A Strategic Plan for Nuclear Disarmament: Engineering a Perfect Political Storm

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ABSTRACT

Rydell surveys two contrasting trends in nuclear disarmament: the lack of progress in eliminating nuclear arsenals and the growth of support for a treaty banning such weapons on humanitarian grounds. Both are guided by “political will.” He describes the uses of this term in General Assembly and NPT deliberations. He stresses the importance of collective action on four levels: grassroots; coalitions of states; the nuclear-weapon states; and a common central forum at the United Nations. To sustain this political will, he argues for a “strategic plan” covering all these levels. Its core consists of activities involving actual reductions and destruction of warheads, bombs, and delivery systems, all undertaken with relevant controls for transparency, verification, irreversibility, universal membership, and legal bindingness. Sustaining it will require a blend of political forces yielding a “perfect storm” of pressures from all four dimensions of political will. The author stresses that prospects for disarmament rest on both ideals and self-interest. The article offers some thoughts on how to counter standard anti-disarmament criticisms and also identifies 10 practical initiatives to advance disarmament. The author relied on primary reference materials from the United Nations, the ban-treaty negotiations, NPT review conferences, and official statements by international officials.

Setting the context

Global nuclear disarmament has been on the international agenda since 24 January 1946, when the General Assembly adopted its first resolution (Resolution 1(I)), which called for the elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons “adaptable to mass destruction.” When the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force in 1970, its states parties – including all its nuclear-weapon States – undertook a legal obligation “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament” (NPT, Article VI).

Yet, 71 years after that historic resolution, “nine states – the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) – possessed approximately 14,935 nuclear weapons, of which 4150 were deployed with operational forces. Nearly 1800 of these are kept in a state of high operational alert” (SIPRI 2017). All are actively modernizing their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems. None is engaged in disarmament negotiations.
None has a government department for disarmament. All have long-term plans for retaining these forces and all are explicitly or implicitly justified by the doctrine of “nuclear deterrence”.

Global concerns over this status quo far exceed the mere numbers involved. Of greatest concern, at both the multilateral and grassroots levels, are the catastrophic humanitarian consequences from the use of such weapons. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) received a Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its many efforts to promote public understanding and support of the “humanitarian initiative,” which led to the negotiation this year of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (ban treaty) (ICAN 2017).

Additional concerns have arisen over the substantial economic cost of these nuclear arsenals. A recent estimate has projected the costs of the US nuclear weapons program alone over the next 30 years “at between $1.25 trillion and $1.46 trillion in then-year dollars, meaning it includes price increases due to inflation” (Arms Control Association 2017). Ironically, the United Nations has estimated that the annual cost of meeting its newly adopted 17 global sustainable development goals to end extreme poverty for 700 million people was also about $1.4 trillion (Guardian, November 18, 2015). The relationship between disarmament and development has long been an issue debated at the United Nations and is the subject of a current draft UN General Assembly resolution (A/C.1/72/L.30 11 October 2017a).

This brief survey of the context of disarmament deliberations (more precisely the chronic lack of them) is not sufficient either to explain the lack of disarmament or to understand what will contribute most to future progress. There is, to be sure, no shortage of detailed professional analyses of the substantive requirements for global nuclear disarmament (Kelleher and Reppy 2011; Blechman and Bollfras 2010; Perkovich and Acton 2009; Larkin 2008). UN General Assembly resolutions over many decades have produced a rather robust consensus that effective nuclear disarmament agreement must satisfy some rigorous standards in verification, irreversibility, transparency, universality, and bindingness (Kane 2013b).

Both within the UN disarmament machinery (i.e., General Assembly’s First Committee, the UN Disarmament Commission, and customarily including the Conference on Disarmament) and at meetings of NPT states parties, delegations address many specific requisites for achieving nuclear disarmament. Deliberations focus closely on such questions as how fissile material should be controlled or prohibited, what should happen to the delivery vehicles, how can security be maintained in a nuclear-weapon-free world, what is the relationship between nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control, and other such substantive questions.

