

**THE CHOICE:
RADICAL NUCLEAR MULTIPOLARITY OR GLOBAL INSTITUTION-BUILDING?**

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The general theme of this International Symposium is 'New Dimensions Of Security and International Organizations', and the specific challenge facing the panel in which this paper is located is to look out over the next few decades. The subject of my paper – nuclear proliferation – is actually the threat of an *old* dimension of insecurity, but potentially emerging over the next thirty years in a new and very dangerous form. The most hopeful way of dealing with it is through global institution-building, the

¹ This paper was submitted to SAREM (The Directorate of the Strategic Research and Study Center of the Turkish General Staff) who organised their Fourth International Symposium (entitled 'New Dimensions of Security and International Organisations') in Istanbul, between 31 May and 1 June 2007. The symposium proceedings were subsequently published in Ankara by the Turkish General Staff Printing House under the title *New Dimensions of Security and International Organizations* (2007). This paper is based on preliminary research done for a book, provisionally entitled *Nuclear Weapons and Future Uncertainty*. As ever, I want to acknowledge the help given to my thinking about these matters by Michael MccGwire and Nicholas J. Wheeler. The responsibility for what follows is my own, but my debt to them for helping to clarify my thoughts continues to expand.

revival of international organization.² With this context in mind the central question of this paper is as follows: how can we – human society globally, but also in specific regions – try to cope with the uncertainty arising as a result of spreading nuclear knowledge? My basic argument can be expressed simply and briefly: it is that there is no escape in international politics from uncertainty, but that some forms of it are preferable to others. In this case, the uncertainty attendant upon global institution-building is to be preferred to that which will arise as a result of radical nuclear multipolarity.³

Today, human society, globally, stands at a historic junction in relation to the future of nuclear weapons. There are two roads ahead. This is the choice:

- Take one road, that of global business-as-usual, and the risks we face are those of trying to exist in an unregulated nuclear world, with a growing number of nuclear weapons states. This is what I call 'radical nuclear multipolarity' – not a few more nuclear weapons states on top of today's nine, but potentially up to five times that number.
- Take the other road, that committed to saving the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a key step in building a new, more inclusive, and more just network of global institutions, and the opportunities may open up for constructing a more cooperative and security society of states. Ultimately, it is politics and institutions, not deterrence, that offer some hope of making war 'unthinkable', and of attaining a reasonable and predictable degree of security in a world of inescapable uncertainty.

Both roads lead us to the brink of a new nuclear age – of the latter there is no choice; the only choice concerns the character of that new age. The decades ahead offer either the prospect of a largely unregulated nuclear weapons world (radical multipolarity), or a world in which the NPT norms are seriously embraced by all,

² For a brief but sophisticated discussion of the general decline of international organizations – the UN, EU, WTO, WORLD BANK, and NATO – as well as the NPT, see John G. Ikenberry, 'A Weaker World', *Prospect*, No.116, November 2005, pp.30-3.

³ Living in the 'house of uncertainty' is explored from many different perspectives in Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming – end of 2007).

including, importantly, the implementation by the existing nuclear weapons states of their stated commitments to nuclear abolition. Today, I fear that the signs are such that it is the uncertainties of the first road that will be taken, that of business-as-usual, and so I share the view of Kofi Annan, as he left office as UN Secretary-General, that we are 'sleepwalking' into disaster.

I will begin, therefore, by giving an outline of the dynamics pointing towards the more dangerous path. There are two main reasons why global business-as-usual is pointing us in this direction. The first is the serious erosion of the NPT regime, and second is the development of new civilian nuclear technology.

The 1968 NPT became the core of the most successful international security regime ever. It is now the heart of a network of agreements, including other arms control measures, export controls, international safeguards, and standard-setting agreements.⁴ In the early 1960s, President Kennedy had warned that there might be over 20 nuclear weapons states within ten years unless decisive international action was taken. This was a widespread view at the time; the fear of uncontrolled nuclear weapons proliferation led to an upsurge of concern and ideas to curb the problem.⁵ One outcome of these fears was the signature of the NPT, and one token of its success is the fact that after nearly 40 years we are still some way from the 'nuclear club' being as large as President Kennedy had warned. That said, the regime in the last few years has been facing more problems than ever before. Its legitimacy has

