

# Moral and Political Necessities for Nuclear Disarmament

## An Applied Ethical Analysis

*Thomas E. Doyle II*

### Abstract

In the preparatory meetings for the 2015 Review Conference (Rev-Con) of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), the nuclear abolition or disarmament movement has urgently reiterated the demand that nuclear-weapon states (NWS) must live up to their Article VI commitments as defined by the 1995 and 2000 RevCons' final reports.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, this demand is predicated on a *humanitarian imperative* to prevent the horrific effects of nuclear war or nuclear-weapon accident.<sup>2</sup> The term *humanitarian imperative* is the most recent expression of a long-standing moral demand by the global antinuclear movement that the human and environmental suffering resulting from nuclear war or accident constitutes a supreme moral evil and, perhaps, a supreme moral emergency.<sup>3</sup> The NWS have resolutely resisted this demand, in part because they fear the effects of instability and insecurity that might result from nuclear abolition.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the results from all of the NPT RevCons have demonstrated that the demand for nuclear abolition has failed to pressure the NPT NWS to act beyond strategically and politically prudent nuclear arms reductions. Moreover, some of the NPT NWS have initiated nuclear-weapons modernization projects, which indicate their sustained commitment to nuclear deterrence for the indefinite future.<sup>5</sup>

The current political contest between antinuclear global civil-society groups and the NPT NWS raises two focal questions. First, assuming nuclear disarmament is truly a humanitarian and moral imperative, what are the policy preconditions for effective implementation? The academic and policy literature offers a variety of answers to this question that is important to review. A second and more important question is

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Thomas Doyle is an assistant professor of political science at Texas State University. His research focuses on the intersection of international security and international ethics. His recently published book is titled *The Ethics of Nuclear Weapons Dissemination: Moral Dilemmas of Aspiration, Avoidance, and Prevention* (Routledge, 2015).

to what degree do such policies ensnare the NPT NWS in unanticipated violations of international ethical imperatives? In particular, is it possible to undertake nuclear abolition in a morally responsible manner if at least one ethical imperative is genuinely violated in the very effort to realize it?

This article begins with preliminary remarks on the latest efforts by some global civil-society groups to reframe nuclear abolition as a humanitarian imperative. It then argues that nuclear disarmament is not likely to happen merely because of the concerted expressions of moral demand by moral entrepreneurs and global civil-society groups. This is not to say that moral pressures from such groups are not necessary. On the contrary, the NPT NWS are not likely to reconsider their nuclear options without such pressures. Rather, the demand must be conjoined to a series of political interactions among rival NWS that resolve, transcend, or significantly mitigate their security, status, and trust dilemmas. In other words, the morally required end of nuclear abolition might tragically ensnare nuclear-armed rivals in a range of moral and political dilemmas that might involve significant instances of moral violation. If this paradoxical outcome is realized, then the paramount question for all involved is how to satisfy the moral imperative of nuclear abolition in ways that are not morally irresponsible.



## **Nuclear Disarmament as a Humanitarian Imperative**

On the sixty-ninth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, 6 August 2014, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) released a joint statement titled “Remembering Hiroshima: Nuclear Disarmament is a Humanitarian Imperative.”<sup>6</sup> This statement reiterated resolutions agreed upon by the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 2011, which expressed deep concern “about the destructive power of nuclear weapons, the unspeakable human suffering they cause, the difficulty of controlling their effects in space and time, the threat they pose to the environment and to future generations and the risks of escalation they create.” It also appealed to states to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again and to pursue negotiations that prohibit and completely elimi-

nate nuclear weapons based on exiting commitments and international obligations.<sup>7</sup> This expressed a long-standing concern of the global anti-nuclear movement, namely that nuclear war or other large-scale nuclear accidents inherently constitute a grave moral evil for humankind.<sup>8</sup>

Several other global civil-society figures and groups were subsequently motivated to echo this statement, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu. In a recent publication of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Tutu echoed the moral call for nuclear abolition and addressed what he believes to be the central and most stubborn question of today: why NWS need nuclear weapons. His answer was twofold: 1) Cold War inertia and 2) a stubborn attachment to the threat of brute force to assert the primacy of some states over others.<sup>9</sup> For Tutu, these two answers fall short of genuine military or moral necessity. Rather, the answers suggest, as United Nations general secretary Ban Ki-Moon stated, “There are no right hands for wrong weapons.”<sup>10</sup> Recalling the anti-apartheid campaign he helped start and lead, Tutu called for measures to repeal the apartheid-like Nonproliferation Treaty regime and to ban nuclear weapons altogether. To do this, he called for an irrepressible groundswell of popular opposition along with intense and sustained pressures from non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS): “By stigmatizing the bomb—as well as those who possess it—we can build tremendous pressure for disarmament.”<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the ICRC, IFRC, and ICAN demand is reiterated in the context of an international nuclear order in which the likelihood of nuclear abolition appears remote. As several scholars and policy experts have argued, the last seven decades have comprised the longest period of great power peace in modern history, and it seems no accident that such a peace corresponds to the period of great power nuclear deterrence. Even so, the ICRC, IFRC, and ICAN statements seem to reaffirm the antinuclear community’s continued belief in the argument made by Lawrence Wittner that the foremost political precondition for nuclear abolition is a sustained, determined, and organized global civil-society movement that will not take “no” for an answer.<sup>12</sup> Yet, even Wittner suggests that a global antinuclear movement might not be able to overcome all the political obstacles to reach a complete nuclear abolition. If such pessimism is correct, then one needs an account of the other preconditions that would be necessary or sufficient. Such preconditions have already been suggested in the *Final Report of the 2000 NPT Review*