Less attention, actually close to none at all (with the exception of divestment initiatives), is devoted to practical political strategies and tactics to sustain and to achieve a nuclear disarmament process. While there is still a widespread consensus in the world community about the desirability of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world, there are persisting and deep disagreements over how this goal is to be achieved. These contrasting approaches were summarized in the 2013 report of the General Assembly’s Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, which identified five basic approaches: (1) an action
plan; (2) a step-by-step approach; (3) a comprehensive approach; (4) a legally binding framework; and (5) a “building blocks” approach (UN General Assembly 2013).

In the NPT context, its states parties were able to reach a consensus on nuclear disarmament issues three times in the last 22 years.

In 1995, they identified three “measures” to fulfill the disarmament provisions of Article VI: completion by the Conference on Disarmament of a Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) no later than 1996; “early conclusion” of negotiations on a fissile material cutoff treaty; and the “determined pursuit by the nuclear-weapon States of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally” with the ultimate goal of their elimination (NPT 1995).

In 2000, the parties agreed on 13 “practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts” to implement Article VI; these included (inter alia) progress in the following areas: CTBT entry into force; a fissile material cutoff treaty; creating a subsidiary body in the CD on nuclear disarmament; the principle of irreversibility; an “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament”; entry into force of START II and the conclusion of START III; and several additional steps by the nuclear-weapon states that would lead the way to nuclear disarmament “in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all” (NPT 2000).

And in 2010, the parties adopted an “action plan” that included 22 provisions to advance nuclear disarmament, which included principles and objectives; specific actions relating to nuclear disarmament; security assurances; nuclear testing; fissile materials; and other measures relating to civil society, reporting, and education (NPT 2010).

For his part, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon offered in 2008 his own five-point proposal for achieving global nuclear disarmament, stressing the need for either a nuclear-weapon convention or agreement on “a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments” (Ban Ki-Moon 2008).

As described above, the “context” of nuclear disarmament deliberations in all these arenas has focused specifically on the substantive content of future agreements and on actions that the world community expects countries – in particular the nuclear-weapon states – to do in achieving agreed goals in this field.

As apparent in Table 1, these deliberations also reflect widespread recognition of the absolutely essential role of “political will” in achieving nuclear disarmament goals.

As clearly indicated by the broad geographic scope of these remarks, this recognition of the importance of “political will” is virtually universal, including comments by all states possessing nuclear weapons. It is also widely acknowledged in civil society, and it even had a significant role to play in civil society efforts on behalf of negotiations on a ban treaty. As an ICAN spokeswoman once explained, “The current framework provided for multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations has not been able to overcome the lack of political will of nuclear-armed states to comply with their obligations to disarm” (Baqwa 2013). Yet what does this term actually mean in practice?

