

“Priorities after the 2015 NPT Review Conference”

The 2015 NPT Review Conference ended without producing any document laying out what the participating countries agreed upon or are determined to do in the succeeding years until they meet again in 2020. This was not unexpected because the conference was held against the backdrop of low expectations. The observers predicted a difficult conference in view of (1) the lagging nuclear disarmament efforts partly due to the deteriorating relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation, (2) the failure to convene an international conference on the Middle-East Zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (MEWMDFZ), and (3) the persisting concern about nuclear proliferation progressing in North Korea and Iran, and spreading even further.

A Great Disappointment but we cannot afford to give up.

The failure came as a great disappointment to those who were eagerly looking for a progress to be made in the international efforts to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons and the prevention of nuclear proliferation. This includes myself. But, we cannot afford to give up on the NPT Review process and let it remain idle until the next conference meets again in five years. The threats of nuclear weapons are present and enormous. We cannot afford to risk ourselves continue to be exposed to the threat that one day nuclear bombs are used either intentionally or unintentionally. We have to reconstitute ourselves and move forward in our efforts to seek reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, and until then prevent nuclear proliferation and any occurrence of nuclear terrorism.

Hold the Line.

First thing to be done is to hold the line. The fact that the review conference ended without producing any agreed document means that even the results of the previous 2010 conference were not reaffirmed. The 2010 document contained the important 64 item action plan for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. That has to be maintained. Without falling into the wasteful argument of whether the document from the previous conference is still valid or not we should hold the participating countries accountable to what they said in the conference. I remember the NWSs argued that they have been making efforts to carry out their commitments for nuclear disarmament against the criticism of the lack of progress. If that is so, we hold them to their words and ask them to continue their efforts. There were many statements made during the conference arguing that the participants are making good efforts to promote nuclear disarmament, prevent nuclear proliferation and deal with the threats of nuclear accidents or terrorism. Let us hold them to their words.

¹ The text was adapted from the speech he gave at the International Christian University/Carnegie Council joint Global Ethics Conference held in Tokyo on June 6, 2015. Nobuyasu Abe, a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, serves as a Commissioner of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission. Views expressed here are author's own and do not necessarily reflect those neither of the Commission nor of the Japanese Government.

During the conference the U.S. and Russian representatives stated that they are working on their bilateral nuclear weapons reduction. We welcome those statements and look forward to them continuing their efforts to work on further nuclear weapons reduction beyond the current new START treaty level. The five NWSs stated that they are collectively working on their efforts to promote nuclear disarmament. We welcome the statement and look forward to them working harder to meet the expectations of the Non-Nuclear Weapon States.

Virtually all the delegates emphasized the importance of working against nuclear proliferation and on nuclear security. Let them continue to work, e.g. on universalizing the Additional Protocol to the Comprehensive Safeguards with the IAEA, and on acceptance of the number of conventions regarding nuclear security.

Low-Hanging Fruits

There are a number of priority issues that the countries concerned about the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation can do as urgent agenda items. First things we should address may be the low-hanging fruits that are there for immediate harvesting.

Nuclear Deal with Iran

First comes the negotiation with Iran on Iran's nuclear activities. The U.S. and other major powers agreed on the basic outline of the comprehensive agreement to come before the end of June. It is good that the Obama administration has made it a top priority matter. There are a lot of detractors who argue that the foreseen final agreement is not tough enough to stop the Iranian attempt to acquire nuclear weapons in the future. The centrifuges will be greatly reduced but some will remain. Enriched uranium will be required to be shipped out of the country but some will be allowed to stay. The verification system may not be robust enough to detect serious hidden activities. The sanctions should only be lifted step-by-step and be snapped back into place once any Iranian non-compliance is revealed but in reality it may be hard to do vis-à-vis the reluctant Russia and China and the businessmen who are eager to do business with Iran.

