

2009 Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference
‘Menaces and Promises – Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Disarmament
and the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy’

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The immediate aftermath of the Cold War brought renewed hope for increased synergy between international peace and security, on one hand, and disarmament and non-proliferation, on the other. The demise of the Soviet Union ended the bipolar confrontation and therefore the need for superpowers to counterbalance one another's stock of warheads. The emerging new world order, it was believed, would pave the way for the elimination of nuclear arsenals.

In 1993, the international community adopted the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which I had the satisfaction of signing, as Brazil's Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament. It was – and continues to be – an important universal and non-discriminatory disarmament agreement, the first to abolish a whole class of weapons of mass destruction in a thoroughly verifiable manner, including a very intrusive set of inspections procedures. The Convention represents a remarkable precedent to be taken into account as we debate how to proceed to nuclear disarmament.

In the field of nuclear disarmament, however, we have been faced with disturbing developments. Great emphasis was given to non-proliferation. But nuclear disarmament has received little attention. Some important initiatives, however, were put forward over the last few years in the field of nuclear disarmament.

In 1996, under the auspices of the Australian Government, the Canberra Commission on the elimination of nuclear weapons was convened. A select group of diplomats, scientists, academics, politicians and high-ranking military officers were invited to discuss how nuclear disarmament could be obtained through practical, viable steps. The Commission concluded that the very existence of nuclear weapons diminishes the security of States, including those that possess them. It called upon Nuclear-Weapon States to lead by committing themselves unequivocally to the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Commission described concrete measures to bring about the verifiable elimination of such weapons.

In that same year, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty was signed, responding to long-standing views and demands of world public opinion, and contributing to constrain the development of new types of nuclear weapons. It is urgent that the CTBT enter into force. The remaining signatories that have not yet ratified the CTBT should do it without further procrastination.

In 1998, the New Agenda Coalition was launched. Composed by Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden, the Coalition was inspired by the common perception that Nuclear-Weapon States were not fulfilling their legal responsibilities towards disarmament, as outlined by Article VI of the NPT. This in turn weakened the case for further non-proliferation.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Coalition was absolutely instrumental in producing a breakthrough in the 2000 NPT Review Conference. The meeting was marked by strenuous negotiations between the New Agenda Coalition and the five nuclear-weapon States. Discussions often went through the night and early morning. But at the end, the Conference reached a historic agreement as regards the elimination of all nuclear weapons: the so-called ‘13 steps’. Proposed by the New Agenda Coalition (and largely based upon the recommendations of the Canberra Commission) these steps included: the urgency of signing and ratifying the CTBT; the moratorium on nuclear-weapon-test explosion; and a treaty banning the production of

fissile material for nuclear weapons. It also prescribed the beginning of discussions/negotiations on the subject in the Conference on Disarmament (CD).

In 2000, as Permanent Representative of Brazil in Geneva, I chaired the Conference, which was facing a stalemate regarding its work program. At stake was the issue of dealing with nuclear disarmament in that forum. This was stubbornly resisted by nuclear-weapon States. There were often contentious issues. Paramount among them was the prevention of an arms race in outer space. This was obviously related to the U.S. project of building a shield against nuclear missiles, which, if implemented, would undermine the balance obtained by previous agreements. At that time, I proposed a formula which would allow for the two issues to be discussed in the CD in a non-negotiating format, without excluding future negotiations on them. It was a way of unlocking the process and putting the CD to work. After extensive consultations, that proposal obtained almost unanimous support. But it did not produce consensus for reasons that, until today, are not totally clear to me. Unfortunately, that opportunity was lost, as were other multilateral efforts in the coming years. The nuclear disarmament debate became paralyzed.

The successful outcome of the 2000 NPT Review Conference raised expectations that significant progress would occur in the implementation of the NPT's provisions, as well as the '13 steps'. By contrast, and after the failed efforts in the CD, the 2005 NPT Review Conference was marked by stark differences between a few countries that wanted to focus on non-proliferation, and a majority which emphasized the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament. No progress whatsoever took place as regards multilaterally negotiated, irreversible and verifiable agreements.

In 2005, the Foreign Ministers of the New Agenda Coalition jointly stressed that Nuclear-Weapon States should acknowledge that disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing processes. 'What does not exist cannot proliferate'. Not much heed was paid to such advice. The international community continued to focus almost exclusively on the problem of the spread of nuclear weapons, while being too indulgent on the question of their very existence. The maintenance of nuclear arsenals presents several risks. These were clearly illustrated during the discussions of the Canberra Commission by the testimony of men whose knowledge and good faith are undisputed, such as the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara and the former Commander of the U.S. Air Force, General Lee Butler.

But perhaps more seriously, the argument against proliferation will be considerably weakened. Actually it will be outright undermined if those who have such weapons try to justify their possession on either political or moral grounds.

A balanced implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with substantive focus on its three pillars – nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy – is crucial. These three main pillars, whose interplay is often referred to as its essential bargain, must all be equally addressed. To privilege one at the expense of the others causes the whole regime to falter, for it simply cannot stand if propped up by two pillars – let alone by a single one.

The bias in favor of non-proliferation, present from the start in the very name of the treaty, was accentuated – up to a point understandably – by the increasing fear of terrorist acts that might involve nuclear arms. But for the reasons already mentioned, which were amply expanded, among others, by the Canberra Commission, this tilted approach is misleading.

Lately, there have been some encouraging signs that nuclear disarmament is returning to the scene. The Director-General of the IAEA, Mohamed El Baradei, in the article '*A recipe for survival*', stated that 'after two mostly wasted decades since the end of the Cold War, nuclear disarmament is again high on the international agenda'.

The newly established International Commission on Nuclear Non Proliferation and Disarmament, proposed by former Australian Prime Minister Gareth Evans and former Japan Minister of Foreign Affairs Yoriko Kawaguchi points to the same direction. It is also heartening that a similar view now finds favor with a sitting Prime Minister of one of the Nuclear-Weapon States. Gordon Brown's statement on March 17, 2009, puts the issue in very clear terms: 'As possessor states we cannot expect to successfully exercise moral and political leadership in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons if we ourselves do not demonstrate leadership on the question of disarmament of our weapons.'

As a country that even before acceding to the NPT enshrined the prohibition of the development of nuclear weapons in its Constitution, Brazil welcomes these developments. They should serve as a clear guideline to the next NPT Review Conference, in 2010.

One of the greatest Brazilian poets, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, writing in 1962, devoted one of his most famous poems to the horrors brought upon humankind by the existence of the atomic bomb. He starts by saying that 'the bomb is a flower of panic terrifying the floriculturists', that it 'poisons children before they begin to be born, then continues to poison them through the course of their lives.' He warns us that 'the bomb goes to all of the conferences and sits on all sides'. What better description of the dilemmas involving nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation?