



Keynote Address

NATO and the Future of Disarmament

By

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Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation**

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Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen—

It is an honour to participate in NATO's annual conference on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation—all vital subjects of our time. For over a decade, this conference has contributed much to the global debate on the future of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

I would like to thank the Government of Qatar for its hospitality and, of course, NATO and our Chair, Ambassador Ducaru, for inviting me to share my views.

All participants here today surely recognize that 2015 is an important year for disarmament and non-proliferation. It will also be a significant year for WMD.

In April, the international community will commemorate the centennial of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons in the First World War. The horrific consequences of these weapons shocked a generation and led to the banning of their use under the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Those consequences underscore the importance of new efforts to achieve universal membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention and full compliance by all its parties.

My remarks today, however, will focus on another type of WMD: nuclear weapons, the deadliest and most indiscriminate of all. They deserve our closest attention because the future of nuclear weapons will have a profound impact on the future of WMD. Our arms control and non-proliferation challenges will be quite different in a world free of nuclear weapons. This is why disarmament clearly merits our close attention—and I emphasize—as a security policy.

Given its status as a nuclear alliance, NATO might seem an unlikely partner in achieving this goal. I disagree: NATO can play a hugely important role as a champion of security through disarmament. This will of course require it finally to turn the page on the old doctrine of nuclear deterrence and move to a posture that is both more ethical and more appropriate for the world of the 21st century. That doctrine is just incompatible with achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

At a time of growing concerns throughout the world community over the terrible humanitarian consequences from the use of nuclear weapons, NATO has a superb opportunity to advance all the goals found in the title of this conference: arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation. It can do so by moving away from—better yet, abandoning all together—reliance on nuclear weapons and the doctrine that has rationalized them.

Part of this opportunity arises from historical reasons. In August this year, we will observe the 70th anniversary of the tragic nuclear weapon attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The testimonies of the survivors have long reminded us of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear war, as well as our shared duty to pursue the elimination of these weapons of terror.

Yet despite such concerns, there have been some worrying developments for those of us who view WMD disarmament not merely as a long-term goal, but as a practical and realistic means of advancing security interests.

Of obvious relevance to NATO is the lull in strategic nuclear arms control between the United States and the Russian Federation, who together possess more than 90 percent of the

world's nuclear weapons. There are even some concerns over the future of some past treaty accomplishments, like the ground-breaking Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. After two decades of progress in incremental nuclear arms control, we are seeing new challenges to the internationalism and cooperation that characterised the post-Cold War period. And all nuclear-armed states are modernizing their nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

Many non-nuclear-weapon states and groups in civil society view these developments as contrary to the articulated positions of the nuclear-armed states to pursue a world free of nuclear weapons. There are widespread concerns that nuclear deterrence is here to stay, and if true, this will have profound implications for the future of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Provocative rhetoric about the legitimacy and military utility of nuclear weapons has impeded new progress in both disarmament and non-proliferation. Such language has reminded the world that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence remains deeply enshrined in security strategies of all nuclear-armed states and their allies. It has also raised doubts about their sincerity to pursue disarmament. This can scarcely strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Outside the nuclear realm, various technological developments also have the potential to alter the current geo-strategic landscape—these include cyber warfare, space weapons, and “conventional strategic weapons”, to name just a few.

In briefly surveying such challenges, I cannot but wonder how the policy language we are continuing to hear about nuclear weapons will affect prospects for meeting those challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen --

I'd like to make three observations about this staying power of nuclear deterrence as the guarantor of national security, and I am not at all limiting my remarks here to the five recognized nuclear-weapon States.

Take, for example, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which not only views its putative nuclear programme as a guarantor of regime survival against hostile foreign powers but also a tool to leverage gains from the international community. Other countries have pursued various nuclear-weapon options, justified—as always—in the name of deterrence.

So my first point here is to underscore the importance of memory. As our populations age, too many of our fellow citizens and leaders have forgotten how close the world came to nuclear catastrophe in the race to build nuclear weapons during the Cold War.

Many of those dangers remain today. After all, what kind of stability or security do such weapons provide, given the dangers of miscalculation, miscommunication, accidents, or wilful use? The consequences of the breakdown of nuclear deterrence would be calamitous, while the financial and opportunity costs of even maintaining this doctrine continue to mount.

The effects of a nuclear attack would also not be limited to the immediate targets. The devastation of even a so-called ‘limited’ nuclear exchange would cause death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, and it would be an unmitigated environmental disaster—including, many scientists say, a global nuclear famine.

This brings me to my second point about nuclear deterrence—it does not prevent conflict, even between nuclear-armed states. Instead, it facilitates a deadly new type of conflict. Following the logic of nuclear deterrence, if belligerents believe that nuclear weapons will act as a brake on unacceptable escalation, they will see fewer risks in waging lower-level conflicts in which hundreds if not thousands perish.