The list of doubts is almost endless but in a real world we have to be realistic. The negotiators should indeed come up with as tough agreement as possible but after all a success of such an agreement greatly depends not only on how good the agreement itself is but also on the determination of the parties involved to implement the agreement in good faith and to make the deal come to a successful end. Very often the negotiation with Iran is compared with that with North Korea and the failure of the North Korean process is cited. In comparison, the Iranian outline seems to be a lot better than, e.g. the 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea, which only closed the plutonium path to nuclear weapons and had a limited verification process. The Iranian outline dealt with both uranium and plutonium paths and has by far stronger verification provisions. Experts, however, know that even the IAEA Safeguards with the Additional Protocol are not perfect to detect absolutely any kind of hidden activities. Ultimately, convincing the Iranian regime that it is in their own interest to keep the agreement in good faith and to stay away from any activity that may contribute to the future weapons

making. For this reason, too, it will be highly important that the U.S. and Iran move towards improving their bilateral relationship overcoming their historical animosities. It takes a great political leadership and determination to do so because there is always someone who tries to take short-term political advantage by attacking such a rapprochement. Trying to make the Iranian society as open and democratic can also help strengthen the verification process. That means basically encouraging the current moderate line of President Rouhani in that country. An interesting development in Japan after the horrible Fukushima nuclear accident is that the people in Japan without realizing started a kind of people's verification process. Now, a lot of people in Japan carry radiation detectors and find out from time to time high radiation spots in parking lots or public parks. We may encourage the Iranian people to carry radiation detectors and report any unusual radiation! Pronouncing peaceful intention of nuclear activities, even though not so sincere at the beginning can still work as a moral dissuasion to the scientists and engineers who may engage in the activities and encourage them to reveal any activity that may go counter to the pronounced policy. This is more likely to happen if the society is more open and freer.

CTBT

Another low-hanging fruit is the CTBT, which waits for only eight more ratifications to enter into force. In fact, the treaty has been hanging low for so many years, i.e. 19 years. The treaty is an important tool to prevent further spread of nuclear weapons and to solidify disarmament efforts. Without testing nuclear explosive devices it is difficult, particularly for newcomers, to develop nuclear weapons. But, that was exactly the reason why the U.S., China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Iran and North Korea have been resisting either signing or ratifying the treaty. We need to work harder to move these countries that are required for the entry into force of the treaty to accept the treaty definitively.

Until the treaty comes into force, we have to solidify the *de facto* moratoria on nuclear tests. As of today, all the required states except for China and North Korea have declared varying degrees of moratorium. We need to make those moratoria firmer by, for example, making those unilateral moratoria into a multilateral commitment. China seems to be refraining from nuclear tests without declaring to do so. We should try to make this explicit. North Korea is not heeding the mandatory Security Council resolutions demanding it not to conduct nuclear tests. The countries have to work harder to make North Korea observe the Security Council's commands. That is the obligation under the United Nations Charter as contained in Article 25 that commits the Member States to carry out the decisions of the Security Council.

The supporters of the CTBT also have to make the international monitoring stations virtually ready for starting its operation and provide necessary financial and human resources available to the CTBTO Provisional Secretariat. A near complete ability of the monitoring system to detect hidden nuclear tests will work as a strong deterrence against anybody who may try to conduct secret nuclear tests. The data from the monitoring system collected by the CTBTO International Data Centre has proven highly useful for the early warning of big tsunami anywhere in the world. The precise and

objective radioactivity data of the monitoring stations also proved useful at the time of the Fukushima nuclear accident.

Continue Pursuing Humanitarian Consequences Campaign

There may be other low-hanging fruits but let me move on to the top priority issue as I see it in the situation after the failure of the 2015 NPT Review Conference. That is the issue of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. This is exactly the reason why the people, physicians, scientists and lawyers started the movement to abolish nuclear weapons almost 70 years ago. The nuclear weapons are too destructive, indiscriminate and long-lasting in their radioactive aftereffects. We thought the movement was strong enough to move the countries towards nuclear disarmament and refraining from nuclear proliferation. President Obama called for a world without nuclear weapons in Prague in 2009. But, unfortunately, the progress after that was at a snail's pace. And, there are threats that new countries may seek nuclear weapons and the weapons may be used one day. For all these reasons it is highly important that we revisit the horrors of the catastrophic destruction caused by nuclear bombs. If we cannot eliminate the nuclear weapons any time soon, if we cannot stop some of the political leaders from hanging on to their nuclear weapons, if we cannot win their agreements to start negotiations on nuclear disarmament and the Nuclear Weapons Ban Convention, one of the few tools that remain to the hands of those who do not possess nuclear weapons is to strengthen the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons by emphasizing the terrible consequences. The humanitarian consequence campaign, therefore, has to be carried on. It is unfortunate that some of the Nuclear Weapon State representatives argued to deny even the need to discuss the humanitarian consequences in order to defend their position not to join negotiations on nuclear disarmament or on Nuclear Weapons Ban Convention right away.

