

“Nuclear Futures? Realities and choices”

4 Sworn Men (and The Canberra Commission) by Maj Britt Theorin

The proliferation of nuclear weapons, of nuclear weapons material and the knowledge about nuclear weapons have brought us to a dangerous point. The world is focussed by the possibility that the most deadly weapon ever created will fall into the hands of dangerous people. Deterrence has lost its credibility and become more of a threat than a protection. That is what the former Secretaries of State and Secretaries of Defense, George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn wrote in January a year ago. They proposed a series of steps in order to get rid of nuclear weapons. Now they have received support from other prominent American politicians such as Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell and Robert McNamara.

Security of nuclear weapons is deficient. In August 2007 six cruise missiles armed with nuclear weapons were loaded on an American Air Force plane, were flown over the whole continent and were unloaded. For the whole of 36 hours no-one knew where those nuclear weapons were or even that they had disappeared.

These are the realities but where are the choices?

The Canberra Commission

The Canberra Commission, – 16 men and one woman (myself) – convened by the government of Australia in 1995, presented a realistic way of getting rid of all nuclear weapons. Canberra Commission did not set the goal of “reduction” or “non-proliferation” of nuclear weapons, but the goal of “a nuclear weapon free world”, as the four prominent Americans have done 12 years later.

No state should feel at any stage that further nuclear disarmament is a threat to its security. To this end nuclear weapons elimination should be conducted as a series of phased verified reductions that allow states to satisfy themselves, at each stage of the process, that further movement toward elimination can be made safely and securely.

The first requirement (so says the Canberra Commission) is for the nuclear weapon states to commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of nuclear weapons, and agree to start work immediately on the practical steps and negotiations required for its achievement. The commitment by the nuclear weapon states to a nuclear weapon free world must be accompanied by a series of practical, realistic and mutually reinforcing steps. The Canberra Commission, like the four Americans, pointed to the specific responsibility of the USA and Russia (who have 95% of all the nuclear weapons of the world) to show leadership.

The recommended steps that can be taken immediately, which will significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, are:

- Taking nuclear forces off alert
- Removal of warheads from delivery vehicles
- Ending deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons
- Ending nuclear testing
- Negotiations to further reduce US and Russian nuclear arsenals
- Agreement of no-first-use undertakings by nuclear weapon states, and
- Agreement of non-use against non-nuclear weapon states.

The Canberra Commission presents those proposals in detail, and suggests thereafter a plan of action to prevent further horizontal proliferation, development of verification arrangements for a nuclear weapon free world and cessation of the production of fissile material for nuclear explosive purposes.

The time has now come to bring those proposals to the table again.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences, 2000 and 2010

At the NPT Review Conference in 2000, an agreement was reached – signed by all member states, including the nuclear weapons states – on 13 steps to get rid of all nuclear weapons. They reflect in practice the proposals of the Canberra Commission. Even if the Review Conference in 2005 failed, the agreements from 2000 are still valid and should be taken up again. With a new administration in the USA there should be a possibility for such a process to be set in train, and thereby prevent the insanity of nuclear weapons ever being used pre-emptively, by accident or against non-nuclear weapon states.

The upcoming NPT Review Conference in 2010 must be prepared in good time not only by governments, who have to be pressed to present their own initiatives to implement the agreement from 2000, but also by civil society.

First of all we must agree on the goal, a nuclear weapon free world. Thereafter, to work out practical realistic steps towards this goal. And then, to develop measures to reach every step.

The Canberra Commission proposals are described and found not only in the NPT 2000 13 steps, but also partly in the proposal that has come from the “four sworn men”. The goal for the four sworn men and of the Canberra Commission is clear – to get rid of all nuclear weapons. (The Blix Commission repeated many of those proposals, but did not have the same goal.)

A very good example of successful work is how the international lawyers against nuclear weapons managed to get nuclear weapons declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in the Haag. They informed civil society and politicians in many different countries, worked in the corridors of UN, and wrote a report laying out all the arguments why nuclear weapons were both illegal from the point of view of the law, and acted against the Court itself. This was work that was ongoing for several years, but it yielded results. The combined work of civil

society, professionals and politicians led the way to reaching the goal they had set.

In a similar way, civil society and the peace movement managed in the 1980s to stop deployment of medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe, which were designed to reach the enemy in five minutes. When journalists, who found out in which cities in Europe these weapons were to be deployed, wrote articles about this in the local press, public opinion reacted strongly. Hundreds of thousands went out into the streets on peace rallies all over Europe, protesting the deployment of medium-range nuclear weapons. People were not foolish. They realised that they would be victims if nuclear weapons were ever used in their own city. Once again, a combination of professionals, in this case journalists, the peace movement and public opinion gave a result.

When the Cold War was over, many seemed to believe that nuclear weapons were gone. Not at all! The possession of nuclear weapons by any state is a constant stimulus to other states to acquire them. And as the four elderly Americans say, this has brought us to a dangerous point.

This is what must be done, in my view:

- every stupid argument for nuclear weapons must be combated
- all the facts and risks about nuclear weapons – practical, juridical and political – must be described
- a strategy must be worked out for as many individual countries as possible
- professionals must work together with politicians and parliamentarians
- public opinion must be informed of the necessary arguments to use with governments

I am convinced that there are enough scientists, journalists, lawyers, politicians, peace movement activists, and public opinion, who want to contribute now to a world free of nuclear weapons for their children and grandchildren.

Those are the realities but also the choices.

Maj Britt Theorin PhD h.c.
Former ambassador for disarmament
Former Member of the Swedish and European Parliame
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