⁴ In particular, the International Atomic Energy Agency (1956), the Nuclear Suppliers Group (1974), the Missile Technology Control Regime (1987), the Cooperative Threat Reduction programme (1991), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (1996), the Chemical Weapons Convention (1997), Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (2002), UN Resolution 1540 (2004). The status of these agreements (signatures/ratifications/progress) is uneven: see note 20 below

⁵ For a flavour of the thinking at the time, see: Leonard Beaton, *Must the Bomb Spread?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966) and Alistair Buchan, *A World of Nuclear Powers?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), and George H. Quester, *The Politics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973).

been eroding, and with it the reassurance that it has given its members about the nuclear ambitions of their neighbours and potential competitors. The 2005 NPT Review Conference was universally regarded as a major failure, and it is seen as the key sign of the decline of this hitherto uniquely successful security regime.⁶

Converging with the unravelling of this major constraint on additional states acquiring nuclear weapons has been the so-called 'civil nuclear renaissance'.⁷ We are living in a period in which many governments are looking positively towards nuclear power to generate electricity, as traditional energy stocks run down and as environmental concerns grow. Nuclear energy is being seen as the answer to both these truly historic problems. One figure that is commonly cited is of 70 new nuclear plants being started within the next few years. Inevitably in such circumstances – against the background of the increased suspicions that will accompany the eroding reassurances of the NPT regime – the shift to nuclear power in particular cases will increase the uncertainties about the motives of particular governments: is their investment in nuclear energy really for civilian purposes, or are they hedging against the failure of the regime, or are they actually beginning a weapons programme?

⁶ Among the many disappointed surveys of the 2005 Review Conference in New York, see Burkard Schmitt, 'NPT Breakdown', *EU Institute for Security Studies Newsletter*, No.15, July 2005. Part of Schmitt's summary deserves quoting at length, for it excellently portrays both the failure and the mood: 'instead of using their four weeks to tackle these challenges and debate practical steps for implementing the Treaty's commitments, delegations spent 15 out of 20 conference days on purely procedural battles. During the little time that was left for discussing substance, a few important states obstructed all initiatives which they found incompatible with their national priorities: the US blocked any reference to the disarmament commitments made by the nuclear powers at the 1995 and 2000 NPT conferences; Iran blocked proposals to limit access to the nuclear fuel cycle by non-nuclear states; Egypt blocked a resolution on the universalisation of the NPT because of Western tolerance vis-à-vis Israel's nuclear activities. At the end, an unholy alliance of states with diametrically opposed interests made any trade-off between non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful use impossible. As a result, none of the pressing issues was tackled, and the conference became, as one observer put it, 'one of the most shameful exhibitions of cynical time-wasting outside the Geneva Conference on Disarmament'.

⁷ My thinking about this has been much influenced by Frank Barnaby, and in particular the work he has done for the Oxford Research Group, which in the UK context has for nearly a quarter of a century been the focus for progressive ideas, knowledge, and dialogue on these matters. The ORG's website is <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk> See also Frank Barnaby, *How To Build A Nuclear Bomb* (London: Granta Books, 2003).

Even if the motives of all the governments building new plants are innocent in relation to weapons production, the fact is that the greater the civilian investment in nuclear energy production, the greater will be the potential for some of the material to find its way into the hands of terrorists. Simply, the more material relevant to nuclear weapons production is produced and moved around the world, the more difficult it will be to control it.⁸

Together, the threatened collapse of the regime and the civilian nuclear renaissance point down the road of nuclear business-as-usual, with states giving absolute priority to narrow conceptions of their national security interest (whose mantra is that nuclear weapons not only represent the ultimate guarantors of national sovereignty, but that they also bring their possessors enhanced international status). A radical breakout from the situation we have become used to over the past 40 years (in which proliferation has been slow, and mostly among non-signatories of the NPT, while about 13 states have abandoned nuclear weapons policies for one reason or another) would change the whole face of international politics.⁹ It would truly be a new nuclear age – but so would be its alternative, built around an attempt to revive the NPT as the centrepiece of nuclear governance, itself a key dimension in an attempt to construct a new era of global institutions to deal with the new era of global challenges. This alternative road points immediately to the need for urgent actions to save the non-proliferation regime - actions that are so radically different to those with which we have become accustomed, especially on the part of the nuclear weapons

⁸ For a brief introduction, see Frank Barnaby, 'Terrorism with weapons of mass destruction' in his *How To Build A Nuclear Bomb*, pp.107-20.