One important way to learn about the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, naturally, is to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki to see the aftereffects of the bombing 70 years ago and to hear what the people had experienced. It was quite unfortunate that Chinese representative took the Japanese proposal to invite world leaders to visit the two cities as an attempt to portray Japan as the victim of the last war. The kind of criticism is well-known in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the people of the two cities do take care of stating that that is not their intention and they do remember the atrocities the other Asian countries suffered as a result of the war Japan imposed upon them. Nevertheless, if some still do not feel comfortable visiting Hiroshima or Nagasaki, I would recommend them to visit Semipalatinsk or the Marshall Islands as a first step to learn about the serious consequences of nuclear explosions even they were for testing purposes.

Nuclear Security; Another Priority

Another priority area that needs to be addressed as an urgent issue, unfortunately, is that of nuclear security, i.e. the efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism. Perhaps, the extremist of the extreme terrorist group today is the Islamic State. It recently boasted about their ability to purchase a nuclear bomb, perhaps, from Pakistan, and smuggle it into the U.S. across the U.S.-Mexican borders. They

may be exaggerating their power for recruitment and other purposes but this certainly is a horrifying prospect. We, therefore, have to urgently tighten our grips on all the avenues of potential nuclear weapons passages including potential nuclear suppliers, border passages, means of transportation, and the culprits who may engage in such activities. Through the Nuclear Security Summit process and otherwise, long-, medium- and short- term measures have been identified. While we keep working on long- and medium-term measures, the countries should address the immediate short-term measures as an urgent task.

However we may try to prevent nuclear terrorism, it may happen one day. As Professor Graham Allison of Harvard University Kennedy School says, “It is not a matter of if it happens but a matter of when it will happen.” If so, we need to be prepared against the eventuality of suffering from a nuclear terrorist incident. Again, the Fukushima nuclear accident gave us an important lesson. “Don’t think it will never happen. You’d better be prepared against an accident that may happen one day.” Thus, preparations for disaster relief and consequence management are critical. I understand that in the U.S. such big cities as New York City has such a plan and conduct drills from time to time. Japan conducts CBRN drills from time to time in such big cities as Tokyo. But, not so many cities around the world have such a practice. My advice is to have it so that when the worst comes, you are better prepared. Some of the expertise is common to the disaster relief in the case of a nuclear accident and to the disaster relief in the case of nuclear terrorism.

North Korea

An important medium-term priority issue is that of North Korea. As North Korea must be producing fissile material and bombs from it and means of delivery of the nuclear bombs at a maximum speed, the threats are mounting day by day. Some people argue that, therefore, we need to engage North Korea again for a negotiation to stop its nuclear program. If we can engage North Korea in a meaningful way, that would be wonderful and that should be our ultimate objective. However, there is no sign that North Korea is ready to talk the abandonment of its nuclear program. To the contrary, it has written the possession of what it calls nuclear deterrence into the preamble of its constitution and seems to be firmly determined to push its nuclear weapons program forward.

Consequently, there is little the U.S., South Korea or Japan can do to control the nuclear force build-up in North Korea in the near future unless there is a major change within North Korea that can fundamentally alter their policy orientation. But, we don’t have to be given up on this question. The kind of change usually comes all of a sudden. Who predicted the Soviet Union would collapse and the Germany would be reunited a few years before they happened? Who predicted South Africa would give up the Apartheid policy and abandon nuclear weapons? No serious North Korean scholars or nuclear experts today predict that there will be a regime change soon in North Korea. Still, quite often the change comes all of a sudden.