*Conference*, such as the effective establishment of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty (CTBT), a fissile materials cut-off treaty (FMCT), establishment of a nuclear abolition committee within the Conference on Disarmament, and continued nuclear arms reductions that can be reliably verified.<sup>13</sup>

However, the NPT NWS appear as reluctant to move on these concrete disarmament measures as they are to act on nuclear abolition itself. For instance, the conservatives in Congress have successfully blocked consideration of the CTBT and FMCT since the Clinton administration.<sup>14</sup> And while the early rhetoric of the Obama administration reaffirmed the ultimate objective of a complete and irreversible nuclear disarmament, that rhetoric also made clear that the United States would be the last NWS to abolish its nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup> For their part, the British government seems ready to reauthorize their Trident nuclear missile program.<sup>16</sup> The French government is also committed to retaining its nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. Although London and Paris have reduced their nuclear arms stockpiles down to the low hundreds, both governments seem intent on waiting to do further reductions until significant increases in international security and stability are forthcoming.<sup>17</sup>

Two considerations arise in light of the NPT NWS's reluctance to move on these and other concrete disarmament preconditions. One is that their reluctance is linked in part to their ensnarement in a set of dilemmas of political and moral import. If this is true, it implies that honoring a humanitarian imperative has both political and moral costs. This means that it is possible to act on a humanitarian imperative in a morally (and politically) irresponsible manner. A second and related consideration is that greater and more serious attention to the general analysis of the political preconditions might hold the key to pursuing nuclear abolition in a morally and politically responsible manner. It is important, however, to test this intuition to determine if realizing any or all of the preconditions for nuclear abolition might constitute or produce potential violations of international ethics.

## **Concrete Policy Measures for Nuclear Disarmament**

Many experts and security scholars believe that nuclear disarmament requires a gradual series of preliminary confidence-building measures

undertaken by the NWS and key NNWS. These measures are considered crucial for decreasing mistrust among rival NWS—rewarding their cooperation, and thereby making it more likely that the NWS’s verbal commitments to nuclear disarmament will be enacted. The 13 steps outlined in the *Final Report of the 2000 NPT Review Conference* comprise the most succinct and authoritative list of such measures.<sup>18</sup> The 13 steps were the product of intense lobbying of the NPT NWS by the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) states, which formed in 1998 and were originally comprised of the foreign ministers of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa, and Sweden.<sup>19</sup> The NAC 1998 declaration claimed that the NPT NWS had made insufficient progress on their NPT Article VI disarmament commitments in the three years following the 1995 indefinite renewal of the NPT and the time had come to specify concrete measures that would count as good faith efforts to honor those commitments. As evidenced by the 2000 RevCon Final Report, the NAC succeeded in convincing the NPT NWS to commit to the 13 steps, which are:

1. immediate and unconditional commitment to a CTBT;
2. verifiable moratorium on all nuclear testing until the CTBT’s entry into force;
3. immediate effort within the Conference on Disarmament to bring into force a treaty on banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear explosive devices in a reliable and verifiable manner, otherwise known as the FMCT;
4. immediate effort to establish the mandate for nuclear disarmament within the Conference on Disarmament;
5. commitment by all states to applying a principle of irreversibility on nuclear disarmament;
6. “unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament, to which all States parties are committed under Article VI”;
7. immediate undertaking to advance the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties between the United States and Russia, and the strengthening of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which had been in force since the Cold War period;

8. completion and implementation of the Trilateral Initiative between the United States, Russian Federation, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);
9. taking of concrete steps by all NWS toward nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability and security, such as
  - a. unilateral nuclear arms reductions,
  - b. increased transparency in the same,
  - c. continued reductions of tactical nuclear weapons, stocks,
  - d. de-alerting of nuclear weapons,
  - e. diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in national security doctrines, and
  - f. engagement by all NWS in good faith negotiations toward nuclear disarmament;
10. placement by all NWS of fissile material no longer required for military purposes under IAEA verification protocols;
11. reaffirmation by all NWS of the ultimate objective of nuclear abolition;
12. regular reports by all NPT states parties on the progress in implementing Article VI; and
13. further development of verification capabilities that will ensure compliance by all to their NPT obligations.<sup>20</sup>

The reader might notice the apparent redundancy in this list, insofar as points 4, 6, 9, and 11 repeat the nuclear abolitionist demand in different ways. Clearly, the NNWS sought to emphasize that each step counts as an important indicator of the NPT NWS's commitments to nuclear disarmament. Yet, at least some NWS are as reluctant to commit to the 13 steps as they are to ascribe to nuclear abolition itself. Thus, it should be emphasized that the most important preconditions of nuclear disarmament actually precede the realization of the 13 steps. Indeed, realizing the steps or nuclear abolition prior to instantiating these preconditions would be morally and politically irresponsible, leading to a reinvigoration of nuclear proliferation among the great powers.

