



What the Commission Report says on:

ACHIEVING NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: OVERALL STRATEGY

If we want to minimize and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons, the critical need is to change perceptions of their role and utility: in effect, to achieve their progressive delegitimation, from a position in which they occupied a central strategic place to one in which their role is seen as quite marginal, and eventually wholly unnecessary as well as undesirable...

The number of diverse states that must cooperate to make nuclear abolition feasible is too great, and the issues too complex, to allow anything but incremental movement. Here as elsewhere in public policy, inertia tends to be the norm, major change the rarity, and sustaining major change extraordinarily difficult. The real alternative to an incremental approach is not more rapid change, but stasis. But doing nothing is not an option.

The case for action on disarmament was put with stark clarity and simplicity by the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in 1996, and has been repeated many times since:

So long as any state has nuclear weapons, others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain, it defies credibility that they will not one day be used, by accident, miscalculation or design. And any such use would be catastrophic for our world as we know it.

The most productive way forward is a two-phase process – “minimization” [from now to 2025] and “elimination” [beyond 2025] respectively – beginning with the achievement of a world in which the roles and numbers of nuclear weapons are dramatically reduced, though they have not yet completely disappeared...

The Minimization Phase. There are three core features of the “minimization point” which we should be striving to achieve no later than 2025.

Numbers of warheads. The primary defining characteristic of the “minimization point” – although not its only one – will be a massive reduction in the number of nuclear warheads of all types still in existence. The objective must be to cut not only strategic but all classes of weapons, and not only deployed weapons but those in storage and those awaiting destruction (but still capable of reconstitution and deployment) as well. A very ambitious, but not wholly unrealistic, target for 2025 in this respect is a global total of no more than 2,000 such weapons – more than a 90 per cent reduction as compared with the more than 23,000 now in existence (and much greater still as compared with the 70,000 that existed at the height of the Cold War).

Nuclear doctrine. Just as critical as reaching agreement about dramatically lower numbers of warheads will be achieving agreement among the nuclear armed states about how those weapons could ever be used...[I]t is crucial that, at the very least, every nuclear-armed state be unequivocally committed to the principle that the sole purpose of possessing nuclear weapons – until such time as they can be eliminated completely – is to deter others from using such weapons against that state or its allies. We would prefer that sooner rather than later, such declaratory “sole purpose” statements be hardened into unequivocal “no first use” commitments, but acknowledge that there has been an issue in the past as to whether such commitments have been seriously intended. We also believe that clear, meaningful and unequivocal “negative security assurances” should be given by all the nuclear-armed states in relation to non-nuclear-armed states.

The full text of *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Co-chairs Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi (November 2009), is available at www.icnnd.org

Force Posture: deployment and alert status. If doctrinal declarations are to be taken seriously they must be accompanied by appropriate changes to force posture, which in this context primarily means where and how weapons are deployed, and with what degree of launch readiness. The basic objective must be to ensure that, while remaining demonstrably survivable to a disarming first strike, nuclear forces are not instantly useable, with stability maximized by these postures being transparent – well known and understood by friend and potential foe alike.

The Elimination Phase. We might wish there were a straight-line continuum between the world as it now is and a nuclear-weapon-free world, such that if real momentum is generated in the minimization phase it could be expected to carry over into the elimination stage, making it possible to set a specific target date for the achievement of “global zero”. But we have to acknowledge the reality that there will be very large psychological confidence barriers to overcome before all nuclear-armed states are willing to give up all their nuclear weapons, and that given the need to satisfy a number of geopolitical and technical verification conditions, about all of which there is great uncertainty, setting a specific target date for elimination is not likely to be credible or helpful.

To help build political support for many of the measures necessary to reach such a vantage point, and to keep in mind the ultimate objective of eliminating the dangers of nuclear war, the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world must remain visible, and be seen as achievable. The mountain top might be a long way away from what the four U.S. statesmen have called the “vantage point” or “base camp” (essentially what we describe as the “minimization point”) but it is essential that it shine as a beacon in the sunlight, not be left shrouded in mist. That means spelling out in some detail the various conditions – as best we can now assess them – that will need to be satisfied if states are going to be persuaded to take the final steps to abolition. [Section 19 of the report fully discusses these conditions.]

Once the world becomes accustomed to maintaining security at the minimal level we describe, it should become clearer and easier to define and meet those conditions than it is now. But even if the ultimate elimination phase is decades away, it is not too soon now to begin detailed analysis and international debate, to help motivate and inform the work that must generate and sustain momentum for change for many years to come.

Recommendations:

Nuclear disarmament should be pursued as a two-phase process: with “minimization” to be achieved no later than 2025, and “elimination” as soon as possible thereafter. Short (to 2012), medium (to 2025) and longer term (beyond 2025) action agendas should reflect those objectives.

Short and medium term efforts should focus on achieving the general delegitimation of nuclear weapons, and on reaching as soon as possible, and no later than 2025, a “minimization point” characterised by:

- (a) low numbers: a world with no more than 2,000 warheads (less than 10 per cent of present arsenals);
- (b) agreed doctrine: every nuclear-armed state committed to no first use of nuclear weapons; and
- (c) credible force postures: verifiable deployments and alert status reflecting that doctrine.

Analysis and debate should commence now on the conditions necessary to move from the minimization point to elimination, even if a target date for getting to zero cannot now be credibly specified.

[Sections 6,7, Recs 1-3; see also Sections 17,18,19]