In so far as the North Korean regime continues and maintains its nuclear policy, there is no much choice but to take a number of defensive measures against the North Korean nuclear threat. First is to

maintain a credible deterrence so that the North Korea makes no mistake to use their nuclear weapons. Second is to prepare to defend ourselves in the event the deterrence failed. The kinds of defense and deterrence measures, however, have to be carefully measured and tailored so that the building up of the deterrence and defense capabilities do not encourage any regional weapons-build-up competition. There is no chance North Korea can win any of the arms competition but if China becomes determined to engage in arms build-up competition, Japan would have a hard time matching the fast growing Chinese economy and the companion expansion of its military expenditure. The U.S. would also have a hard time. Thus, it is in the self-interest of Japan and its allies not to encourage arms build-up competition.

Regional Skirmishes in East Asia

Another medium-term priority issue is the rising regional tension in the Western Pacific centering on the rising China. The territorial skirmishes over Senkaku Islands, the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the East and South China Seas can lead to a military escalation in the region that may eventually lead to something that may involve nuclear weapons. There are a number of precautions that I can recommend. First of all, these are what may be called low-intensity local skirmishes and the arguments should not all of a sudden jump to the issue of nuclear deterrence as sometimes the Japanese commentators make, e.g. “Can Japan trust American nuclear deterrence concerning Senkaku?”, “Will the U.S. continue to reaffirm its defense commitment under the Security Treaty to defend the Senkaku?” But, in the meantime, we should not forget the fact that the world history shows that territorial disputes are very easy way to lead nations to wars because the issue can throw politicians and the public quickly into hot patriotism, making it difficult to back down and leading to the ladder of escalation. For this reason, I recommend to organize serious and continuing regional discussions among not only scholars but also policy-makers and military commanders to consider ways to prevent dangerous escalation of such skirmishes.

Future of the NPT and the Middle East WMD Free Zone

Last, we have to look to the future of the NPT. The treaty initially succeeded in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to the major industrial countries around the world. Of late, unfortunately, the NPT seems to be losing its luster. It is no longer a glittering star around the corner. It has failed to stop North Korea gain nuclear weapons. It allowed Iraq and Libya getting close to obtaining nuclear weapons. It has not succeeded even in making the Additional Protocol a new standard. There are mounting frustrations about the slow progress in nuclear disarmament, inability to cope effectively with the proliferation concerns and the regional issues to name a few. I do not think the countries will abandon the NPT but, if the things are left as they are, its strength to persuade the participating countries to work seriously on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation will further decline.

Therefore, on top of the priority issues I have raised so far, we have to work on the issue of the international conference on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (MEWMDFZ). The issue was the direct cause of the failure of the Review Conference. I know this is a long-standing

tenacious issue but efforts need to be made to reconstitute the efforts to convene the conference as soon as possible if we are to make the next 2020 Review Conference a success. However, just convening a conference for the sake of a conference would not be good enough. If you are genuinely serious about establishing a MEWMDZFZ, there has to be a realistic dialogue among the parties for the establishment of such a zone. We all know well that there is a fundamental gap of views between Israel on the one hand and Egypt and the other Arab countries on the other. Virtually, everybody knows that Israel has nuclear weapons. Basically, the issue is how to make Israel agree to abandon its nuclear weapons in return for the commitments by the other countries not to acquire any of the WMDs. Israel argues that a peaceful regional environment has to be established so that it feels safe to abandon nuclear weapons. That may be so. But, unfortunately absolute peace may never come to the region. It is the most volatile region in the world. However, knowing the horror of any use of nuclear weapons I beg not to use nuclear weapons even when the countries may engage in armed conflict in the future. Therefore, the real issue here is to realize a reasonable calm in the region that would enable Israel and the other countries to commit themselves to abandon or not to acquire any kind of WMDs. The countries should get together to resume the kind of quiet dialogue they conducted in Switzerland in the past years. And, I think Japan should try to make a contribution towards this end. You may invite one of the meetings to Hiroshima or Nagasaki, or short of that, offer a best Sushi dinner with best Sake to the participants once! Oops, some of them may not take alcohol. Then, we may offer sweets.