

Reaching Critical Will's Report on the UN Security Council Summit on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, 24 September 2009

Introduction

On 24 September 2009, US President Obama chaired a [UN Security Council](#) meeting on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It was a great opportunity for heads of state from the fifteen members of the Council—including the five permanent members and nuclear weapon states China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States—to make concrete commitments to nuclear disarmament and lay out the steps toward a nuclear weapon free world.

Unfortunately, these governments instead used the Summit to lay out their vision for stricter requirements for non-nuclear weapon states to prove they are not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. As [UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown](#) said during his General Assembly statement: *"Britain will insist that the onus on non-nuclear states is that in future it is for them to prove they are not developing nuclear weapons."* [Russian President Medvedev](#) emphasised the importance of "modernizing" the global non-proliferation regime. [French President Sarkozy](#) stated, "whatever the opposition, at a certain moment we will all have to unite to adopt sanctions and to ensure that Security Council and United Nations decisions are complied with."

Yet at the same time, the five permanent members did not extend any new commitments for themselves to eliminate nuclear weapons in compliance with their legal obligation to do so. There was some very strong rhetoric in favour of nuclear disarmament from some of the P5—most notably, [US President Obama's closing statement](#): "And no matter how great the obstacles may seem, we must never stop our efforts to reduce the weapons of war. We must never stop until we see the day when nuclear arms have been banished from the face of the Earth. That is our task. That can be our destiny. We will leave this meeting with a renewed determination to achieve that shared goal."

But this rhetoric was not matched with action-oriented items in the resolution adopted at the Summit.

The resolution focused nearly exclusively on strengthening existing non-proliferation measures and advocating new, more stringent requirements for proof of non-proliferation, while at the same time requiring no concrete nuclear disarmament steps by the nuclear weapon states. The only reference to disarmament in the operative paragraphs of the resolution simply reiterates Article VI of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. As signatories to the NPT, the five permanent members of the Security Council are already bound by this obligation. Meanwhile, the resolution sought to empower the UN Security Council to impose new non-proliferation commitments on non-weapon states, beyond those in the NPT.

The problem with promoting non-proliferation without disarmament

The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is already a discriminatory Treaty. It was designed as a "grand bargain" between those who possess nuclear weapons (they agree to give up their weapons) and those who don't (they agree never to acquire nuclear weapons and in exchange are granted access to technology and materials for nuclear energy). Unfortunately, progress on disarmament has not been seriously undertaken in good faith as the Treaty proscribes. Some nuclear weapon states have reduced their stockpiles over the years, but the steps toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons adopted in 2000 have gone unfulfilled. Meanwhile, non-nuclear weapon states have not only been expected to uphold their end of the bargain, but are now facing pressure from the nuclear weapon states to accept even more stringent requirements and commitments in order to be afforded their right to use

or develop nuclear energy.

While President Obama's vision for a nuclear weapon free world is commendable and welcome, his rhetoric must match his government's policy. Elites in the United States and its some of its allied states have come to see nuclear weapons as more of a problem for than a solution to the maintenance of their hegemonic order. The threat of more states acquiring nuclear weapons overrides the privileged position it currently affords the few that have them. The nuclear powers, therefore, have begun to lead a campaign for increased non-proliferation and arms control, citing the elimination of nuclear weapons as their "ultimate" goal but focusing for the foreseeable future on aggressive measures they believe are necessary to prevent the emergence of new nuclear states.¹

Proving this point, not all nuclear weapon states are on board even in rhetoric to a nuclear weapon free world. In his statement to the Summit, [French President Sarkozy](#) stopped short of calling the campaign for a nuclear weapon free world a fantasy. He argued, "we live in the real world, not a virtual one. We say that we must reduce. President Obama himself has said that he dreams of a world without nuclear weapons. [Yet] before our very eyes, two countries are doing exactly the opposite at this very moment." He went on to complain about Iran and North Korea's nuclear programmes, without acknowledging that North Korea has minimal nuclear capabilities and that Iran has no nuclear weapons nor an immediate capability to produce them. For Sarkozy, the way to "confer credibility on our commitment to a future world with fewer nuclear weapons and, perhaps one day, a world free of nuclear weapons," is to "have the courage together to declare sanctions against countries that violate Security Council resolutions."

Reactions to this approach from the Summit delegates

Reaching Critical Will was not the only entity to recognise the problems with the nuclear power's approach to non-proliferation and disarmament. Several delegates at the Summit highlighted the importance of focusing on disarmament in tandem with non-proliferation.

[President Museveni of Uganda](#) noted, "it is clear that the possession of nuclear weapons is the main cause of other countries wanting to acquire them. It is not logical to say that a few of us should possess nuclear weapons and others should not." [Japan's Prime Minister Hatoyama](#) pointed out that despite the world's wish for the abolition of nuclear weapons, "nuclear-weapon-holding states still possess large nuclear arsenals." [President Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica](#) noted:

While we sleep, death is awake. Death keeps watch from the warehouses that store more than 23,000 nuclear warheads, like 23,000 eyes open and waiting for a moment of carelessness. Death is incited and spurred on by those who perfect weapons of mass destruction instead of destroying them, and by those who each year allocate tens of billions of dollars to vertical proliferation.