**The role of political will in disarmament**

Patricia Lewis has defined “political will” in the field of disarmament as “the sustained determination to advance a public interest, even in the face of strong resistance.” Lewis
| Date         | Name                        | Country     | Venue                               | Quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 27 April 2015 | Margot Walström             | Sweden      | NPT RevCon                          | We must not forget that when there has been political will, we have made progress.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 30 April 2015 | Frederick Shava             | Zimbabwe    | NPT RevCon                          | … Zimbabwe underscores the importance of political will to achieve the objective of total nuclear disarmament. The future of this Treaty relies on the political will of its States Parties for its full implementation, as well as the achievement of its universality.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 28 April 2015 | Daniel Ionita               | Romania     | NPT RevCon                          | We call on all delegations to demonstrate the necessary political will to enhance progress on the issue of disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear technology.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 5 May 2010   | Tommo Nonthe                | Cameroon    | NPT RevCon                          | We know that, if there is political will, real and meaningful progress in nuclear disarmament is also possible. It is indeed necessary.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 28 April 2015 | Antonio Patriota            | Brazil      | NPT RevCon                          | For decades, the lack of political will in international disarmament forums made progress near impossible.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 28 April 2015 | Tommo Nonthe                | Cameroon    | NPT RevCon                          | … it is equally easy to point to THE main factor that can over-ride this [impasse]: political will.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 29 April 2015 | Juan Mendoza               | Costa Rica  | NPT RevCon                          | I conclude my remarks by calling the international community to muster the political will, leadership and sense of urgency that we require to rid the world of nuclear weapons.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 6 May 2010   | Angella Brown               | Jamaica     | NPT RevCon                          | … we expect that nuclear-weapon States will … demonstrate the necessary political will to fulfil their agreed responsibility on nuclear disarmament, specifically with respect to Article VI, in good faith and to commence discussions on a treaty, to achieve general and complete disarmament.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 26 September 2013 | Frans Timmermans         | the Netherlands (for members of NPDI) | General Assembly High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament | Sustained, high-level political will is critical to achieving this goal [nuclear disarmament].                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 28 April 2015 | Abdallah Al-Mouallimi      | Saudi Arabia | NPT RevCon                          | … strengthening international peace and security approach requires genuine political will and strong determination from all countries, particularly those possessing nuclear weapons, in order to dispose of the reliance on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as instruments of national security.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 3 May 2010   | Stephen Smith               | Australia   | NPT RevCon                          | … the enduring health of the NPT and its contribution to our collective security will only be maintained by states parties’ political will and concrete action to meet all their obligations and commitments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 27 April 2015 | Javad Zarif                | Iran (on behalf of the NAM)       | NPT RevCon                          | We express our dissatisfaction over the lack of required political will and efforts by the nuclear-weapon States to fully address this legitimate interest [nuclear disarmament].                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Date               | Name                        | Country   | Venue                                           | Quote                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 26 September 2013  | Rolf Nikel                  | Germany   | General Assembly High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament | With political will and determination, we can move ahead on the road towards Global Zero.                                          |
| 26 September 2013  | Salman Khurshid             | India     | General Assembly High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament | We hope that our discussions today would galvanize political will and help channel our collective efforts towards the noble goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. |
| 26 September 2013  | Nawaz Sharif                | Pakistan  | General Assembly High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament | The multilateral disarmament machinery must be strengthened and revitalized. For that we need collective political will. Disarmament cannot progress unless there is a common political will to do so. |
| 14 October 2016    | Louis Riquet                | France    | General Assembly First Committee                | It is not enough to have the political will to pursue this [non-proliferation and disarmament] agenda. We have to have a practical way to pursue this agenda. |
| 17 December 2014   | Rose Gottemoeller           | United States | Statement at Brookings Institution, Washington DC | I do believe that the Conference has the capacity to deliver concrete results when there exists the political will and when members make concerted efforts to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties. |
| 28 June 2011       | So Se Pyong (as President of the CD) | DPRK | Conference on Disarmament, Geneva               | In a word, multilateralism is not obsolete; the key is that all parties should fully demonstrate political will and take steps towards each other rather than pursuing unilateralism or isolationism. |
| 6 October 2017     | Wang Qun                    | China     | General Assembly, General Debate                | We are confident, that if the participants of the process have enough political will, we will be able to successfully complete the necessary preparatory work, agree on the agenda, modalities and a draft outcome document for the Conference during the remaining time. |
| 29 April 2014      | Mikhail Ulyanov             | Russia    | NPT PrepCom                                     | Remaining differences [over establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East] can be bridged with political will on both sides. Will you [USA] muster the political will and capability to deal with this [Iran's nuclear program] in a year? |
| 10 March 2015      | Tobias Ellwood              | United Kingdom | UK Parliamentary debate on the NPT | The imperative today is to exert more political will for further substantial reductions and eventual total elimination of all nuclear stockpiles by all nuclear possessing states. |
| 22 May 2014        | Benjamin Netanyahu (delegation) | Israel | Interview (Bloomberg)                        |                                                                                                                                 |
| 12 October 2017    |                             | Kazakhstan | General Assembly First Committee                |                                                                                                                                 |

1The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative. [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000256421.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000256421.pdf).
2The Non-Aligned Movement. [https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf/Members-and-other-participants.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/pdf/Members-and-other-participants.pdf).
went on to argue that “it is not political will that is lacking – it is agreement on direction that does not exist right now.” (Lewis 2006)

As UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Sergio Duarte, has similarly pointed to this problem of the divergences of political will in this field. He argued,

we find ourselves today ... as rowers in a Roman galleon whose seats are placed in opposite directions. Individually, we diligently slave away at our individual tasks, only to find that our collective efforts are leaving us all right where we started. We are burning calories, not nuclear weapons. [Adding] ... my goal and indeed my role is not simply to row harder, but to find some ways to adjust the seats so that all of our collective labours are directed to the same objective. (Duarte 2008)

