

OPINION

Sleepwalking Towards a Nuclear Catastrophe

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It takes technical prowess as well as political rhetoric to move the world away from the nuclear precipice, and both skills were on display last week in Ottawa as diplomats and experts from 25 countries wrestled with how to cut down the existing 27,000 nuclear weapons in the world.

A unique consultation, hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and run by the Middle Powers Initiative, sought to respond to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recent warning that the world is "sleepwalking" towards a possible nuclear catastrophe. The Middle Powers Initiative is a NGO-led movement to push key middle power countries to exert their influence with the nuclear weapons states to fulfill their legal obligations to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons.

MPI is particularly concerned that the next review in 2010 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the central instrument that is supposed to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons, not repeat the failure of the 2005 review.

MPI is dedicated to the worldwide reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons, in a series of well-defined stages accompanied by increasing verification and control. The coalition works primarily with "middle power" governments to encourage and educate the nuclear weapons states to take immediate practical steps that reduce nuclear dangers, and commence negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The Ottawa consultation was the third in a series of invitation-only meetings under the

Article VI Forum, a program of MPI. The purpose of the Article VI Forum—named after the article of the NPT committing states to nuclear disarmament—is to create an informal setting (the deliberations are off the record) where diplomats, experts and NGOs can discuss ways to strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime through the NPT.

In addition to 23 "middle power" governments, two of the nuclear states—the United Kingdom and China—sent experienced diplomats to participate in the technical discussions. The United States, Russia and France were invited, but did not attend.

Some 60 representatives from NGOs attended, as well as officials from the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the support organization for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and members of the International Panel on Fissile Materials, a panel gathering together some of the world's leading nuclear scientists in order to promote the control of the stocks of weapons-grade nuclear materials.

Foreign Minister Peter MacKay delivered a welcoming address, saying: "Canada is committed to a coherent, comprehensive and packaged approach toward the NPT that does not neglect any of the 'three pillars' on which the treaty is based: non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy." He added, "Canada recognizes and supports the valuable role that civil society can play in the NPT review process. Our support for this meeting here in Ottawa today is a tangible sign of that belief." The consultation was held in the Pearson Building.

The UN Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs, Nobuaki Tanaka, delivered the keynote address. "Multilateralism," he

said, "is what is required to consolidate these gains in a coherent global framework that is stable, permanent, and just. It is here that the middle powers have enormously important contributions to make. They enter this process from the moral high ground of those states that chose not to seek weapons of mass destruction—they are practicing what they preach."

A central focus for the consultation was five technical issues which are key to any progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation: the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Fissile Materials Cut Off Treaty, de-alerting and reduction of U.S./Russian nuclear dangers, negative security assurances, and verification.

Short Term Effectiveness

The CTBT—a treaty that exists but has not yet entered into force—and the FMCT—a proposed treaty for which negotiations have not yet begun—were seen as the two avenues for effective work on disarmament in the short term. The CTBT was signed in 1996, but is not yet in force because 10 of the 44 countries needed for entry into force—including the United States and China—have not ratified the treaty. This treaty is considered key to disarmament and non-proliferation efforts since by halting testing, nuclear weapons states cannot reliably develop new weapons and states aspiring to nuclear status cannot test to ensure their weapons will work. Depending on its scope, an FMCT would halt the production of new fissile materials, require the inventory of all stock and the elimination of excess materials not needed for functioning nuclear weapons.

Verification is a cross-discipline issue dealing with the various ways to ensure that arms control agreements—bilateral and multilater-

al—are adhered to. The irony is that as the science of verification (satellite inspections; detection systems for air, soil and water; tamper-proof seals) improves, the political commitment to verification is weakening. This is particularly true of the United States, which has over the last six years rejected any verification mechanisms for either existing or planned treaties, saying that verification is too unreliable. The scientific community and the vast majority of states reject this position.

Negative security assurances—guarantees by nuclear powers not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states—are a long-standing demand of non-nuclear weapons states parties to the NPT. Their argument is simply that since they have renounced the use of nuclear weapons, the five nuclear states party to the NPT should give them unequivocal legally-binding guarantees that they would not be targets of nuclear weapons.