⁹ Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Egypt, Japan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, Romania, Ukraine. The reasons for these decisions, of course, varies considerably. For a brief but thought-provoking discussion see Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare. The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), especially 'The Good News about Proliferation' in his pp.125-38.

states themselves. One way or another, therefore, human society globally is on the brink of a new nuclear age.

The road to a more controlled nuclear future promises fewer rather than more nuclear weapons states, and ultimately none at all (the agreed goal of the NPT). The decisions that have to be taken can be easily identified, though persuading states to take them is a very different matter. Above all, the non-proliferation regime can only survive over the long term if the existing nuclear weapons states shift their positions on the key Article VI of the NPT, and put into practice their commitment to 'pursue in good faith effective measures' to promote nuclear disarmament, and ultimately general disarmament. If such decisions are taken, and if the road of global institution-building is taken, then we will see a revival of reassurance, negotiation, transparency, and cooperation. Hope would be revived that the 'grand bargain' of the original NPT would be respected and lead to far-reaching benefits in terms of international security – and all the local regional spin-offs from that. The ideal of common security would become progressively globalised.¹⁰

It should be clear from what has already been argued that those states Hedley Bull called the 'Great Responsibilities' would need to be at the heart of successful global institution-building. This second road envisages a major shift on the part of the existing nuclear club with regard to their commitment to nuclear abolition. This is a shift so large that many believe it is impossible, though it is important to note that over the years some very significant figures in US life – figures not normally stereotyped as 'nuclear disarmers' – have come out in favour of global

¹⁰ On common security, bringing together academic research with the insight of a former diplomat, see Geoffrey Wiseman, *Concepts of Non-Provocative Defence: Ideas and Practices in International Security* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and *Common Security and Non-Provocative Defence: Alternative Approaches to the Security Dilemma* (Canberra: Peace Research School of Pacific, Australian National University, 1989).

nuclear disarmament.¹¹ Progress along the second road means that the nuclear weapons states would have to pursue Article VI seriously and work constructively to save the NPT. They would need to reassess their 'modernisation' plans with regard to nuclear weapons (eschewing qualitative as well as quantitative improvements in their inventories) and stop seeing nuclear weapons – and advertising the fact – as the 'ultimate guarantors' of national security. Instead, the bias of their national security policies would be towards building a world politics in which nuclear weapons are progressively marginalised, legally, politically, and strategically.¹²

If the road of institution-building is not taken, the outcome will be scenarios in which international politics are characterised by a growing club of nuclear powers. Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) – and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2005 – gave his considered and expert opinion at the end of 2006 that about 36 states presently possess the capacity to develop nuclear weapons. If we add the nine existing nuclear weapons states, then the nightmare scenario, over time, is of an international system of nearly 50 nuclear weapons states – about one-quarter of the whole United Nations. This, potentially, is what radical nuclear multipolarity could look like, and as stated earlier, of the two roads leading to our new nuclear future, the likeliest option points to a

¹¹ Note, for example, the article in the Wall Street Journal, 4 January 2007, p.A.15 by George P. Shultz (former US Secretary of State, 1982-89), William J. Perry (former Secretary of Defense, 1994-97), Henry A. Kissinger (former US Secretary of State, 1973-77) and Sam Nunn (former Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee). It ends: 'We endorse setting the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and working energetically on the actions required to achieve that goal, beginning with the measures [we] outlined above.' The latter, above all, called on the US government to live up to the commitments of successive presidents to adhere to the principles of the NPT, and especially that of 'divesting themselves of these weapons over time'. In addition to the main signatories, a list of 18 other senior figures in US public life or academe endorsed the views in the statement.

