progressing towards a world without nuclear weapons and towards also the non-proliferation imperative that the five nuclear weapon states and their allies prioritise.

The second paper was contributed by Professor Nick Ritchie of the University of York. His paper weighs questions about the effectiveness of a treaty prohibiting the possession and use of nuclear weapons (i.e., a 'ban treaty'). Noting that most of the nuclear-armed nations are currently opposed to such a treaty, along with most of the United States' nuclear allies, he observes that, ultimately, nuclear disarmament can occur only when the nuclear-possessors have dismantled and disposed of their nuclear weapons in a voluntary process. Nevertheless, actions take place not in a vacuum but in particular political and historical contexts and the chief purpose of the humanitarian initiative and a ban treaty, he sees, as being to change the global political context of nuclear weapons. By 'political context' Ritchie is referring to the prevailing set of norms, rules, practices and discourses that shape how we think about and act in relation to nuclear weapons.

Ritchie views the primary changes sought by advocates of a ban treaty as being twofold: (i) the 'delegitimation' and stigmatisation of nuclear weapons based on the risks of nuclear use and the unacceptable humanitarian effects of nuclear violence; and (ii) a shifting of the centre of power in nuclear disarmament diplomacy away from the agency of nuclear-armed states and their relationships with each other and towards the collective agency of non-nuclear-weapon states that foreswore the possession of nuclear arms under the NPT. This shift he attributes to frustration with the slow pace of nuclear disarmament.

In Ritchie's view, the effect of a stigmatising move by a majority of states would neither be immediate nor direct. A direct effect would require the participation of one or more nuclear-armed states in the negotiation process leading to a strategic decision to disarm and begin a process of dismantling nuclear weapons and production complexes—not something that is currently in prospect. The effect of a ban treaty would therefore be indirect through changing the global context of nuclear weapons by establishing and legitimising a new political reality, and through challenging established ways of thinking about nuclear weapons and security and the relationships and practices that sustain them. He sees the intention of proponents of a ban treaty as being to increase the costs of trying to legitimise nuclear weapons in global politics in order to induce change in the policies and practices of the nuclear-armed. A ban's impact would be felt as part of a broader set of 'effective measures' to develop a universal prohibition regime that will have to include robust verification of demilitarised nuclear programmes.

In summary, these papers serve the intended purpose of an initial summarising of perspectives that will need to be understood and recognised in any dialogue to bridge the gap between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. The papers both recognise that there are other, competing viewpoints to accommodate. Understanding all positions is essential to accommodating them. Exchanging views on ways and means of reconciling various perspectives on nuclear disarmament will form the basis of further collaboration by UNIDIR and the Hiroshima Prefecture towards bridge building. It is our hope that in the meantime there will develop an increased realisation on all sides that talking to each other needs to replace talking at—or past—each other, that is, understanding the differences first, reconciling them where possible, and concentrating on identifying and building on common ground.