The [Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency](#) reiterated the importance of recognising "the intrinsic link between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation," noting, "By demonstrating their irreversible commitment to achieving a world free from nuclear weapons, the weapon states can greatly contribute to the legitimacy of the non proliferation regime, and gain the moral authority to call on the rest of the world to curb the proliferation of these inhumane weapons."

Solutions proposed during the UN Security Council

¹ For more analysis of this situation, please see Darwin BondGraham, "[Anti-Nuclear Imperialism: The New Face of Nuclear Armed Empire is Quickly Taking Shape](#)," *Sung A Lot of Songs*, 1 September 2009 and Darwin BondGraham and Will Parrish, "[Anti-nuclear Nuclearism](#)," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 12 January 2009.

Several delegates at the Summit made concrete suggestions on how to move forward in a balanced manner. Most emphasised the importance of maintaining all three pillars of the NPT and endorsed some of the non-proliferation and nuclear energy aspects of the resolution. However, many also made specific proposals regarding disarmament, which did not make it into the resolution.

1. [President Arias Sánchez](#) was the only delegate to the Summit to remind the Council of its commitment under Article 26 of the UN Charter to promote “the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.” [Viet Nam’s President Nguyen Minh Triet](#) pointed out that global military expenditure has increased 45 per cent over the past decade, “while expenditures for nuclear armament have been many times greater than those for Millennium Development Goals, which were set to prevent and mitigate, *inter alia*, hunger, the degradation of the environment, adverse climate change and pandemics affecting the lives of billions of human beings.”
2. [International Atomic Energy Agency Director General ElBaradei](#), [President Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica](#), and [President Calderón Hinojosa of Mexico](#) argued that in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the proliferation and misuse of other weapon systems must be addressed.. ElBaradei encouraged the UN Security Council to “put more emphasis on addressing the insecurities that lie behind many cases of [nuclear] proliferation, such as endemic conflicts, security imbalances and lack of trust,” while President Arias Sánchez noted that every day the world spends \$3.5 billion on weapons and soldiers and that every year “\$42 billion in conventional arms are sold to developing nations, where weak or non-existent democracies are incapable of satisfying the most basic needs of their peoples.”
3. [President Mesić of Croatia](#) suggested:
 - Supporting a multilateral contractual system related to nuclear arms control and disarmament “which includes strict implementation and strengthened verification of contractual obligations; and
 - Calling upon UN member states to “contribute to activities aimed at preventing the abuse of existing treaties and at strengthening anti-proliferation efforts and resources.”
4. [Austria’s President Fischer](#) expressed his support for a Nuclear Weapon Convention “equipped with a sophisticated verification mechanism.” He noted that in the meantime, the NPT needs to be strengthened, institutionalized, and universalized. President Fischer also called on the nuclear weapon states to reduce their arsenals and for all states to strengthen trust and confidence through nuclear weapon free zones and transparency.
5. [Viet Nam’s President Nguyen Minh Triet](#) called for:
 - Bilateral, multilateral, and unilateral plans for “early and substantial reductions of nuclear stockpiles” and for negative security assurances;
 - “an early commencement of negotiations on an international nuclear disarmament agreement in which those countries having largest nuclear arsenals must take a leading role in nuclear disarmament;”
 - Nuclear weapon states to support the protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone;
6. [China’s President Hu](#) recommended that all nuclear weapon states should:
 - fulfill their Article VI obligations;
 - “publicly undertake not to seek the permanent possession of nuclear weapons;”

- continue their nuclear reductions;
- abandon nuclear deterrence policies based on first use of nuclear weapons;
- commit to firm, unconditional, legally-binding negative security assurances;

He also suggested the international community:

- develop “a viable long-term plan composed of phased actions, including the conclusion of a convention on the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons;” and
- refrain from double-standards in non-proliferation.

7. [Japan’s Prime Minister Hatoyama](#) called on nuclear weapon states to reduce their arsenals and to disclose information on their arsenals in the interests of confidence-building to create a “virtuous cycle for further nuclear disarmament.”

8. [Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdoğan](#) called on nuclear weapon states to uphold their “unequivocal undertaking” to “accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons” by building on Article VI of the NPT and the 13 practical steps agreed upon in 2000.

9. Both [Turkey and Libya’s representatives](#) called for the establishment of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. Ambassador Shalgham of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

10. [Ambassador Shalgham of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya](#) also suggested that the IAEA inspect all states, including those possessing nuclear weapons.

WILPF’s recommendations

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom released a statement before the meeting, calling on the UN Security Council members to make serious commitments to disarmament along with their requests on non-proliferation. WILPF continues to call upon Council members—and all other members of the United Nations—to work toward a nuclear free world through real, concrete actions and commitments. For example:

1. The UN Security Council should call for a **halt to development, production, design, modernization, and acquisition of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems.**
2. It should also fulfill its commitment to **formulate a plan for nuclear disarmament with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources**, as it is instructed to do in Article 26 of the UN Charter.
3. The context of all **non-proliferation measures should be designed as steps toward the elimination of nuclear weapons**, not toward their indefinite possession by an elite group of states.
4. The UN Security Council should urge governments to accelerate and enlarge their support for development of commercially viable renewable and non-carbon emitting sources of energy and to **phase-out nuclear power**, as a measure strengthening both non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.