¹² See, for example, the work over many years of Jonathan Schell in this regard: *The Fate of the Earth* (London: Picador, 1982), *The Abolition* (London: Picador, 1984), and *The Unfinished Twentieth Century: the Crisis of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (London: Verso, 2001). See also, Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Beyond Nuclearism' in Regina Cowen Karp (ed.), *Security Without Nuclear Weapons? Different Perspectives on Non-Nuclear Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp.21-55.

continuation of business-as-usual, which means the collapse of the non-proliferation regime and the inexorable rise in the number of nuclear powers: the question then becomes 'how radical is radical?' Such negative expectations are fuelled by the fact that the existing nuclear weapons states for some time, by their words and especially by their actions, have seemed to be hedging against the failure of the regime rather than working constructively to save it. This bias was evident in the decision of the British government to renew its Trident system, well in advance of the time necessary. Unless – under the press of some as yet unforeseen circumstances, or a surprising change of position on the part of the British political elite – this means that the United Kingdom will remain a member of the nuclear weapons club until the middle of this century. And if this is the case with Britain, it is unlikely that any of the other existing nuclear powers will think differently – while the copy-cat acquisition of 'minimum deterrents' will take place (and be used as legitimisation) by states facing more immediate security threats. The pro-nuclear weapons decision of the Blair government in 2006, backed enthusiastically by its loyal Opposition, Cameron's Conservatives, was a clear sign of the times in relation to the thinking of the nuclear weapons states. The prevailing mood on the part of the major nuclear powers is 'steady as we go' in uncertain times, and modernisation not abolition.¹³

Only a hopeless optimist could regard a multipolar nuclear world with confidence. International politics in the context of 20/30/40 or more nuclear weapons states would be extremely risky, and in such a setting the consequences of bad

¹³ For a set of arguments on both sides about the most suitable policy for the UK, see Ken Booth and Frank Barnaby (eds.) *The Future of Britain's Nuclear Weapons: Experts Reframe the Debate* (Oxford: Oxford Research Group, *Current Decisions Report*, March 2006). The government's case was tabled in *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent: Defence White Paper 2006* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, December 2006). Amongst the more powerful and sophisticated critiques, bringing together both the parliamentary politics and the wider strategic context, is John Gittings, 'After Trident: Proliferation or Peace?', *International Relations*, Vol. 21(4), December 2007 (forthcoming). An earlier and lengthier critique of the British government's developing position was Rebecca Johnson, Nicola Butler, and Stephen Pullinger, *Worse than Irrelevant? British Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century* (London: the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, 2006)

decisions could be catastrophic. Those who might take comfort in the fact that the world survived the Cold War without a nuclear war are mistaken: it was a closer run thing than complacent strategists would accept, with luck playing a rather larger part at times than strategic rationality.¹⁴ The 'lessons' of nuclear deterrence that might be learned from an essentially superpower bipolar world would only be minimally relevant in a world of multiple, diverse, and unequal nuclear powers. This difference in the two historical nuclear eras leads me to recall the insightful expression usually attributed to Lenin: 'Quantity has a quality all of its own'.

The uncertainties (the risks and threats) of a world of 20/30/40 nuclear weapons states are entirely predictable:

- the increased danger of conventional wars in regional settings escalating into nuclear wars;
- the growing risk of inadvertent war (a war nobody wants) as a result of stressed leaders making irrational decisions, or caused by bad intelligence – with apparently rational decisions flowing from far-from reliable 'facts';
- the increased risk of accidental wars in the context of a growing number of nuclear weapons states which in some cases will lack the most advanced systems, in the context of multiple potential threateners;¹⁵
- the greater will be the scope for nuclear entrepreneurs to disseminate knowledge on the lines of the A.Q. Khan network;
- the likelihood of security dilemmas spiralling across regions with already existing high levels of suspicion, characterised by the misinterpretation of words and actions that are meant for ostensibly defensive purposes, with the result that all the major states in a region may end up less secure, but primed for nuclear retaliation;¹⁶

¹⁴ Joseph Cirincione, 'Lessons Lost' *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 2005, is recommended, as well as his *Bomb Scare*.

¹⁵ In this regard it is important not to forget the acute dangers of accidental war in the context of the Soviet-US confrontation. In particular, the 'Abel Archer' incident in 1983 deserves careful study, both for the risks and the chastening effect it had on all the main participants: see Booth and Wheeler, *Security Dilemma*, Chapters 3 and 6.

¹⁶ Such a condition, a familiar one in international politics, is conceived and discussed as 'the security paradox' in Booth and Wheeler, *Security Dilemma*, Introduction.

- the growing danger that some states will erode the tradition of nuclear non-use (the so-called 'nuclear taboo') under conditions of clear strategic superiority or acute national emergency; and finally,
- the greater risk, as signposted earlier, that more nuclear weapons and associated material in more hands across the world will increase the chances that some of it will end up in the control of terrorists, who are neither inhibited by taboos about killing civilians in very large numbers, and are not deterrable by normal calculations of strategic rationality.

