

PANEL #4

TOWARD A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

Immediate Steps to Reduce the Danger

by

Daryl Kimball

Executive Director, Arms Control Association

Toward a Fundamental Change in Nuclear Weapons Policy Conference

United States Capitol Visitor Center

April 27, 2017

KIMBALL: Thank you, Kathleen. It's an honor to be here and I want to thank the organizers for all the hard work that went into this. It's an honor to be among the great speakers that showed up for this event and to see some new and old friends.

And I think we've got to remember that as Barry pointed out, we have through the years been able to make significant progress to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, to limit the number of nuclear-armed states, force reductions in the number of nuclear weapons held by the major nuclear-armed powers, to effectively end nuclear testing by all -- not one country, and to help create an informal taboo against the use of nuclear weapons.

It's been done through the imperfect and incomplete nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation enterprise -- but we've made progress. And that progress has been the result of public pressure and activism first and foremost and the leadership and the hard work of thousands of people, but especially key diplomats, scientists, religious figures, citizen diplomats and more.

So, we've seen tough times before and we've made significant progress in reducing the nuclear danger. But today, there are, as we've heard through the course of the day, some very, very tough challenges, some of which are unprecedented and they're new, and it's going to take lot of creativity to deal with them.

So, what I just wanted to do today is I want to take us down to a very practical and I hope not too boring level, but an important level of conversation about some of the things that we need to do in the next two or three years to maintain a foundation for much more transformational progress in years ahead. And I think we've got to recognize that as we have this conversation today. As Barry was just mentioning, tensions between the world's nuclear-armed states are on the rise.

The North Korean nuclear and missile program is not an urgent threat to the United States itself, but it is going to be a much more dangerous situation in the years ahead if we don't find a diplomatic solution to cap and reverse that program and to resolve some of the fundamental security tensions that underlay the problem.

We have relations between the United States and Russia almost an all-time low. And there is no current plan to maintain or to talk about maintaining the nuclear disarmament regime between these two countries that we have had in place one way or another for the last 40 plus years. And other nuclear-armed states are building up their capabilities too. So, it's a tough

situation, it's not just a U.S., Russian dynamic as it was in 1982 when I was graduating from high school and getting involved in this issue. It is multi-dimensional and it is very difficult.

And so, then, if things weren't difficult enough, we have our President Donald Trump. And let me just say, a couple things about how this will complicate some of the work ahead and that we need to keep in mind. I mean, we've all seen Trump's tweets about greatly strengthening and expanding the U.S. arsenal. We've seen his comments about welcoming an arms race. We've heard him denounce the 2010 New START agreement with Russia.

Those are deeply troubling, we have to pay attention to not only what he says, but more importantly what he does. And what is coming is a comprehensive top to bottom review of U.S. nuclear weapons policy that has the potential over the next year to change some of the fundamental policies that have been very important to establishing the foundation for future progress.

And the bottom-line is that, the pillars of the international nuclear order as imperfect and cracked and shaky as it may already be, we can't take it for granted, because there could be further stresses and strains as a result of this nuclear posture review that is going to be completed probably by the end of this year.

And just to give, you know a flavor -- many of you may have heard Chris Ford, the National Security Council Senior Director for Weapons of Mass Destruction for the White House speak at the Carnegie Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Nuclear Policy Conference back in March. And he was asked whether global nuclear disarmament is a realistic goal. And he said that the administration would review whether the United States continues to support the goal of world without nuclear weapons.

Now that maybe is not a surprising comment for somebody who is involved in the review, and they're going to review everything, but it just gives you a sense that, there are some people in this new administration who don't recognize Article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. It makes it a legally binding requirement to pursue nuclear disarmament and there are other statements of course in NPT context that binds the nuclear states to nuclear disarmament.

So, we have a lot of work ahead of us. And I think that we need to first of all recognize that we can't take for granted some of the important things that have been achieved over the past 40 to 50 years upon which we can build our work for transformational change.

And I would mildly disagree with a couple of the other comments made by couple of other speakers earlier that only political science students care about the nuclear danger. I think we've got to recognize that the Trump effect has its dangers, but it also presents opportunities.