### **Preconditions of the Concrete Policy Measures for Nuclear Disarmament**

This section of the article examines the preconditions that an array of scholars have identified as preliminary to the undertaking of measures

in the 13 steps. This examination presumes that these preconditions make it possible for the NWS and key NNWS to undertake the 13 steps and ultimately nuclear abolition in a morally and politically responsible manner. Several key questions emerge about these preconditions with the aim of determining if morally responsible nuclear disarmament remains an elusive aspiration.

### **Vigilant Civil-Society Activism**

First and foremost, it is highly unlikely that any NPT NWS will conform their policies to any of the 13 steps unless a sufficient number of their citizens put organized and sustained disarmament pressures on their respective governments. As Lawrence Wittner remarks

Given the tension between the widespread desire for nuclear disarmament and the national security priorities of the nation-state, nuclear policy usually has proved a rough compromise, unsatisfactory to either the nuclear enthusiast or critic. Often it takes the form of arms control, which regulates or stabilizes the arms race rather than bringing it to an end. . . . What, then, will it take to abolish nuclear weapons? As this study suggests, it will certainly require a vigilant citizenry, supportive of peace and disarmament, groups that will settle for nothing less than banning the Bomb. . . . [Additionally], we need to do no more (and should do no less) than change that [pathological nation-state] system.<sup>21</sup>

Wittner recognizes that neither the NWS's interests in unconditional nuclear armament nor the antinuclear movement's interests in unconditional nuclear disarmament have prevailed. Rather, a compromise position of *nuclear restraint* has emerged, which is an internationally regulated regime of nuclear deterrence and nonproliferation.<sup>22</sup> Of course, a perpetual regime of nuclear restraint is inconsistent with the NPT NWS Article VI commitments as defined by the 13 steps. Article VI asserts one of the NPT's grand bargains: that in exchange for the NNWS remaining non-nuclear, the NWS state-parties commit to negotiations in good faith to the end of realizing nuclear disarmament. Even so, Wittner argues that states are not likely to act adequately on their Article VI commitments without a passionate and vigilant antinuclear movement. And since state leaders can effectively resist disarmament pressures because the *pathological state system* incentivizes such resistance, Wittner argues that the antinuclear movement must also work to change this system in significant ways, such as strengthening international law and organization.<sup>23</sup>

Wittner's analysis echoes the institutionalist analysis of Ethan Nadelmann, who argues that global civil-society pressures to strengthen international law and organization are jointly necessary to produce changes in state behaviors.<sup>24</sup> Citing cases of the international prohibitions of piracy, privateering, and the slave trade, Nadelmann traces five stages of regime evolution. First, he finds the targeted activity (piracy, slavery), which state actors continue to regard as legitimate, is subjected to constraints only by reason of prudence or the balancing of other interests. The second stage involves sustained civil-society efforts to stigmatize the activity, for example to redefine the activity as evil instead of good. This stigmatization effort is usually led by moral entrepreneurs, for example international legal experts, religious leaders, or public intellectuals. The third stage involves unrelenting advocacy by states won over to the prohibitionist cause to criminalize the activity via international convention. Convinced states might undertake diplomatic pressures, offer economic inducements, threaten military action, or otherwise push for a formalized prohibition instrument. The fourth stage involves the creation and coming into force of the relevant prohibition regime, with the corresponding enforcements against the activity having now been established as legitimate. The fifth stage involves the corresponding decline of the activity to no more than obscure or marginal levels.<sup>25</sup>

If Nadelmann's and Wittner's analyses are correct, vigilant antinuclear movement pressures are indispensable to the realization of the CTBT, the FMCT, the agreement on a principle of irreversibility, and the rest of the 13 steps. The necessary and sufficient conditions of establishing this global civil-society pressure are difficult to achieve. For this reason, such a movement cannot be distracted by partial victories or the political tidal waves that have often redirected policy makers' focus—such as 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Prospect of Deterrence Failure and Deterrence Destabilization**

Another precondition of the 13 steps and nuclear abolition is the conviction among policy makers and scholars that nuclear deterrence policies are increasingly likely to fail the longer the deterrence regime lasts. A corollary awareness is that nuclear reprisal strikes are very likely to follow any nuclear deterrence failure. In 1986 Joseph Nye admitted that “even if nuclear deterrence has lasted for nearly four decades, it is difficult to believe that it will last forever.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, there is an increasing historical



awareness that US nuclear deterrence policies often destabilized regions and rivalries more than not. According to Francis Gavin, nuclear weapons frequently “nullified the influence of other, more traditional forms of power, such as conventional forces and economic strength, allowing the Soviet Union to minimize the United States’ enormous economic, technological, and even ‘soft power’ advantages. Nuclear weapons also changed military calculations in potentially dangerous ways. It has long been understood that in a nuclear environment, the side that strikes first gains an overwhelming military advantage. This meant that strategies of preemption, and even preventive war, were enormously appealing.”<sup>28</sup>