Despite these warnings, on first sight the risks and threats in international politics in a world of 20/30/40 nuclear weapons states do not seem to match the potential catastrophe of 'nuclear winter' envisaged at the height of the Cold War, resulting from the superpowers releasing 50,000 or so nuclear devices in an Armageddon scenario. Having said that, in some calculations at the time, nuclear winter was seen as a possible outcome even of a nuclear war in which the superpowers employed far fewer than their total inventories.¹⁷ Nonetheless, even if the ultimate nightmare image of nuclear winter can be eschewed in the new nuclear age (a view I will shortly question), the scenarios that can be envisaged under radical nuclear multipolarity - with more players than the Cold War but less overall megatonnage - entail a range of devastating risks for particular regions, states, societies, economies, cultures, cities – and above all for human security.

Starting at the bottom rung of destructiveness, the possible risks that will be increased under radical nuclear multipolarity, are as follows:

¹⁷ The concept of 'nuclear winter' has always been controversial. Nonetheless, it remains an important benchmark against which to think about all nuclear strategy. One important place to begin thinking about nuclear winter is Carl Sagan, 'The Nuclear Winter' (1983), where he explored the 'unforeseen and devastating' effects of even a small-scale nuclear war on the earth's biosphere and life (http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/sagan_nuclearwinter.html). See also, 'Does Anybody Remember the Nuclear Winter?' *SGR Newsletter*, no.27, July 2003 (http://www.sgr.org.uk/climate/NuclearWinter_NL27.htm). The SGR is the organisation of Scientists for Global Responsibility.

- spectacular nuclear terrorism against a city;
- a nuclear weapons state using its nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapons state (perhaps in a 'preventive' mode);
- regional nuclear weapons states becoming engaged in a limited nuclear war (inadvertently or by accident);
- a major nuclear power attacking a new nuclear weapons state (especially a 'rogue'); and
- nuclear war between major nuclear weapons states.

There is one additional scenario we must be consider, for we cannot rule out entirely the possibility of what has been called a 'nuclear Sarajevo'. This would be a chain reaction across the multipolar nuclear world, bringing in more and more states, replaying the unexpected course of events in 1914. This final scenario keeps alive the prospect of a nuclear world war. The latter became forgotten about by states and their publics with the end of the Cold War, but the potentiality for such an outcome did not entirely vanish. It is being reborn, and as a result of what for many years I have called the 'nuclear amnesia' on the part of so many people and institutions – the almost wilful forgetting of the nuclear fears and dangers of the early 1960s and early 1980s in particular. Indeed, it is my fear that the scenario of a nuclear Sarajevo will become more salient as the number of nuclear powers grows, together with their interlocking alliances, special relationships, agreements, and secret nuclear arrangements.

There is another and very particular reason for expressing considerable anxiety about the possibility of 20/30/40 nuclear weapons states by the 2020s/2030s/2040s. This is the result of the growing convergence over time of a number of dangerous trends in world affairs. If they are extrapolated into the coming decades, we will witness a concatenation of interacting dangers the like of which the world has never seen. I call this challenge 'The Great Reckoning', because it

confronts human society globally, as well as the separate parts of it, with unparalleled challenges.¹⁸ Unless over the next ten to fifteen years – by the early 2020s at the earliest – the decay in international institutions has been halted, then the 2030s threaten to be a period of historic crisis in which there will be many nuclear weapons states, growing climate chaos, energy depletion (and competition over resources), food and water security issues, and massive population growth. All this could well be exacerbated by yet further divisions over culture, ideology, and religion, and will certainly be exacerbated by the further gap between haves and have-nots. What this challenge means is the need for the equivalent of a revolution in the global diplomatic and civic culture, so that governments and peoples collectively work more effectively to solve common problems. The converging challenges of the Great Reckoning can only be dealt with collectively; the alternative is global chaos.¹⁹

It is my contention that almost everybody, when they think about the future of world politics, underestimates the extra dimensions of danger that come from the convergence of so many global threats and risks converging at the same time. The strong tendency and habit on the part of politicians, journalists, and academic analysts is to try to understand the dangers separately, to concentrate on those in which they are particularly interested. As a result, the global challenges are compartmentalised. In contrast, I believe the greatest danger facing human society globally in the future is not *this* or *that* risk or threat, but the very synergy between them. This is another variant of the belief that quantity has a quality all of its own. So, in relation to the subject of this paper, the danger over the next 25 years is of possibly 40 nuclear weapons states interacting and competing in a world of multiple global stresses, in which states will be competing for resources and governments will

¹⁸ The challenges, and the areas in which decisions have to be taken, is elaborated in Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming – end of 2007).

