

## THE ICNND REPORT AND THE ROAD TO ZERO

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The fundamental premise of our Report is that nuclear weapons are a fundamental threat to human security which must be removed, and which, moreover, *can* be removed. However, equally fundamental was the reluctant acceptance by the Commission that reaching zero would realistically but unavoidably be a long, complex road with many obstacles.

One of the principal ways of laying a groundwork for reaching zero, in the view of the Commission, is to devalue the concept of nuclear deterrence. One of our key recommendations sounds deceptively simple, but in practice will probably prove difficult to bring about. It's also a little paradoxical, since it reaffirms the principle of deterrence, but it would have each nuclear-armed state make a declaration that the ***sole purpose*** for nuclear weapons, so long as they exist, should be to deter the use of such weapons by others against that state or its allies. This would help put at rest the perception—so damaging to the cause of non-proliferation—that the nuclear-armed states regard nuclear weapons as an indispensable, legitimate and open-ended guarantor of their own and their allies' security, which they are born to have but others have no right to acquire.

There is the risk that some countries which are allied, say, to the United States would see this as amounting to a withdrawal of the US nuclear umbrella, and the danger is that they could elect to develop a nuclear deterrent themselves. However, 'extended deterrence' does not have to mean 'extended nuclear deterrence', particularly in the case of the United States, given its overwhelming conventional capability.

The next step after the sole purpose declaration would be to encourage the nuclear-armed states to give ***unconditional negative security assurances*** to all non-nuclear weapons states—that they would not use their nuclear weapons against any of those states under any circumstances whatsoever. Many of the nuclear armed states have already given such assurances but they are all conditional in one way or another. *Unconditional* security

assurances would certainly help reduce the desire of new states to acquire nuclear weapons.

The nuclear-armed states would also need to give special security assurances to each other. This would most usefully take the form of a **'no first use' commitment**—that they would not be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other, or for that matter, against any other state.—In effect, a 'no first use' commitment would become a universal *positive* security assurance, thus replacing extended nuclear deterrence which is essentially alliance-based. This in turn could reduce general threat perceptions around the world, and correspondingly reduce any desire by new states to acquire nuclear weapons for themselves.

Of course with a 'no first use' undertaking, the nuclear armed states themselves would also have less reason to fear a nuclear attack, and thus have much less need to maintain their nuclear forces on high or 'hair trigger' alert as many still do to this day, despite the end of the Cold War. As a corollary, many nuclear weapons could be taken out of operational deployment, and even have their nuclear cores separated from their warheads and put into storage. Potentially, it could also see the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons which are designed primarily for first use. Gradually, and hopefully, the importance placed on nuclear weapons would thus be lessened in national security strategies.

A 'no first use' commitment could be made unilaterally; or by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. A better way would be for it to be made in treaty format as this would give both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states greater confidence, and give the commitment a multilateral normative status in international law. And in fact I prepared for the Commission the draft text of a 'no first use' treaty which can be found on the Commission website. That paper contains much greater detail and commentary than I have the time to present here.

There's one very real, practical obstacle to achieving a universal 'no first use' commitment, and that relates to how to bring in North Korea and Pakistan. However, we hope that an international consensus on 'no first use' by the other nuclear armed states would put pressure on Pakistan and North Korea as the only holdouts. Secondly, military leaders in Islamabad and Pyongyang will be very well aware that a weaker military power can never come out better after the first use of nuclear weapons against another—and better

armed—nuclear state. Thirdly, if the ‘no first use’ commitment were, as suggested earlier, accompanied by comprehensive and unconditional security assurances, as well as by conventional arms control measures, it should hopefully reduce, if not fully eliminate, the threat perceptions of those two states. This would be even more the case if there were to be a treaty that outlawed the use of nuclear weapons altogether.

That brings me to my final point. If a ‘no first use’ commitment is ever made, then after a time, if the commitment is not broken by any of the nuclear-armed states and confidence amongst them consequently grows, it would be time to move to the more ambitious step of a treaty on the non-use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. I also prepared a draft treaty and commentary on this subject for the Commission. Suffice it to say that such a treaty would in effect mark the death knell of the concept of nuclear deterrence. The nuclear-armed states could still retain their nuclear arsenals, but there would be little point in doing so if they had legally bound themselves never to use them. And no country currently without such weapons would any longer want to acquire them since they would no longer be able to be used as a weapon, or as a deterrent either.

Sitting here in the world of 2010, the idea of such a treaty sounds more than a little idealistic and fanciful. But in a very real way, we’re hamstrung in predicting what might happen two, three or four decades from now, by the high levels of distrust which currently characterise international relations, and particularly in the nuclear sphere. It was, in fact, for this very reason that the Commission was unwilling to be specific about an exact timeline for achieving zero nuclear weapons. But hopefully, with steps such as sole purpose declarations, negative security assurances and ‘no first use’—plus any advances in international efforts to curb terrorism and otherwise address causes of inequity in the world—the geopolitical outlook will have changed dramatically enough for the nuclear-armed states to realise that it is indeed possible to achieve a world with zero nuclear weapons.