Gavin’s two-part observation suggests that deterrence failure is multifaceted. First, overreliance on nuclear deterrence can erode a country’s general deterrence posture, leaving it vulnerable to decreases in overall influence and power. In other words, nuclear weapons empower with one hand and disempower with the other. Additionally, Gavin suggests that the conventional understanding of deterrence failure—for example, where US deterrence fails at the point the Russians or another nuclear-armed power launches a nuclear first strike—is incomplete. It fails also if the United States succumbs to the temptation to launch a preemptive or preventive nuclear strike to gain the overwhelming military advantage. This latter case does not merely count as a failure of Russia or another country’s nuclear deterrence policy; such a first strike also incentivizes the attacked country’s reprisal strike, which the United States most definitely would want to avoid.

Clearly, the elimination of nuclear weapons is the most straightforward method of preventing nuclear deterrence failure. Not only would the absence of nuclear weapons cease to produce destabilizing effects that erode a country’s general deterrence posture, their absence would also make nuclear reprisal strikes necessarily impossible. If the entire purpose of a nuclear-deterrence regime was to prevent nuclear war and if deterrence cannot last forever, then rational policy makers should deduce (independent of civil-society pressures) that nuclear disarmament must be undertaken. Accordingly, the knowledge of the possibilities of deterrence failure seems essential to cultivating the motivation or determination to realize the 13 steps. Even so, the global antinuclear movement might also have to pressure policy makers toward this understanding, because those policy makers would remain pathologically wed to

national-security thinking over and above what history and probability recommend.

### Security Dilemma Sensibility

A third precondition is suggested by Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler's concept of security-dilemma sensibility.<sup>29</sup> The superpowers' nuclear strategies during the Cold War were often explained as a function of the *security dilemma*, in which state A's decision to augment its (nuclear) force posture generates sufficient insecurities in state B such that B in turn develops or augments its own (nuclear) forces. In Booth and Wheeler's view, this conventional definition of security dilemma is conceptually confused insofar as it describes a paradox more than a dilemma. In contrast, a security dilemma is a two-level strategic predicament that characterizes decision situations.<sup>30</sup> The first level of the dilemma involves a policy maker's uncertainty about the motives, intentions, and capabilities of rival or neighboring states. State B, for example, observes that state A augments its nuclear force posture, and State B is uncertain if that posture is meant for deterrence only or if it might also support an offensive nuclear capacity. The intentions of state A are opaque to state B's leaders. Accordingly, the second level of predicament is the policy makers' uncertainty about the proper response to their rival's perceived threats. State B might or might not do well by developing or augmenting its own nuclear forces. This is to say, if A's augmentation is for deterrence only, B might get away with not responding in kind. However, can B trust that A's intentions are limited to deterrence? If not, then B must respond in kind, even if A initiates a subsequent round of nuclear force increases.

In this vein, history suggests that state leaders are intensely aware of their own nuclear predicaments and dilemmas, but they generally lack empathy regarding their rivals' predicaments and dilemmas. Moreover, state leaders are unaware of how their own aggressive policies activate fear and mistrust in their rivals. For instance, it was only after Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan began to develop a modicum of mutual trust that Reagan came to understand that Moscow genuinely feared Washington.<sup>31</sup> Thereafter, the two leaders cultivated a mutual awareness and sensitivity that largely facilitated the historic Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987.<sup>32</sup> From this case, Booth and Wheeler concluded that

Gorbachev sought . . . to enter into the counter-fear of Western policy-makers by designing a set of policies aimed at fundamentally changing Western threat perceptions. His unilateral promise to cut those combat forces that most worried NATO planners . . . was arguably the most dramatic act of reassurance made during his time in office. The episode is a fascinating example of security dilemma sensibility because it demonstrated that leaders can take steps to increase their security which, far from decreasing the security of their potential adversary, actually increases the sense of security felt by both sides.<sup>33</sup>

In light of this analysis, it would not be surprising if the INF Treaty would have been included on the 13 points' list of arms-control measures had not Gorbachev and Reagan already concluded it. This point suggests that security-dilemma sensibility is indispensable for realizing in a morally responsible way any of the concrete measures for nuclear disarmament—much less an irreversible nuclear disarmament itself.