Unlike the other four issues, which require multilateral cooperation, de-alerting is essentially a bilateral issue between the United States and Russia. The strategic postures of the two largest nuclear states still—15 years after the end of the Cold War—have approximately 3,000 nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert aimed at each other. The goal of middle powers is to encourage the two to remove these weapons from alert to avoid accidents.

All this was what is sometimes called "Track Two" diplomacy, i.e., quiet sessions out of the headlines. Whatever its results, it is a lot better than future headlines of nuclear catastrophe.

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Give Iran Incentives to Stop Enrichment: Blix

By Lee Berthiaume

Former UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix believes countries like Canada must band together to break the complacency that has taken hold over the world on nuclear weapons disarmament, or more countries can be expected to join the exclusive group in their bids to attain a level playing field.

"We need a revival of disarmament," Mr. Blix said in an interview with *Embassy* last week. "People don't seem to be worried about it, it's global warming they're worried about and not nuclear mutual destruction any longer."

"Canada cannot be expected to act alone," he added. "I think that Canada can work together with a number of other countries that are eager to revive disarmament and get somewhere and tell the nuclear states it's time they shaped up and delivered."

Mr. Blix was in charge of inspections for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in Iraq prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, and has been highly critical of the American and British administrations that launched the war, despite his correct assessment that there were no such weapons in the country.

Over the past year, the world has been increasingly caught up in the West's struggle to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions, as well as attempts to pacify nuclear-armed North Korea.

At the same time, the United States is looking to ratify an agreement with India that would essentially see America give its blessing to the Asian country's nuclear program, an act that that many believe has significantly weakened the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. Blix, who was in Ottawa for a lecture at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, says if trends continue, the U.S., India and North Korea could see the nuclear power group—which also counts France, Russia, China, Pakistan and Israel as members—only grow.

"I think there may be a justified fear that if the nuclear weapon states do not move in the direc-

tion of disarmament, there is a risk that there will be an erosion of support for the NPT by the others," he says.

"Right now there's a feeling everyone is trying to test, but it's not true," Mr. Blix adds. "However, it could happen. There's a domino effect. If the North Koreans move on and continue testing missiles and weapons, I'm sure it would have an impact on thinking in Japan. And no area is more riskier than that. And if the Iranians were to move on, I don't think that Turkey or Saudi Arabia...over time there is a risk that they see a nuclear program as a modern part of [progress]."

Europeans On Track With Iran

In addition, Mr. Blix says it's hard to tell other countries not to develop such weapons without leading by example.

"It's like someone sitting with a fat cigar in his mouth and telling the others they should not smoke," he says. "It's not a terribly convincing pose."

While some have questioned whether Iran is actually working on a nuclear weapons program, and how close the country is to obtaining those weapons, Mr. Blix says it's essential the West continue working to get the Iranians to suspend their uranium enrichment program.

However, he says the way the U.S., which is leading the charge, has gone about the negotiations is wrong and should instead mimic the offers made to North Korea with more "carrots" for Iran.

"I think the Europeans have been on the right track," he says of offers to supply uranium for civilian purposes and endorsing Iran's bid for nuclear power generation, "which I think is important to show that they are not out to retard developing countries."

In addition, the North Koreans have been offered diplomatic relations with Japan and the U.S. as well as assurances that it will not be attacked from abroad or subverted from the inside.



PHOTOGRAPH BY SAM GARCIA, EMBASSY

"If the North Koreans move on and continue testing missiles and weapons, I'm sure it would have an impact on thinking in Japan," says former UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix, who was in Ottawa last week to speak at Foreign Affairs headquarters.

"Although the Iranians are not worried about Iraq today, they may well be worried about the United States," Mr. Blix says. "Hence an offering of assurances against attacks from the outside, provided they suspend their enrichment program, would be an interesting element in which they should probe and try in talks."

Finally, by insisting that the Iranians abandon their enrichment efforts prior to the com-

mencement of negotiations, Mr. Blix says the Western countries have "painted themselves into a corner."

"The enrichment of the program is the chief objective of the negotiations and the other elements are given in return for it," he says. "How can you expect the party to, in advance, give away their card?"

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