In multilateral disarmament arenas today – most notably the UN disarmament machinery and the NPT review process – the world community is divided between two large blocs of states separated by different agendas. The present author has described this as a “tale of two cultures”:

One consists of a block of States that value nuclear weapons, view them as status symbols, regard them as essential for their – indeed, global – security, and as the “ultimate insurance policy” in a dangerous and unpredictable world. The other consists of a somewhat larger block of States that views nuclear weapons as abhorrent, morally indefensible to either have or to use, a source of catastrophic humanitarian threats, and a drain on financial and technical resources better directed at addressing compelling social and economic needs ... In terms of communication between these two cultures, we have seen two familiar patterns. Either a “dialog of the deaf”, or a “dialog of the like-minded” – with each embedded with their own respective silos of information, priorities, alliances and even common bonds of language. (Rydell 2017)

Actually, these two blocs largely agree on the common “goal” of global nuclear disarmament. Yet a single word summarizes their disagreements over the means to achieve it. The possessors of nuclear weapons and their allies support progress “towards” disarmament. They often refer to disarmament as an “ultimate goal.” For them it is a purely aspirational aim, non-binding, a distant dream or hope. For them disarmament must necessarily follow as a conclusion of a lengthy “step-by-step process” involving the prior solution of such challenges as world peace, global security, an end to all regional strife, and some say, an end to war itself. Other common metaphors used for this include the “building block” or “progressive” approach (UN Disarmament Commission 2016, Variations abound).

A larger group of non-nuclear-weapon states, by contrast, supports progress “in” disarmament. They are willing to support a “step-by-step process” only insofar as it involves the actual implementation of disarmament commitments: namely, the reduction and elimination of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems, the closure of relevant facilities and sites, and the withdrawal of fissile material and its peaceful disposition under safeguards – all undertaken in a phased, time-bound framework (UN General Assembly resolution L.18 2017b).

While the members of each bloc have each displayed strong political will in defense of their respective positions, the contrasting ends of each group have resulted in the inability to sustain any consensus beyond the general desirability of achieving, one day, a nuclear-weapon-free world. Hence the commonly held refrain about the “lack of political will” being the reason for the lack of disarmament.
Toward a strategic plan for disarmament

... the total lack of any common and coherent strategy to deal with nuclear weapons may well present the greatest danger to life on Earth. (Kofi Annan 2016)

The current disarmament stalemate within multilateral diplomatic arenas will likely persist unless there is a profound change in the political circumstances in which the relevant deliberations are conducted.

The multilateral diplomatic process is largely adrift at present toward an uncertain destination. The nuclear-weapon states have no plan for achieving nuclear disarmament, nor any demonstrated interest in preparing one. The non-nuclear-weapon states clearly understand what steps could legitimately be viewed as “real” disarmament, yet lack an organized strategy for actually getting those steps implemented. In recent years, the “humanitarian initiative” has been framing nuclear disarmament as an imperative under the international humanitarian laws and norms, and this has helped to ensure that support for disarmament is here to stay. Yet it remains uncertain if this new wave of support for disarmament will ever be reflected in a transparent, irreversible, verified, universally observed, and binding disarmament process. The basic question remains, “how do we get there?”

Regardless whether one supports progress “towards” or “in” disarmament, both stances would benefit from the development of a “strategic plan” to achieve their concrete objectives. There is no sign that any such plan exists in either camp, as the possessors proceed with their own plans for indefinite retention and modernization, and the non-nuclear-weapon states proceed to itemize actions that must be taken without addressing the political circumstances necessary to achieve them.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson defined “strategic planning” as a particular organizational capability:

... to look ahead, not into the distant future, but beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crises of current battle; far enough ahead to see the emerging form of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them. (Williams 2010)

At a minimum, strategic planning requires a clear set of goals, tools for assessing progress in achieving those goals, a capability of forging coalitions of support, the marshaling of resources necessary to make the disarmament enterprise sustainable, a coherent and compelling message for the public, a capacity to create networks across borders and among diverse interest groups, and an ability to adjust collective activities in the event of inefficiencies or ineffectiveness.