### **New Security Narrative(s)**

The foregoing preconditions are more likely to take root if the basic and traditional security narratives that comport with the present international order are revised or replaced by new security thinking. The debate among security theorists in the last several years reflects this contestation over the need to replace mainstream national or collective security thinking with conceptions that broaden or deepen the pool of *referents of security*.<sup>34</sup> This is to say, a new international relations security narrative that might undergird political efforts to achieve the 13 steps might replace realism and its exclusive focus on state security or even a broader conception of alliance security with a liberal or constructivist notion of human security. Indeed, this alternative security paradigm is suggested by Desmond Tutu's and the ICRC's and IFRC's invocation of the humanitarian imperative.<sup>35</sup>

But perhaps the most pertinent form of new security thinking for the purposes of nuclear disarmament arose with the conception of common security advanced by the Palme Commission in 1982, which concluded "there can be no hope of victory in a nuclear war, the two sides would be united in suffering and destruction. They can survive only together. They must achieve security not against the adversary but together with him. International security must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on a threat of mutual destruction."<sup>36</sup>

This statement suggests that conventional national-security thinking leads policy makers to believe that security is necessarily produced by the

actions taken *against* one's adversary. This belief is conditioned by the history of predatory or expansionistic state behavior in which the functions of force—for example, defense, deterrence, and compellence—comport with securing against such predation.<sup>37</sup> In Olof Palme's view, however, the conventional security conception is exploded in the wake of nuclear war. The mutual assuredness of destruction for the United States, the Soviet Union, and innocent third parties renders the notion of military victory empty. On the one hand, nuclear war is not a zero-sum game; it is a negative-sum game for all involved. Security, on the other hand, must be a positive-sum game in the nuclear era. Collective security realizes a modicum of security among allies; common security aims to realize security among rivals and enemies.<sup>38</sup>

The case of Gorbachev is once again illustrative. He had exposure to the new thinking of the Palme Commission and the antinuclear thinking of the Pugwash Conferences.<sup>39</sup> In light of the various and severe economic and political challenges facing the Soviet Union at the time, Gorbachev began to see Soviet security not in terms of constantly being *against* the United States but *with* it on matters of joint concern. And although Soviet economic decline weighed heavily on his mind, it was this new thinking that enabled Gorbachev to act contrary to conventional national-security wisdom, to initiate conciliatory policies towards the United States at the very time Reagan was undertaking a significant arms buildup, and eventually to persuade Reagan of the necessity of eliminating nuclear weapons from the world.<sup>40</sup>

The upshot is that it is dangerous and morally irresponsible to compel the NWS's adherence to the 13 points and ultimately nuclear disarmament in the absence of new security thinking. Any leader who remains committed to the old security thinking is likely to look for opportunities to cheat or subvert an imposed disarmament mandate. In contrast, leaders motivated by new security thinking are not likely to look for such opportunities but rather seek to fulfill their disarmament commitments.

### **Willingness to Accept the Risks of Vulnerability**

A fifth and related precondition of the 13 points and nuclear disarmament is the willingness of heads of state to take the risks of vulnerability to induce a virtuous cycle of reciprocal acts of cooperation and trust. For Booth and Wheeler, a durable order of international cooperation

and trust depends upon a mutual willingness to put something valuable under another actor's control.<sup>41</sup> It is expected that such willingness is not immediately forthcoming on matters of vital national security, such as on the possession and control of decisive weapons systems and related technologies. Unless state leaders have adopted a new and common security framework or unless they are otherwise pressured to do so, we would not expect leaders to take the kinds of risks necessary to start a virtuous cycle of cooperation and trust.

Yet, security cooperation cannot occur without a minimal level of trust among rivals or enemies. Immanuel Kant frames this as a point of normativity in his Sixth Preliminary Article for Perpetual Peace: "No state at war with another shall allow itself such acts of hostility as would have to make mutual trust impossible during a future peace."<sup>42</sup> Ostensibly, the collective interest among the NWS in nonproliferation and war avoidance has already established a modicum of trust such that each has put something valuable into the other's hand. The question is if the civil-society antinuclear pressures, the sober knowledge of the fragility of nuclear deterrence, an initial security-dilemma sensibility, and perhaps a commitment to some new security thinking will pave the ground for the kind of willingness to become vulnerable suitable to realize the demands of the 13 steps and, ultimately, the Article VI demands of nuclear disarmament.

The previously mentioned case of Gorbachev's moves toward conciliation illustrates the effectiveness of his risk taking in this regard. His unilateral decision to initiate arms reductions put at risk the notion of Soviet strategic parity with the United States. Additionally, when Reagan refused to reciprocate by putting his plan for strategic missile defense, or Star Wars, at risk, Gorbachev felt he had no other reasonable alternative but to "make further conciliatory moves."<sup>43</sup> Such moves included freeing Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, putting much of the authoritarian system of Soviet governance at risk. Eventually, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed on the INF Treaty, even though Reagan never backed off of his insistence on Star Wars. The upshot is that the willingness to make oneself vulnerable to an adversary is more likely to secure the central objective of disarmament, even if the conciliation cannot reach to all other matters that might have importance.

## **A Joint Set of Preconditions**

As important as every precondition listed above is, each is more likely to have substantial or maximal effect if it is activated in concert with all the others. For instance, the security-dilemma sensibility mutually exhibited by Gorbachev and Reagan lasted as long as these men held office. Afterward, the return of security-dilemma insensibility strained the relationship between the United States and Russia, such that Pres. Barack Obama and Russian president Vladimir Putin seem unable to exercise mutual empathy. Even the common security framework and cooperation that has marked the European Union for a number of years is fraying under the pressures of nationalism and mistrust.<sup>44</sup> In the absence of irresistible and permanent civil-society pressures, a firm and lasting conviction in the inevitable failure of nuclear deterrence or new security thinking that displaces the old, it seems that any attempt on leaders' parts to cultivate security dilemma sensibility will be eventually undermined.