¹⁹ This is the theme of Booth, *Theory of World Security*, especially Chapter 10.

be under great strain. It is because of the size and complexity of the Great Reckoning that it is imperative to be aware of the dangers immanent in the present nuclear situation, and nuclear business-as-usual, and attempt urgently to head off the worst dangers while working as constructively as possible along the road that promises a future of greater world security.

Winston Churchill liked to say that humans will always do the right thing in the end, but only after they have tried every other way. To live by such an adage under conditions of radical nuclear multipolarity is almost unthinkable, given the dangers outlined earlier. We have to make progress along the more hopeful road by the use of reason and foresight, not learning by our mistakes. Regions, and the world in general, cannot afford to take a road such as the one that led to the growth of European integration. Today the EU exists, and its workings contribute to the secure situation in which war between members has become 'unthinkable'. But it took two world wars to get there. One hopes that the realisation of the dangers of a world of radical nuclear multipolarity will be a powerful incentive to move forward with reason and foresight, though the past ten years or so, as was argued earlier, do not give us confidence, for the nuclear weapons states have shown considerable complacency. They have been 'sleepwalking'.

In one sense, what needs to be done to prevent human society sleepwalking down the business-as-usual road is the easy part, for there are lots of good ideas out there in global civil society, and even in governments.²⁰ It is only necessary to

²⁰ There are abundant readily available resources for keeping up to date with current developments in nuclear proliferation/non-proliferation, as well as researching past proposals etc. Among relevant civil society websites, the following can be recommended: Acronym Institute (<http://www.acronym.org.uk>), Arms Control Association (<http://armscontrol.org/subject/nup/>) British American Security Information Council (<http://www.basicint.org>), Carnegie Institution (<http://www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/weapons/weapons.asp?ID=3&weapons=nuclear>), Center for Nonproliferation Studies at Monterey (<http://cns.miis.edu/research/nuclear/htm>), David Davies Memorial Institute (http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/research_index.html), International Institute for Strategic Studies (<http://iiss.org>). Mountbatten Centre for International Studies

mention at this point the 'Thirteen Steps' agreed by the participants at the 2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, or Kofi Annan's idea of the parallel pursuit of non-proliferation and disarmament, or the efforts of the states forming the 'New Agenda Coalition'.²¹ Against these many good ideas, the obstacle of course is one of the oldest in international politics, namely that of getting states to back words with appropriate action. Here the British case is again instructive. Tony Blair, in one of the most important areas of decision making in his final months as Prime Minister, talked about the need for the UK to have nuclear weapons for the indefinite future because of the 'certainty of uncertainty'.²² If this is the case for highly secure Britain, then the same logic works for every other state – and for ever, because uncertainty is an existential condition.

Alongside this fatalist logic about world affairs is an unwillingness amongst almost all political leaders – with some notable exceptions – to take the risks to build trust internationally, even when they have a huge margin of safety. I often think of what might have happened had the United States responded comprehensively, enthusiastically, and consistently to Mikhail Gorbachev's timetabled nuclear abolition

(<http://www.mcis.soton.ac.uk>), Nuclear news and links (<http://nci.org/index.htm>), Oxford Research Group (<http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk>), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (<http://sipri.org>), WMD Awareness Programme (<http://www.comeclean.org.uk>).

²¹ The New Agenda Coalition (NAC) shows the potentialities and constraints on group of states that have sought to make the NPT flourish. The NAC originated in 1998, in a declaration by the foreign ministers of eight countries: 'A Nuclear Weapons Free World: The Need for a New Agenda'. According to Johnson, Butler, and Pullinger (*Worse than Irrelevant?* p.49 n.138), 'Though Slovenia was forced to withdraw following US and French threats to its applications to join NATO and the EU, the other seven – Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden – went on to work with civil society to develop the ideas, teamwork and strategies that enabled the NPT Review Conference in May 2000 to adopt a substantive set of agreements.'