The primary (but not exclusive) location of this strategic planning process for disarmament must necessarily be at the level of the nation state. As Jayantha Dhanapala once put it, “The central challenge of our time is not to achieve the end of the nation state, but to rehabilitate the ends of the nation state” (Dhanapala 2001). While “the UN can do many things,” said Sergio Duarte, “it cannot replace or compete with the vital need for concrete action at the level of state policy and practice, which is shaped and influenced in diverse ways by an informed public” (Duarte 2008). Yet strategic planning remains relevant at all levels of political activity, from grassroots to global, which helps to explain why the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has a “strategic planning unit” as do about 20 other offices in the UN secretariat.
It is inconceivable that global nuclear disarmament can ever be achieved without a serious strategic planning process in the states that possess nuclear weapons, in consultation with their allies. The complex activities that collectively define the disarmament agenda will obviously require considerable cooperation not just among different parts of the government, but also specialized laboratories, factories, military facilities, and the legislature. It will require a disarmament budget, benchmarks, timetables, deadlines, and the political and organizational means to fulfill existing commitments.

A national strategic planning process for disarmament will arguably require the establishment of offices or departments charged with implementing disarmament functions – entities that currently do not exist in any state that possesses nuclear weapons (the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency was abolished in 1997). Surely the negotiators of disarmament agreements will require strong institutional support from their governments. This suggests a need for specialized expertise and information inside the relevant bureaucracies of negotiating states, both to support the negotiators and to help in resolving conflicts that may arise inside and between government agencies with different mission priorities, constituencies, and institutional interests. (Rydell 2005)

Yet there are two even greater challenges facing the strategic planners of disarmament. The first is to find ways inside governments to bridge the enormous gap between a country’s formal international commitments and its actual day-to-day policies and governmental actions, a particularly severe problem in nuclear-weapon states and among their allies. Speaking in New Zealand as UN High Representative for Disarmament, Angela Kane praised the country, whose “domestic laws, regulations, policies and public and civic institutions are fully consistent with your country’s international commitments” (Kane 2014b). Her statement elaborated the concept of “congruence” in the field of disarmament, surely a worthy objective of any strategic plan.

The second great challenge in this planning process is to treat disarmament as a means of serving the national security interest rather than just a foreign policy goal. The NATO alliance has elaborated at length over many years what it calls its “strategic concept” that encompasses a prominent role for nuclear weapons (NATO 2016). The alliance, however, has no “strategic concept of nuclear disarmament” (Kane 2013a). Neither NATO nor any nuclear-weapon possessor state currently treats nuclear disarmament as a matter of defense policy, advancing core national security interests. Yet the defense community and military will no doubt have enormously important roles to play in the future process of disarmament, especially in such areas as transparency, irreversibility, and the maintenance of security in a nuclear-weapon-free world. Under the UN Charter (Article 26), the Security Council, with the assistance of its Military Staff Committee, is “responsible for formulating … plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.” Such plans have never been submitted.

A perfect storm for disarmament on four dimensions

Unfortunately, neither nuclear disarmament nor the establishment of a strategic planning process for nuclear disarmament will be possible without that long-missing ingredient, political will – or more precisely, focused, collective political will.
The metaphor of a “perfect storm” is admittedly overused, but it can serve a useful purpose in establishing the outlines of a kind of “ideal type” of political circumstances that can most productively lead to the achievement of global nuclear disarmament. Novelist Sebastian Unger has defined the term as follows, “I use ‘perfect’ in the meteorological sense: a storm that could not possibly have been worse” (Junger 2009). In the case of disarmament, a perfect storm would constitute a confluence of political forces strong enough to overcome deeply entrenched political, psychological and institutional interests and habits in retaining nuclear weapons. Who are its participants?

Level 1 (bottom-up). The first political constituency is the general public – the voters, taxpayers, and potential victims. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan once called a strong civil society “the new super-Power” (Annan 1998). The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to ICAN in 2017 was clearly in recognition of the substantial effect that that organization had in mobilizing both public opinion and international support for the negotiation and conclusion of the ban treaty. Its effectiveness was no doubt related to its success in fostering cooperation among diverse groups across many national borders. By promoting the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament, the campaign was able to appeal to new constituencies outside the traditional disarmament groups, including human rights activists, environmentalists, women, religious leaders, youth, and many professional groups and associations, most notably in the medical community. The impact of civil society groups – over many years and in many countries – has been thoroughly documented by Lawrence Wittner (Wittner 2009). He found these groups especially important in influencing public opinion and in shaping the form and at times the content of public policy. As of November 2017, the international membership of one NGO, Mayors for Peace, has grown to 7469 cities in 162 countries and regions. Also in 2017, ICAN has an extensive international membership of 468 partners in 101 countries.