Yet, the global civil-society demand for nuclear disarmament (even though it is not yet irresistible or permanent) on the moral grounds of a humanitarian imperative would likely insist that states that are committed to the ends of nuclear disarmament are committed to the means of disarmament. If the end cannot be achieved in one ambitious and risky step, then it must be achieved by means such as what are suggested by the 13 steps. Moreover, if those steps cannot be accomplished in turn, then the aforementioned demand is translated into one in which states must commit themselves to the knowledge that nuclear deterrence is likely to eventually fail, that new security thinking is in order, and that the security dilemma is better addressed by conciliation rather than security against one's enemies. Otherwise, the complex project of nuclear disarmament cannot be undertaken in a morally and politically responsible manner. "What do international ethics tell us about the project of states committing to these preconditions," is the next question to ask. Is there a harmony among the moral end of nuclear disarmament and the means to achieve it, or do we find competing moral principles at play that render the prospect of realizing the preconditions morally problematic?

## **Moral Ends and Moral Means for International Institutions—A Set of Ethical Dilemmas**

In his *On the Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that any legitimate and sure principle of government aims at bringing together “what right permits with what interest prescribes so that justice and utility are in no way divided.”<sup>45</sup> Rousseau suggests that the terms *interest* and *utility* refer to morally desirable outcomes and *right* and *justice* refer to actions that morality would affirm. By making this argument, his aim is to link a concept of legitimacy in governance with the harmony of moral ends and means. The statements by the moral entrepreneurs of nuclear disarmament, like the ICRC, IFRC, and Archbishop Tutu, appear to assume as moral fact what Rousseau proposes conditionally. This is to say, the antinuclear movement appears to believe that an immediate and complete nuclear disarmament satisfies utility and justice such that it is necessarily a morally and politically responsible policy or, in the absence of an immediate and complete disarmament, that an immediate compliance with the 13 steps reflects the moral harmony of ends and means and is thus morally and politically responsible. The argument here is just the opposite; preliminary steps must be taken before adopting the 13 steps and before nuclear disarmament itself can be accepted as morally and politically responsible. This argument can be tested against a series of objections.

### **Is Inducing a Fear of Nuclear Holocaust Morally Responsible?**

Ultimately, one important precondition for realizing the 13 steps and nuclear disarmament is mobilizing citizens from several NWS and NNWS into a global antinuclear movement to demand action. Accordingly, it seems important that moral entrepreneurs and global civil-society leaders must first *securitize nuclear weapons* among individuals who would join this movement. The act of securitization involves a securitizing agent mobilizing an audience via speech acts to perceive a *threatening* other’s act or posture as an extraordinarily dangerous and thereby extract the audience’s permission to take emergency security measures.<sup>46</sup> In our case, the securitizing agents are the leaders of the global antinuclear movement and the initial audiences that must be addressed are the present and potential members of this movement.<sup>47</sup> Afterward, the roles change somewhat: the main audience of the securitizing agent (which is now the antinuclear movement as a whole) is

comprised of governments and citizens of the NWS and key NNWS. The purpose of the securitization in both stages is to cultivate in the audience a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust such that the movement's members can mobilize a sustained and irresistible demand for nuclear disarmament and the NWS will accede to the movement's demands. However, cultivating such fear risks producing a collective psychological trauma among the audience that might count as moral harm to them. Is the cultivation of this kind of fear permissible on humanitarian moral grounds? Is it morally responsible?

The answers to these questions are morally complicated. It must first be recalled that the securitization of nuclear weapons is undertaken in the context of their prior deployment by the NWS for war fighting, deterrence, or compellence purposes. These deployments were emergency security measures undertaken after the various NWS governments had effectively securitized their enemies to their respective citizenries. Recall that the United States securitized the Soviets as godless communists bent on expansion; the Soviets securitized the United States as ravenous capitalist expansionists.<sup>48</sup> For many Americans and Europeans, the fear of nuclear war in the aftermath of deterrence failure was palpable, and some observers made the argument that the experience of this fear counted as a significant moral harm.<sup>49</sup> For his part, Steven Lee argued that the immorality of nuclear deterrence is principally found in the practice of *nuclear hostage holding*, where innocent civilians are put at risk of nuclear war without their consent. For Lee, this meant nuclear deterrence is immoral even if the hostages are unaware of their condition and accordingly do not suffer a collective psychological trauma. Nonetheless, he claimed that causing such psychological trauma provides another reason for reproaching hostage holding.<sup>50</sup> Given this context, how should our considered moral judgments regard the seeming necessity of the *countersecuritization* of nuclear weapons by the antinuclear movement's leaders and the corresponding production of a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust among movement members—and later among citizens of the NWS?