You know, just one little example. My 14-year-old daughter who is of course not exactly your average kids, in a household with the Director of Arms Control Association, but she is very interested in K-Pop music, all right? And she has been listening to NPR around the house and she knows that there is the risk of war between the Koreans, so she was asking her dad, you know, what might happen to my favorite K-Pop stars.

You know, there are opportunities here. My point is to raise awareness, all right? To raise awareness in ways that you might not imagine.

And then, you know, the very important publication of the National Enquirer the other day, warns that World War III is coming. So the point is, I've got to have little humor to make light of the terrible, but the point is that, there is a growing anxiety about the global situation and the particular situation that we have with Donald Trump in-charge of 800 nuclear weapons that could be launched within 10 minutes with no congressional approval.

So, what are some of the things that we need to do. I'm going to talk about some of the more modest steps that I think are important to maintain the foundation, I'm going to leave it to Ray and others to talk about the more ambitious and inspiring things. But these are things that I think we need to keep in mind, if we're serious about making progress.

So first of all, I think, there are four categories of things that we need to be thinking about, (1) preventing new nuclear competition and eliminating access. We need to think about steps that can (2) reduce the risk of nuclear weapons use and reduce the salience of nuclear weapons. We need to think about things that can be done to (3) head off proliferation through smart diplomacy and I am thinking about North Korea in particular. And in the later stages, we need to also think about (4) engaging all the nuclear-armed states in the nuclear disarmament process, something that's not happening.

Let me talk a little about preventing new nuclear competition and I want to focus on the U.S. Russian situation. The U.S. and Russia have always led the way whether we like it or not on the nuclear disarmament front. If you're not making progress, there's not much other progress in the global nuclear disarmament realm.

And before the end of his hopefully first term and only term, President Trump and Vladimir Putin will need to decide whether to extend the New START treaty by another four years, which they can do without Duma or Senate approval. It is due to expire on February 5, 2021 or they could decide to negotiate a follow-on agreement.

Or they could decide to chuck it and go forward without any legally binding limits on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals. Now, we may not be all that excited or enamored with the New START treaty, it was a modest agreement. But we've got to recognize that without this treaty, without the verification provision, the transparency attributes, there will be a great deal more uncertainty, worst case scenario planning, and a lot more tensions between the U.S. and Russia.

And if this is the situation and there is no New START treaty beyond 2021 or no new follow-on, the 2020 NPT review conference will be a major disaster in a number of different ways and that has ramifications in other nuclear realm.

So, I think we're going to pay attention to this, we need to think about how we can encourage members of Congress, Democrats and Republicans to support the idea of maintaining the bipartisan consensus for negotiated limits and reductions in the world's two largest nuclear arsenals. And I

think that you know there is a strong tradition, Republicans and Democrats pursuing those goals.

Another thing that we can be pushing for and talking about is when Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin meet some time later this year, we don't know when or where it will be. They can take some steps and make some statements that reduce the tensions between the U.S. and Russia. And one of the things that we've been talking about and are going to try to push with the White House and also the Russians is to try to revive somehow the 1985 statement from Reagan and Gorbachev. It's very basic but very true that the nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought and then given the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons we need to pursue the elimination of nuclear weapons.

I mean, that's a statement that perhaps Donald Trump could get behind for his own reasons and I think even Vladimir Putin. And so, these are some of the things that we should be thinking about in the near front. One of the thing with the U.S. and Russian relationship that's important has been mentioned before, there are some serious differences and disputes about compliance with the 1987 intermediate nuclear forces treaty.

This is somewhat technical and obscure, but the Russians have apparently tested a system that exceeds the limits of this 1987 treaty. And so as long as this compliance dispute exist, it's going to be extremely difficult to get the two sides to sit down in a serious way and focus on other things they need to do to reduce their still excessive nuclear arsenals.

And they do need to focus on the steps to reduce their excessive arsenals. And one of the things that we should be talking about in addition to the high cost of nuclear weapons is the fact that the Pentagon itself believes the United States today has one-third more nuclear weapons than necessary to hold at risk all the targets in Russia and China and elsewhere that we would want to destroy in an exchange. And that we could reduce that number by one-third no matter what the Russians do and the Chinese do and the North Koreans do.