And my last observation on nuclear deterrence is that we now live in a world where the majority of conflicts are intra- not inter-state and in which we are economically integrated as never before. This is a new world with new threats and new consequences—yet also a world in which there are new and more sophisticated tools for strengthening international security.

Countries throughout this world are recognizing that their interests are better served by diplomacy, dialogue, and cooperation than by endless investments in weaponry—nuclear weapons in particular. The use of targeted economic sanctions is one such instrument in the diplomatic toolkit, one that can be carefully used to maintain multilaterally agreed norms, to bring disputants to the bargaining table, and to raise the costs of aggression and egregious violations of humanitarian norms.

Constraints on global trade finance can play a similar role. By denying access to marketplaces and banks, financial sanctions can be quite effective, leading to currency flight, inflation, depletion of foreign exchange reserves and a severe dampening of investor sentiment. They can be used either to impose a cost or to encourage the peaceful resolution of disputes.

In the same vein, sanctions that target specific programmes or individuals—such as travel bans and asset freezes—have proven to be valuable mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international norms and regimes by cutting off the key players from their sources of funds.

The diplomatic toolkit, however, is not limited to assortment of sticks. It also includes a wide variety of carrots—positive inducements of a political, economic, technological nature—that can generate new incentives to resolve disputes peacefully and strengthen security.

In a truly global economy, I certainly believe that measures that understand and take advantage of this interconnectedness of the world community have the potential to be far more powerful tools for inducing cooperation than the threat of using nuclear weapons.

This leads me to one of the core questions before this conference: what has been the impact of recent developments on the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and, in particular, the NPT, and its forthcoming Review Conference in May this year?

At this stage, the answer is far from clear, but I would like to note the following:

First, the non-proliferation and disarmament regime rests on the synergistic interplay between the two—failure to act on one leads to a failure to act on the other.

And second, it should be self-evident that the most significant breakthroughs in non-proliferation and disarmament have come at times of strong international cooperation between the great powers of the international community.

During the depths of the Cold War, arms control agreements between the Soviet Union and United States acted—in Strobe Talbott’s words—as a “kind of deep water anchor” in the relationship. By choosing cooperation over confrontation, both sides were able to reduce tensions at a time of deep distrust. They did it before. They can do it again.

The recent collaboration to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons programme and to negotiate a settlement to Iran’s nuclear programme demonstrates the continuing validity of this argument.

Cooperation between major powers on disarmament and non-proliferation is good for international security and the international rules-based system. Fissures in that cooperation lead to fractures in the non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

I expect many of these themes will be raised at the NPT Review Conference in May. Although I remain confident in the value and importance that all States Parties attach to that treaty, the conference will face some challenges that only strong political will can overcome.

Chief among these are the increasingly divergent views between the nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear weapon States over the pace at which the 64-point Action Plan—agreed in 2010—is being implemented.

The reaffirmation by nuclear-weapon States in February of their commitment to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons in accordance with the goals of the treaty was a welcome development. So too are their efforts to advance the transparency and confidence-building measures necessary for achieving this goal.

However, such measures are not a substitute for concrete progress in the verified reduction and elimination of nuclear stockpiles nor for diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in national security postures.

The vast majority of non-nuclear weapon States do not view the Action Plan as an open-ended goal—they demand evidence that commitments made are being fulfilled. This a key purpose of the treaty review process.

If the Action Plan is to serve as a roadmap to a world free of nuclear weapons, it is surely incumbent on the nuclear-weapon States to outline how they propose to reach the final destination in the shortest possible time. The future of the NPT regime is very much at stake.

The other major challenge at that event relates to the failure to hold a conference on a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other WMD, a key element of the 2010 Action Plan. Over the last five years there has been a disappointing lack of progress on this issue, the blame for which cannot be laid at the feet of any one state. Parties to the NPT—and not just those in this region—are deeply frustrated with the lack of progress in implementing commitments to this zone made at the review conferences of 1995 and 2010.

I want to express my continued support to the conference facilitator, Jaakko Laajava, and the conference co-conveners, and to urge regional states to work with them to ensure all parties’ concerns are met and to hold the conference as soon as possible. This is an imperative because

of the implications of failure for the NPT, for regional security, and international peace and security overall.

As I have already noted, a successful Review Conference will require strong political will, a willingness to cooperate, and a recognition that the treaty is a bargain between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear weapon States.

At its 2014 summit, NATO once again concluded that nuclear weapons “are the supreme guarantee of the allies”. However, the summit also reaffirmed the Alliance’s commitment to seeking a safer world for all and to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

As we head into this critical year for the disarmament and non-proliferation regime, I commend NATO for making this second commitment and encourage member states to act upon it. In terms of a supreme guarantee of security, I believe we will find it in nuclear disarmament, not nuclear weapons. As members of this alliance, you can rest assured that you have a partner at the United Nations most eager to work with you to achieve that great goal.

Thank you.