Moral consequentialism might claim that the production of this fear is necessary and therefore morally justifiable or excusable. After all, it was Reagan's fear of nuclear holocaust, seemingly activated by watching a prescreening of the film *The Day After*, that began the long process of his willingness to listen to and ultimately cooperate with Gorbachev on



nuclear reductions and the INF Treaty.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Wittner demonstrates that an appeal to motives independent of fear of nuclear holocaust has been insufficient to mobilize the kind of public outcry that can influence state nuclear policy.<sup>52</sup> In both cases, the motivating fear haunts the actors and drives them to extraordinary actions to prevent the occurrence of the object of their fear. Thus, it seems morally necessary to cultivate a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust among the members of the antinuclear movement and then citizens of the NWS.

In contrast, it seems a deontological ethical approach might offer reasons both for and against cultivating this fear. On the one hand, it is at first sight morally wrong to inflict psychological trauma on people, for it violates their human rights of personal security to be free from the threat of harm. Moreover, in accordance with the wrongful intentions principle, it is wrong for antinuclear movement leaders to intend to cause psychological trauma among their followers and then on other individuals.<sup>53</sup> Another deontological principle requires that evil should never be done in order to realize a good.<sup>54</sup> If this view is decisive, then it is morally irresponsible or immoral to cultivate a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust in *anyone*.

Conversely, one might distinguish between kinds of intentions and their respective moral valences—namely, the intention to prevent nuclear holocaust in contrast to the intention to cultivate a relevant fear for the purposes of effective antinuclear advocacy. In this view, the intention behind the countersecuritization of nuclear weapons is straightforwardly aimed at human security and the just liberation of nuclear hostages. In the nonideal setting of a nuclear-armed world, it seems that a right intention aimed at doing what is right can excuse or perhaps justify in moral terms the kind of act that is ordinarily impermissible—especially if the audience that is responsible for exercising the requisite political pressure to achieve nuclear disarmament consents to the imposition of that fear. If this view is decisive, then it is morally responsible or required to cultivate a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust.

It follows from the preceding four paragraphs that the decision to cultivate such a fear is hostage to competing moral requirements and, accordingly, antinuclear movement leaders are caught in a moral dilemma. They violate at least one deontological principle if they decide to cultivate a fear of nuclear holocaust, and they violate at least one consequentialist and one deontological principle if they decide against

such action. In the absence of an authoritative metatheoretical argument that can adjudicate this controversy, it seems that cultivating a concrete and palpable fear of nuclear holocaust is not a clear morally responsible course of action.

### **Is the Cultivation of Security Dilemma Sensibility Morally Justifiable?**

It has been argued that the cultivation of security-dilemma sensibility among the leaders of rival NWS and key NNWS is important for their adherence to the 13 steps and ultimately achieving nuclear disarmament. At first glance, the exercise of security-dilemma sensibility is morally uncontroversial, as it aims at producing greater stability and security and it also seems to comport with the positive formulations of the wrongful intentions principle and the never evil for good principle.<sup>55</sup> However, it is important to recognize two significant political difficulties of cultivating security-dilemma sensibility among state leaders and then determine if these difficulties have moral import.

One difficulty is cultivating security-dilemma sensibility in the face of determined foreign opposition. In a real sense, the cultivation of security-dilemma sensibility is a constituent part of inculcating new security thinking—for example that my state's security is better conceived in terms of *with* and not *against* our rivals and enemies. Well-known cases include the French and British resistance to Pres. Woodrow Wilson's attempts at conciliation with Germany in the talks leading up to the final creation of the League of Nations in 1919, President Reagan's initial reaction to Soviet general secretary Gorbachev's attempts to begin the process of nuclear arms reductions and nuclear disarmament, and the Israeli and Sunni Arab states' resistance to President Obama's outreach to Iran regarding the latter's nuclear program. From the Booth and Wheeler account of the Gorbachev case, it is clear that the Soviet leader was not dissuaded by Reagan's initial resistance, and Gorbachev eventually succeeded in facilitating Reagan's own empathetic stance toward the Soviet dilemmas. However, the political difficulties of fostering security-dilemma sensibility do not override the moral imperative to do so.<sup>56</sup>

Another difficulty is cultivating security-dilemma sensibility in the face of determined domestic political opposition. It is easy to recall a handful of well-known and relevant cases in US history where attempts at exercising empathy and conciliation were opposed and sometimes

defeated: the resistance by President Reagan's foreign policy advisors and members of the Republican Senate toward his empathetic response to Gorbachev and his success in getting a subsequent Democratic Senate to ratify the INF Treaty, Pres. Bill Clinton's failed efforts at getting a Republican Senate to ratify the CTBT, and the bipartisan resistance to President Obama's outreach to Iran over that country's nuclear program. In each of these cases, the domestic opposition lacked empathy for the insecurities of the Soviets, the NNWS, and the Iranians, respectively. Thus, if the only practical option for reversing their insensitivity to others' security dilemmas is to securitize nuclear weapons in the mode discussed in the previous subsection, then we reengage the question on the moral responsibility or irresponsibility of cultivating the requisite fear of nuclear holocaust among the domestic disarmament opponents. Alternately, if another practical option is to politically marginalize one's domestic opponents and render their opposition irrelevant, then the moral dilemma of securitization is avoided and the state leader can proceed to act in ways that are empathetic. This course of action, however, might trigger the issue of the morality of inducing state vulnerability.