Level 2 (outside-in). Fortunately, civil society groups did not have to bear the entire burden of advancing the cause of nuclear disarmament. Coalitions of like-minded states have also had a significant impact, most certainly on the terms of disarmament debates but also in shaping diplomatic expectations for progress in specific areas. These groupings function a bit like caucuses or political parties in a legislature. At the UN, the New Agenda Coalition (currently consisting of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, and South Africa) is a classic example of such a network in action, both at the UN General Assembly’s First Committee and in the NPT review process. The General Assembly has adopted their co-sponsored resolutions by overwhelming majorities. The UK/Norway Initiative has shown how nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states can cooperate in addressing the challenge of verifying compliance with disarmament commitments. Since 2010, the 12-member Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) has worked to advance these goals in the NPT framework. The 120-nation Non-Aligned Movement has championed nuclear disarmament since its creation in 1961. At the UN, there are also several regional groups of states that have adopted common positions on disarmament issues. There is a De-Alerting Group in the General Assembly. Australia has also served as the voice of a group of 29 states in favor of a “progressive approach” involving the inclusive engagement of the nuclear-weapon states. Working in partnership, ICAN’s network of civil society groups and a coalition
of member states gained the support of 127 states for the “Humanitarian Pledge,” which paved the way for the negotiation of the ban treaty in 2017. At the NPT Review Conference in 2015, Austria read a “Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons” on behalf of its 156 national co-sponsors (Joint Statement 2015). This shows the coalition-building that has been underway with the humanitarian initiative.

Level 3 (top-down). Disarmament can also advance as a result of enlightened leadership by states possessing nuclear weapons. President Obama’s declaration in 2009 of “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons” helped to raise the priority and visibility of nuclear disarmament as an international issue, though it was followed by a large nuclear weapon modernization program and yielded little progress in disarmament (Obama 2009). Sometimes such initiatives are joint ventures with non-governmental organizations, as is the case with the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, a public–private partnership between the US State Department, the Nuclear Threat Initiative, and 25 countries. In 1991/1992, the “Presidential Nuclear Initiatives” of Presidents George H. W. Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin unilaterally acted to reduce dramatically deployments of tactical nuclear weapons and to de-alert strategic bombers (Koch 2012). France closed its nuclear test site and stopped producing fissile material for weapons. The UK has also stopped testing, halted production of fissile material for use in weapons, and limited the size and readiness of its nuclear arsenal. Though none of these steps has eliminated nuclear weapons, they at least show the possibilities for unilateral, bilateral, and plurilateral action by the possessor states. The idea of real progress in nuclear disarmament without these states is not credible. Kazakhstan has recently proposed “to convene a summit of all states possessing nuclear weapons to collectively discuss further steps towards their nuclear disarmament and attaining nuclear-weapon-free world” (Abdrakhmanov 2017).

Level 4 (central). Political action at this “central” level focuses on initiatives launched in multilateral institutions, like the UN disarmament machinery and the NPT review process. In a very real sense, these venues also provide a forum for new cooperation and joint action at the three other levels. Civil society groups meet, share ideas, and launch proposals that they seek to advance both to individual states, groups of states, and relevant international organizations. Initiatives at this level can include specific disarmament proposals by the UN Secretary-General, as illustrated by Ban Ki-Moon’s five-point proposal in 2008.

**Achieving and sustaining the perfect storm**

Disarmament will survive for two reasons: it works, and it is the right thing to do. It fuses together into an integrated whole the two forces that make the world go round: self-interest and idealism. And it does so better than any other approach for dealing with weapons. (Kane 2014a)

Past advances in the field of disarmament have been due to a combination of political forces that have relied on a delicate blend of idealism and realism. On the one hand, disarmament is indeed justified as the “right thing to do” – an activity that has a strong
foundation in ethics, morality and law. Yet on the other hand, its justification also rests on its substantive practical merits in serving genuine security interests. It is the combination of these benefits that gives disarmament a future in our very dangerous and uncertain world.