So, one of the things we should be asking members of Congress and raising in the press is given the catastrophic effect, why the United States continues to maintain and plans to replace and in some ways upgrade an arsenal that is one-third more than the Pentagon itself says according to its own logic which I don't necessarily agree with, but according to some logic, we need.

So, these are three things -- three or four things that I think we need to keep in mind with respect to Russia. Let me talk a little bit about North Korea. And what you need to do there.

We have a situation that is a slow-moving crisis. We have the administration coming out with a so-called new policy, it looks a lot like the old policy. And that the fundamental problem is that the administration is trying to apply greater pressure through China without a means for engagement with North Korea.

There have been successful negotiations with North Koreans that have curbed their nuclear program. We haven't seen any such negotiations in a long, long time. So, one of the things that I think we as nuclear

disarmament activists and abolitionists need to be talking about are what are some of the solutions on North Korea? And how do we avoid an accidental nuclear war? Because that's what could happen if there is any sort of high conflict across the DMZ.

So, I think we should not shy away from this issue, it's the issue that is leading the National Enquirer to put this on their cover. It's the issue that is making my daughter ask me questions about this, it's the issue that's on everyone's minds. And we need to think about how we engage on that and make sure that concerns about North Korea and ICBMs don't lead to need or support for holding on to the nuclear weapons that United States has.

Let me say a little bit about the nuclear weapons prohibition treaty, because I think this is an important way that we can talk about how we can reduce the salience of nuclear weapons and the role of deterrence in the future. And, you know, this has been an issue that has -- we've got to acknowledge, has not been a subject that people on Capitol Hill have engaged with -- that people and the American public have engaged with a lot. But we need to think about how we can talk about it in ways that they can relate to and understand and support.

I think one of the things we need to point out is that given the lack of progress by the U.S. and the Russians and then the P5 commitments to nuclear disarmament, there is growing frustration among the world's non-nuclear weapons majority about moving towards the world without nuclear weapons. And the launching of the talks is among other things an expression of frustration about the failure to fulfill these commitments.

So, therefore if the United States, if you're somebody who doesn't want to see this negotiation go forward or you don't want to see more countries join this treaty, your response should be to accelerate action on meeting U.S. commitments to reduce the number and role and salience nuclear weapons.

In addition, the prohibition treaty has been criticized as a distraction from the real work on nuclear disarmament. And I think one of the things that we need to say in response to this is that the real threat to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is not the nuclear weapons prohibition talks, which I think in some ways reinforces and advances the NPT, but is the failure to meet the disarmament obligations in the 2010 action plan.

It's the threat to the nuclear non-proliferation system from North Korea. It's attacks on the joint conference of plan of action that has blocked Iran's possible pursuit of nuclear weapons in the future.

So, we have to acknowledge that in order to attain the world free of nuclear weapons, this is how I speak to people -- to skeptics, it will be necessary at some point to establish a legally binding norm to prohibit such weapons. And as such, the pursuit of a treaty banning development production, possession and use of nuclear weapons is a key step along the way. It's also an important way in which to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons as a military and foreign policy tool. And that's especially important at a time when the risk of nuclear use and nuclear tensions are rising.

So, these are some ways in which I think we need to talk about and think about the nuclear weapons prohibition treaty in the U.S. context and talk to people who are not familiar with it, talk to people who might be

skeptical about it and who are concerned about nuclear threats facing the United States.

Let me just end on a couple of other points about the limits of the prohibition treaty and I don't think anybody here will disagree with this too much, but I think we've got to keep this in mind. Even though it can when it's completed and I think it will be completed within the next year, de-legitimize nuclear weapons in important ways. It's not a substitute for the steps that are going to be necessary to reduce the numbers to reduce risks of nuclear weapons use and to prevent proliferation, particularly in places like North Korea.

And that's going to require important, creative, new kinds of activism and pressure from all of us here in Washington across the United States, and around the world, who are concerned about the nuclear threat.

And we need to think about how we channel the energy that has been created in the context of the prohibition treaty campaign by great activist like Ray and others out here for action in these other areas. And so -- what I'm -- what I'm suggesting is a both end approach here. We need to recognize that the prohibition treaty has an immense amount of value, but there is a whole lot more that we need to accomplish in the years ahead.

So, let me end there, and I look forward to raise comments on your questions and thoughts. Thanks.