### **Is Inducing State Vulnerability Morally Responsible?**

Theorists of international regimes claim that security cooperation can be fostered by a state seeking to reassure its rivals or enemies by sending a costly signal.<sup>57</sup> In Gorbachev's case, he sent a series of costly signals in the form of concessions to the West that made the Soviets vulnerable. However, Gorbachev took the gamble because he did not believe the West would attack if the Soviet Union acted in a nonprovocative way.<sup>58</sup> His domestic opponents believed the opposite or at least believed the West would not bypass an opportunity to take advantage of the Soviets. Collectively, the Soviet leadership was uncertain about the US response. Reagan reciprocated Gorbachev's costly signal with his own willingness to proceed toward nuclear disarmament.<sup>59</sup> In hindsight, it is clear the outcomes of Gorbachev's costly signals were positive for disarmament advocates, and this gives credence to the idea that his actions were morally responsible.

However, each decision about sending costly signals to rivals or enemies and inducing vulnerability of one's state is made in the context of uncertainty about some future act of reciprocation. Unless several rounds of confidence-building measures have already been completed,

it is extremely difficult for a state leader to estimate the risks of betrayal by rivals or enemies if one is the first to send a costly signal. Moral consequentialists who are risk averse would likely argue that inducing state vulnerability by acceding to the CTBT or committing to a principle of irreversibility is politically and morally irresponsible. Consequentialists who are not risk averse would likely argue the opposite. Kantian deontologists might apply one or more of the preliminary articles for perpetual peace to say that state vulnerability is morally required, and yet some measure of prudence must be retained in deciding on the kind of signal sent and the means of sending it.<sup>60</sup> Regarding this approach, a costly signal that corresponds with moral responsibility is a function of a nonideal coordination between moral duty and ends-means rationality.

Accordingly, suppose an organized and irresistible global antinuclear movement succeeds in raising the political costs of NWS's disarmament avoidance beyond tolerable levels, and suppose also that not all NWS leaders have begun to exercise security-dilemma sensibility. The political pressures on NWS to induce a virtuous cycle of cooperation or to reciprocate in turn on nuclear disarmament policies will introduce the risks of state vulnerability. Any costly signal that one NWS sends carries the risk that other NWS or key NNWS will not reciprocate in relevant ways. It seems only Kantian deontology can ground an argument that inducing such vulnerabilities is morally responsible. Moral consequentialist arguments most likely will argue that making states vulnerable in such ways is morally irresponsible because the risks of betrayal are too great. Thus, even if these consequentialists accept that a world free of nuclear weapons is morally preferable to a world of nuclear-armed states, the risk of acquiring such a world makes inducing state vulnerability morally irresponsible. This conclusion is decisive if it is true that morality follows rationality.<sup>61</sup>

It follows from the immediately preceding paragraphs that the question of the morality of inducing state vulnerability for the purpose of achieving conformity to the 13 steps and to the broader moral requirement of nuclear disarmament is morally dilemmatic. Unless a virtuous cycle of cooperation has already been initiated, the chances of moral failure are significant for leaders who take the first step of sending a costly disarmament signal. Additionally, in the absence of reliable future knowledge, the moral arguments for or against inducing state vulnerability might be reduced to questions of risk aversion. At any rate, it

cannot be unambiguously argued that compelling state vulnerabilities in the name of compliance with the 13 steps or ultimately nuclear disarmament is morally responsible.

## **Conclusion**

The question of the moral imperative of nuclear disarmament involves the question of the morality of its means. This paper accepted as given the uprightness of disarmament intentions. It also assumed the moral goodness of the outcome of nuclear disarmament on the grounds of the humanitarian imperative. However, it problematized the claims that an immediate nuclear disarmament was necessarily responsible in moral and political terms and the claims that compliance with any set of disarmament preconditions is necessarily morally responsible. The core premise of the argument is that the path to nuclear disarmament is morally responsible if—and only if—none of the steps on that path violate some actors' interests or rights of moral import. Cultivating a concrete and profound fear of nuclear holocaust among antinuclear activists and citizens of NWS and key NNWS might well violate moral rights and interests. The cultivation of security-dilemma sensibility seems more likely to satisfy the requirements of moral responsibility, but such cultivation motivates the decision to send costly disarmament signals that might induce significant state vulnerabilities. Additionally, this last precondition is as or more morally dilemmatic as cultivating a fear of nuclear holocaust.

The issue here is not to argue *decisively* that the means of nuclear disarmament are morally irresponsible. Rather, the issue is that this question is under-theorized. The fields of nuclear ethics and international security ethics have not yet adequately thought through the details of the conditions under which “justice and utility are in no way divided” for the question of nuclear abolition. **SSQ**

## **Notes**

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