The humanitarian initiative championed by ICAN, affiliated groups, and numerous governments successfully led to the ban treaty and this in turn will set the stage for further progress in this field. The formula for sustaining and expanding this progress will require persistent cooperation and coordination among groups at the grassroots (both within and across national borders), among coalitions of states, and some interest or support from the higher echelons of government in states that possess nuclear weapons. It is this interplay of power, interest, and shared values that will determine outcomes in central multilateral institutions, notably the United Nations, whose very existence is to strengthen international peace and security while fostering the development and maintenance of multilateral norms.

The two greatest political challenges facing disarmament advocates relate to the needs to diversify and expand their constituency bases. Disarmament cannot succeed based exclusively on lobbying efforts by peace and disarmament groups. Advocates have justifiably every reason to believe that they have, and can certainly find, allies in countless sectors of society. This need for diverse support groups exists even inside the United Nations. According to a recent Chatham House report, the fate of disarmament will affect virtually all the other formal mandates of the United Nations, including: climate change; development; international law; gender; protection of cultural heritage; public health; the problem of non-state armed groups; humanitarian action; and cybersecurity (Lewis, Unal, and Aghlani 2016). The message for disarmament advocates: mobilize the by-standers, at all political levels. Expand the base.

One of the great mysteries about disarmament is why the business community remains one of the few sectors of society to display no interest in disarmament, a mystery only deepened by growing public awareness of the catastrophic consequences for the citizens and economies of countries that become victims of a nuclear attack. The common self-interest of the business community makes it a logical future ally in the disarmament cause, potentially a “sleeping giant” with much to contribute in expanding support for disarmament efforts.

One specialized business sector, however, remains as a major obstacle to disarmament; namely, the various companies that produce the commodities used in the manufacture and development of nuclear weapons. These firms, along with specialized laboratories, government offices, legislators from districts hosting nuclear-weapons facilities, and certain military sectors, together constitute the nuclear-weapon complex, a variation on what President Dwight Eisenhower called the “military industrial complex” (Eisenhower 1961).

The disarmament community has no such institutional infrastructure; Alva Myrdal’s observation decades ago that “Disarmament interests have nowhere had strong organisational backing” remains true today, especially in the nuclear-weapon states (Myrdal 1976). Non-proliferation and “nuclear security” are different stories – they have acquired their own institutional support networks deeply embedded in governments, especially in states possessing nuclear weapons. Yet in such states, there are no
disarmament agencies, no disarmament budgets, no legislative disarmament committees, no disarmament laws or regulations, and no disarmament plans.

The future of disarmament will therefore require a growing public awareness not just of the catastrophic horrors of nuclear weapons or their immorality, but also the growth of a perception of self-interest and public gain from the elimination of such weapons. The antidote for the nuclear-weapon complex would be a disarmament complex – a vast, diverse, and expanding network of individuals, groups, and countries pressing persistently for disarmament in the public interest.

An important, indeed politically indispensable, component of this new complex is a robust “defense conversion” plan encompassing public policies to convert nuclear-weapon facilities to peaceful uses. While there were some academic studies on this subject after the fall of the Soviet Union (Reppy and Pilat 1994), the conversion process deserves far more attention both inside and outside the government. The goal here is to discourage those who work in these weapon facilities from perceiving disarmament as a threat to their communities, livelihoods, and personal futures. This is another example of how the political winds of this perfect storm must be driven both by ideals and recognized interests.

Recognizing real interests will help in expanding networks of support. But the disarmament community also has to do a lot better job of monitoring and refuting common criticisms that have been aired against it literally since the dawn of the nuclear age. This is a challenge both of public relations and education. Angela Kane has identified what she called a “disarmament taboo” even inside the United Nations – under this taboo, many non-governmental groups and parts of the UN family are reluctant to embrace disarmament as an issue relevant to their organizations (Kane 2014c). They avoid disarmament because they see it as divisive, utopian, controversial, or impractical.

