

Written by John Hallam

Friday, 17 March 2017 15:57 - Last Updated Friday, 17 March 2017 15:59

MEMO MARCH 2017

PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT
HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROHIBITION NEGOTIATIONS 27-31MAR, JUNE15-JULY7

Dear Delegate:

This memo is addressed equally to all Governments that support, and who have chosen to be represented at, the historic negotiations between 27-31March and 15June-7July in New York, and even more so, to those who do not currently plan to go.

Those who plan not to attend, or who do not support the idea of eliminating nuclear weapons as a matter of the highest existential priority, are making a historic error. Those who hitch their 'security' to nuclear 'deterrence' in some form, may be making an error that is not so much 'historic' as anti-historic because it raises at least the possibility, however remote, (and maybe not remote at all), of ending all history.

If your government plans to attend these negotiations, congratulations.

Hopefully you will have read by now, and taken into consideration, the essential points for a 'ban' (or prohibition) treaty, from Reaching Critical Will.

If your Government does not currently plan to attend, I urge you to reconsider.

And if your security depends, or you THINK your security depends on, someone else's nuclear weapon systems, I urge you to reconsider. If, finally, you are a nuclear weapon state (official or 'unofficial'), I urge, indeed beg, you to reconsider your security paradigm, and to re-design your country's security on a basis that does not put the future of civilization and living things generally on a knife-edge. For some Governments, being asked to do this may seem unreasonable. However, consider two things:

--Nuclear weapons themselves actually attract threats that would never materialize, were the weapons, or the weapons-related facilities, not there. For example, the nuclear-weapons-related facility at Pine Gap in Australia is a high priority nuclear target, that not only constitutes a target in itself but that also places in jeopardy other targets such as cities. Missile – defense facilities in Poland or the Czech Republic will do the same. An honest analysis of the security impacts of going non-nuclear will reveal most probably, that the security status of countries who rely on nuclear deterrence is no better or worse than those who do not rely on it.

--There are profound ethical problems with the idea that a government – any government – could try to guarantee national survival at the potential cost of global survival. Indeed, if global survival is compromised so of course is national survival.

There are two primary arguments for attendance (by all governments without exception) and for a Ban or Prohibition.

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The first is that particularly right now, the danger to civilization posed by nuclear weapons and the possibility of widespread nuclear weapons use is as great, or greater, than it was during the latter part of the erstwhile Cold War. This applies of course particularly to a possible NATO-Russia nuclear exchange. A number of exalted former officials (former Defense Secretary Perry, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Generals Cartwright and Pavel Zolotarev for example) – have warned of the dangers in the current NATO-Russia hostility. The European Leadership Network has produced reports warning of the risks of escalation attending possible clashes between NATO and Russian forces on exercises in dangerously close proximity to each other. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists Nobel-heavy board of sponsors has moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to the closest it has been to midnight since 1953, and closer than it was in 1983, a year in which global thermonuclear war came close twice in a six-week period. (September and Oct/Nov 1983, with Serpukhov-15 and Able Archer)

All these developments should give impetus to those of us who want to eliminate these terrifying possibilities by eliminating the weapons that give rise to them.

And all these developments should give pause, and stimulate a rethink, amongst those who wish to rely on nuclear weapons for a security 'guarantee', when those weapons are not the solution to a problem but are themselves the problem.

If you rely on nuclear weapons for your security, please understand that you are in effect, in language this author used to the Australian Government, 'painting a target on your backside'. (as argued a few paras ago). Nuclear weapons – particularly, if you are in Europe, Japan or Korea, tactical nuclear weapons – are themselves targets for other nuclear weapons. They decrease, not increase, your security. A reversal of disarmament trends that have operated to date, and the presence of possibly increased numbers of weapons in Europe or Asia will merely make it more and more possible that hundreds of millions of completely innocent people (as well as priceless cultural heritage) – get to be incinerated in a few short hours, triggered by an event sequence that might last minutes. These considerations, I believe, have not been properly taken into account by governments who rely on nuclear deterrence, whether themselves nuclear weapons possessors, or those who depend on 'extended deterrence'.

The number 'two' argument comes from the fact that the 'alternative' to the 'ban' negotiations is posed as the 'progressive', 'step-by-step' or 'building blocks' approach.

The author of this memo has nothing at all against an approach that goes 'step by step'. In order to make a journey one has to take steps, who could argue with that? But therein lies the catch – in order to make a journey one has to actually TAKE the steps, and the steps have not been taken, and are not being taken.

Indeed, so reluctant are the purported advocates of 'step by step' to actually take the steps required that their bona-fides could be called into question. This is particularly tragic, as many of the 'steps' are in addition essential risk – reduction measures, important in their own right as means by which to reduce the all too great risk of an 'accidental apocalypse'. They include measures such as no first use commitments, lowering of alert status and increasing

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decision-making time, mutual trust-building measures, military-to-military communication, data-sharing, and other measures that would decrease the probability of an inadvertent, but potentially civilization-ending, event sequence.

