



"TALKING ABOUT NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT"

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"One hopeful sign is Obama, President Obama: his election does seem to give a ray of hope, for example, one of his scientific advisers, if not the scientific adviser, is John Holdren, who has for many years been arguing for nuclear disarmament: he's a member of Pugwash and all that. So that is a sign of hope, but a very small one.

Strengthening the Non-proliferation Treaty is an essential factor here, if we're going to control nuclear weapon proliferation. The Treaty is very successful in that roughly 190 countries belong to it, so it is a universal treaty. It's very fragile, because important countries, Israel, India, Pakistan, are outside it and they are nuclear weapon powers. So it doesn't encompass all the nuclear weapon powers, but nevertheless it is pretty universal.

The weakness of it, and it is a major weakness, is that Article IV of the Treaty encourages non-nuclear weapon powers to go into nuclear technology. It gives them the "inalienable right" to develop peaceful nuclear technology, and more than that, the nuclear weapon powers have to provide them with assistance in this technology. That's part of the Treaty. But that's the very technology that you need for military weapons, for nuclear weapons, and so you have this absurdity of the Non-proliferation Treaty encouraging the very technology, which can produce the weapons the treaty wants to stop. Now that was an essential bargain. They had to do that to encourage people who didn't have nuclear weapons to join the Treaty. They had to give them a reward, and the reward was assistance in civil nuclear power.

The nuclear weapon states' part of the bargain was to agree to get rid of their nuclear weapons: they had to move towards nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the Treaty, and of course the nuclear weapon states have not fulfilled their obligations. So they haven't lived up to their side of the bargain. And at the Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference next year, this will obviously be a major issue. I think that the Treaty is very fragile, and I don't think that it will become much less fragile, and therefore will not succeed in preventing nuclear weapon proliferation.

What would be necessary to make progress to strengthen the NPT would be a willingness of the political leaders in the nuclear weapon powers, particularly Britain, France, China, the USA and Russia, the willingness of those political leaders to overcome the opposition of the military-industrial complex, and to say that we are going to get rid of our nuclear weapons to move to abolition. But they can't really do that, because this military-industrial complex is so strong.

And of course, there's no real public pressure at the moment to go towards nuclear disarmament. I mean, if you ask people in Britain, for example, should we have Trident, our nuclear weapons? Then the majority of British people will say yes we should have them.

And of course, one has to remember countries like Israel: I mean, Israel has more nuclear weapons than Britain. Israel has about two hundred we believe, and Britain has less than two hundred. So, what you're saying is, would the British population agree to be a less powerful nation than Israel, because people do link nuclear weapons with national power. I think the majority of people would not want that. They would not want to feel inferior in terms of national power to, say, Israel.

So it's these obstacles. Can they be overcome? I think it will require a catastrophe. On the other hand, we're moving towards a time when these catastrophes will happen, and you know, we will have so many nuclear weapon powers, there's bound to be nuclear terrorism, there's bound to be some nuclear disaster. There will be nuclear wars or nuclear terrorist events, and that possibly could change people's view. But on the other hand, by that time we will be so dependent on nuclear power for electricity, it's going to be very difficult to see the lights go out in order to get nuclear disarmament. So I think one has to be very pessimistic about this. I don't know what the answer is personally. I really don't."

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