Unfortunately, the messaging problem in disarmament has become somewhat of a “hardy perennial” (a term Dag Hammarskjold used to apply to disarmament) at the UN and elsewhere. In his Chautauqua Lecture of 2010, Sergio Duarte identified 12 commonly heard criticisms found in standard anti-disarmament tracts written over many decades (Duarte 2010). He called them the “Dirty Dozen” and listed them accordingly:

(1) Disarmament is utopian and impractical.
(2) Disarmament is dangerous, undermining nuclear alliances.
(3) Disarmament is a lower priority than non-proliferation or counter-terrorism.
(4) Disarmament is irrelevant – certain states or non-state actors will never comply.
(5) Disarmament is best seen as only a distant goal.
(6) Disarmament deprives us of nuclear weapons to keep the order and deter war.
(7) Disarmament is unenforceable.
(8) Disarmament is unverifiable, as cheating will occur and go undetected.
(9) Disarmament would open the way for conventional wars.
(10) Disarmament would lead to an expensive increase in conventional arms.
(11) Disarmament should only apply to states that are unreliable.
(12) Disarmament ignores the reality that nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented.

Though each of these dictums can be strongly disputed, too often they are accepted as iron truths and left without challenge. The disarmament community must accept some
responsibility for this, since it has failed to articulate the full case for disarmament based on fundamental principles of security. A disarmament agreement that is verifiable, irreversible, transparent, with universal membership, and legally binding will do far more than any other single initiative (or combination thereof) to prevent the use of nuclear weapons. As has been repeated many times in language adopted by consensus at NPT Review Conferences, “the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons” (NPT Final Document 2010, 21). The greatest security benefit from nuclear disarmament – implemented in accordance with accepted disarmament norms – is that it will not only make the use of nuclear weapons less likely, but impossible.

As for the familiar claim that a nuclear-weapon-free world would be less stable and secure than our world today – with its “contagious” (Ki-Moon 2008) doctrine of nuclear deterrence – the world community has long recognized that nuclear disarmament must be accompanied by progress on other security fronts. At the UN, this is apparent in its handling of the concept of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control” (GCD), which first appeared on the General Assembly’s agenda in 1959 (Resolution 1378) and which has officially become the world’s “ultimate objective” in disarmament (UN General Assembly 1978). It is now found in a dozen multilateral treaties including the NPT.

In the GCD framework, nuclear disarmament is part of a holistic ensemble of initiatives and goals encompassing the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms control, limits on military spending, and measures to promote compliance with the UN Charter’s norms concerning the use of force and the peaceful settlement of disputes (UNODA 2016). As noted earlier, the disarmament process is further strengthened by verification, transparency, irreversibility, universality, and legal bindingness. It is the totality of these measures, with nuclear disarmament as the highest priority, that makes GCD a compelling security concept and that best responds to the ill-informed mantras of the Dirty Dozen.

As for some specific components of our perfect storm, Table 2 offers examples of practical actions that would help to advance nuclear disarmament goals in possessor states.

**Conclusion**

This essay has sought to explain how the achievement of global nuclear disarmament will require sustained political activities at virtually all levels of political life, but most especially at the grassroots, among coalitions of states, and involving the leadership of the nuclear-weapon states. It will require a central forum to serve as a kind of “melting pot” for these myriad political activities – a common venue for the development and maintenance of global norms in this field. Logically, that venue is the United Nations.

It will require participants in this process to challenge unjust or inaccurate criticisms of disarmament, including those underpinning the stubborn persistence of the “disarmament taboo”. This will require a collective effort among groups and states to inform the public, to advance disarmament education in the schools, and never-ending efforts to diversify and expand the coalitions of individuals, groups, and states working to advance disarmament.
Salvador de Madariaga, who headed the disarmament office in the League of Nations secretariat, once wrote, “The problem of disarmament is not the problem of disarmament. It really is the problem of the organization of the World Community” (Madariaga 1929). The degree of cooperation and coordination between states will indeed have an important bearing on the future of disarmament, but the reverse is also true: progress in disarmament will do much to strengthen international peace and security, build trust and confidence, reduce the likelihood of major civilization-ending wars. And this is the ultimate argument pointing to the need for a perfect storm in disarmament.

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Notes on contributor

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