Finally, it must be said the counterposing a 'step-by-step' approach within the NPT, and an approach that starts with, and builds on, a universal prohibition of nuclear weapons is completely wrong. The two approaches do not compete with each other, but reinforce each other.

It is frequently (wrongly) argued that a ban or prohibition will in some way 'destabilize' the NPT. Bluntly this is nonsense.

But what DE-stabilizes the NPT right now is the failure to make progress using the step by step approach, even on critical risk reduction items, because the steps never get taken. And the need of the moment (for the preservation of the NPT, not to mention the mere preservation of civilization) is for some development that will break through the diplomatic logjam and either convince, or place additional pressure on, decision-makers IN the states that have nuclear weapons, to get serious about eliminating them.

The ban comes, not to end the NPT, but to fulfill it.

Indeed, so much is this so that those governments that resist the call for a prohibition place the integrity of their own commitments to the NPT's Art VI as interpreted by successive NPT review conferences, in doubt – particularly where the resistance to the call for a ban or prohibition comes as part of a broader pattern of resistance to other 'steps' in the so called 'progressive' approach, such as de-alerting and no first use.

Reaching Critical Will have done a much better job than can be done here to suggest what should be included IN a possible Ban or Prohibition Treaty.

I'd like to focus on a few unrepresentative elements that seem to me to be of critical importance. My failure to focus on other elements does not signify that they are not important.

--Risk reduction is of increasing importance. Your attention is drawn to the statements I made to the last OEWG meeting and to the Oct 2016 First Committee on Reducing the Risks of Nuclear War, in which I focussed on de-alerting, transparency measures, NFU, a moratorium on provocative military exercises (esp in the Baltics). (attached)

There is some question as to whether these considerations of risk, and of risk reduction, should properly be in a ban/prohibition treaty. I would argue that the risk is such that having them off elsewhere may mean that they are not covered in a timely way by any international instrument. This would be highly undesirable. A comprehensive statement of the heightened risk currently posed by nuclear weapons as well as possible ways to meet that risk could be included in a preamble. Risk reduction measures such as de-alerting could be included within a process to eliminate nuclear weapons, and as first of all applicable to official and 'unofficial' nuclear weapons states.

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The Reaching Critical Will document notes that:

“Above all else, it is imperative that this treaty makes all aspects of the possession, use, threat of use, or preparation for use of nuclear weapons categorically illegal, without exception.”

This is I believe, the very foundation of any possible ban or prohibition whatever the legal framework in which it is incorporated.

In addition:

--The treaty should emphasize that it is inconceivable that any use whatsoever of nuclear weapons would be compatible with international law. It should also emphasize that such use would be a crime against humanity.

--The Treaty should emphasize that all states (without exception – nuclear weapon states or not, signatories or not) – have an obligation to achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

--The Treaty should emphasize the catastrophic humanitarian impacts of even the use of a relatively small number of nuclear weapons, and the possibility that the use of larger numbers of nuclear weapons would terminate what we call 'civilization' as well as having a catastrophic global impact on all living species.

--The Treaty should affirm strongly that it fulfills, and does not displace, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and that the steps contained in successive NPT meetings are an essential roadmap and ought to be fulfilled. Those who most resist the creation of a ban or prohibition risk also losing their credibility vis a vis their NPT ArtVI obligations. All NPT signatories (and not only nuclear weapons possessors) are obliged to do everything they can to bring about the elimination of nuclear weapons. Under any reasonable laymans interpretation of the NPT ArtVI, states that have nuclear weapons should have negotiated their arsenals away decades ago. This has not happened.

--The Prohibition/Ban Treaty should call upon states that have not signed it nor participated in its negotiation to do so, and should establish mechanisms and structures to maintain pressure on official and unofficial nuclear weapons states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals and pending elimination to undertake essential risk reduction measures.

--States that have refused or chosen not to participate in the initial negotiations for a ban or prohibition should nonetheless be given every opportunity both to change their minds at any time, and of course, to join the Prohibition/Ban Treaty. Mechanisms to make this process as easy and rewarding as possible, while maintaining a maximum of pressure on those who do not do so, need to be created.

I emphasize that these points by no means exhaust what needs to be incorporated in the treaty, which RCW deals with much more comprehensively.

Finally I must reiterate the call for risk reduction measures. The risk of an 'accidental

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apocalypse' may be unquantifiable, but it has grown not reduced in recent years. Ultimately, if one keeps on playing Russian(or American) roulette, you will kill yourself. One may or may not be lucky, for a longer or shorter time.

My heartfelt wish is that a ban be successfully negotiated, that it lead to the elimination of nuclear weapons as quickly as possible, and that in the meantime we manage to reduce nuclear risks so that we are all still here to negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons – and to live in a nuclear weapons free world. Such a world will not be perfect but it will first of all still BE a world, and we will still be here to cope with all its other problems. If instead we incinerate each other that won't be the case.

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