²² This is discussed in Ken Booth, 'The Certainty of Uncertainty', paper presented to the Greenpeace/WMD Awareness Programme seminar in the House of Commons, 12 December 2006 entitled 'Trident Replacement: the Tipping Point?' The paper is available on the DDMI website (see note 20 above). The DDMI is undertaking a major project in 'Trust-building in Nuclear Worlds'; this includes building an inter-disciplinary network of relevant individuals and institutions. Anyone interested should contact Professor Nicholas J. Wheeler at njw@aber.ac.uk

plan of 1986.²³ Had the superpowers made progress towards abolition over the following decade, even if it had been slow and difficult, I wonder whether India and Pakistan would have flouted the strengthening norms of international society and moved in the opposite direction by carrying out nuclear tests in 1998? Had the superpowers taken some risks for trust-building in the late 1980s – and the risks were not massive ones²⁴ – the world would have been saved from the much worse risks that it is facing today, as a result of nuclear inertia.

If the predictable and dangerous uncertainties of a world of many nuclear weapons states is to be avoided, risks must be taken to try to build trust and express it in the most concrete form of strong international institutions. This is something, potentially, in which we all can be involved to a greater or lesser degree. To achieve success down the road of international institution-building,

- the international community must take the risk of rebuilding a system of global nuclear governance (starting with saving the NPT in the 2010 Review Conference – if not before);
- collectively, the nuclear weapons states must take the risk of acting out of respect for Article VI, and seriously moving towards abolition;
- the nuclear weapons states on the brink of modernising their systems, like Britain, must take the risk of stepping back and coordinating their actions with the aim of saving the NPT – what I call ‘constructive non-renewal’²⁵;
- the non-nuclear weapons states must take the risk of upsetting friends and allies by carrying out policies that progressively encircle the nuclear club with norms and laws that constrain their actions and delegitimise their possession

²³ On the proposal and the contemporary background to Soviet thinking, see Matthew Evangelista, ‘The New Soviet Approach to Security’, *World Policy Journal*, Fall 1986, pp. 561-99.

²⁴ Governments tend on matters of military security, and especially in the nuclear realm, to give greater weight to the more unpredictable rather than the more predictable uncertainties they face; in other words, they give more attention to worst-case-but-very unlikely-forecasting rather than dangerous-but-not-as-bad-but-much-more-predictable-forecasting. For a discussion of this in the British case – the choice between predictable and unpredictable uncertainties – see Booth, ‘Certainty of Uncertainty’

²⁵ This is discussed in Booth, ‘Certainty of Uncertainty’.

of nuclear weapons (the promotion of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones and the further development of legal instruments outlawing the possession and use of nuclear weapons, for example);

- regions must take the risk of turning nuclear communities of fate into security communities where war is unthinkable, and therefore in which nuclear weapons (and all potentially aggressive military systems) have become irrelevant ('disinvented' politically);
- those who can must take the risk of promoting Track-II initiatives, when Track-I is too sensitive; and
- progressive global civil society movements must learn about the dangers of nuclear weapons, and warn the rest of their societies of what might happen if their governments do not join in trying to stem the drift to radical nuclear multipolarity, and lobby their governments against complacency on these matters, and particularly against taking any decisions which maintain pro-nuclear weapons momentum in their own policies (acquisition, modernisation, or increase).

Nowhere are all these issues – the dangers resulting from inertia, the risks that have to be taken to build institutions, and the promise of stable peace – more poignant yet challenging than in the Middle East and its neighbouring regions, stretching from the Indian sub-continent to north Africa, and from Central Asia to the Gulf.²⁶ Turkey will therefore be a pivotal player.

Working towards nuclear abolition cannot wait until all political problems have been settled in the Middle East or anywhere else. Saving the NPT and increasing the density of constraints on nuclear weapons acquisition and retention must be central to a process of global security learning, and global institution-building if the 2030s are not to be full of risks, as were the 1930s. We all have some choices about this future, whether we are members of governments, military officers, citizens with votes and voices. The choice we collectively face is clear, and it is already later than most of us think.

²⁶ For an introduction to the complexities and challenges of the region, see the papers from the 56th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs, 'A Region in Transition: Peace and Reform in the Middle East' (papers at <http://www.pugwash.org/reports/pac/56/papers>). I want to thank Carol Naughton of WMD Awareness for her help on searching for material on the Middle East and other matters.