

After Hiroshima

Kevin Rudd

The Prime Minister of Australia made Hiroshima his first port of call during his visit to Japan in June 2008. Later, in Kyoto, he announced a new International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, to revive the work pioneered by the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in the 1990s (see Maj Britt Theorin's 'Is a nuclear-weapons-free world achievable?' in Spokesman 98). These excerpts are taken from his speech.

In the past decade, the world has not paid adequate attention to nuclear weapons.

There have been nuclear developments that we have had to confront – like North Korea's nuclear programme and the danger it poses to the region; as well as Iran's continued nuclear ambitions.

And there has been some thinking about new ways to counter the threat of weapons proliferation. Australia and Japan were both founding partners in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). And Australia and Japan cooperate closely on export controls in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). These help to support the cornerstone of the global effort to eliminate nuclear weapons – in particular the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

But there has not been the same focus on the danger of nuclear weapons that we saw at the height of the Cold War. In some ways that is understandable – nuclear weapon stockpiles have come down a long way since their peaks in the 1980s. The two main nuclear powers, our shared ally the United States and Russia, have negotiated a series of treaties that have cut the number of nuclear weapons.

And South Africa and Ukraine have shown that it is possible for countries that have nuclear weapons to eliminate them.

We no longer live with the daily fear of nuclear war between two superpowers. But nuclear weapons remain. New states continue to seek to acquire them. Some states including in our own region are expanding their existing capacity.

Hiroshima reminds us of the terrible power of these weapons. Hiroshima should remind us that we must be vigilant afresh to stop their continued proliferation. And we must be committed to the ultimate objective of a nuclear weapons free world.

The cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament efforts remains the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It is a treaty that is

grounded in the reality of the existence of nuclear weapons, but with a firm goal of their eventual elimination. It is a treaty that, by any historical measure, has helped arrest the spread of nuclear weapons – particularly given the proliferation pressures that existed across states in the 1960s when the treaty was negotiated.

But 40 years later the treaty is under great pressure. Some states have developed nuclear weapons outside the treaty's framework. Some, like North Korea, have defied the international community and have stated that they have left the treaty altogether. Others like Iran defy the content of the treaty by continuing to defy the International Atomic Energy Agency – the agency assigned to give the treaty force.

There are two courses of action available to the community of nations: to allow the NPT to continue to fragment; or to exert every global effort to restore and defend the treaty. Australia stands unambiguously for the treaty.

I accept fully that we have a difficult task ahead of us. But I believe Japan and Australia working together can make a difference in the global debate on proliferation. We are uniquely qualified. Japan remains the only state to have experienced the consequences of nuclear weapons. Japan today has a large nuclear power industry. Australia has the largest known uranium reserves in the world. We can, therefore, understand the concerns that countries bring to this debate. And we share a view of the importance of the NPT. Australia and Japan are also both recognised as being committed to non-proliferation, including through our strong support for the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Each year, for more than a decade, Japan has put forward a UN resolution on nuclear disarmament. Each year, Australia is proud to be a co-sponsor of that resolution. We do more than just vote for it. Alongside Japan we present it to the international community and jointly seek their support.

Australia itself for the last quarter century has developed strong global credentials in arms control and disarmament – through our establishment of the Australia Group; our work in the United Nations on the Chemical Weapons Convention and as one of its original signatories; and our work on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Australia and Japan have also both been at the forefront of global thinking on the long-term challenge of nuclear weapons. In the 1990s, Australia convened the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Japan in the late 1990s established the Tokyo Forum for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. These two bodies produced reports that have become benchmarks in the international community's efforts to deal with nuclear weapons.

I think it is time we looked anew at the questions they addressed and revisited some of the conclusions they reached. The NPT Review Conference will be held in 2010. It is the five yearly meeting of parties to the treaty to assess progress against the treaty's aims and look at how we can strengthen its provisions.

As former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said in 2007, nuclear non-proliferation is the most important issue facing the world today. So, before we get to the Review Conference, we need to do some serious thinking about how we support the treaty and how we move forward on our goals.

I announce today that Australia proposes to establish an International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, to be co-chaired by former Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans. The Commission will re-examine the Canberra Commission and the Tokyo Forum reports to see how far we have come, how much work remains, and develop a possible plan of action for the future. The Commission will report to a major international conference of experts in late 2009 that will be sponsored by Australia. I look forward to discussing with Japan their participation in the work of this Commission.

Australia and Japan have also agreed to establish a high-level dialogue on non-proliferation and disarmament to advance this critical international debate. It is intended that the Commission and the subsequent conference will help pave the way for the NPT Review Conference in 2010. We cannot simply stand idly by and allow another Review Conference to achieve no progress – or worse to begin to disintegrate. The treaty is too important. The goal of nuclear non-proliferation is too important.

Even with these additional efforts, there is no guarantee of success. But that should not deter us from exerting every diplomatic effort. This is a view shared by people with unique experience in strategic policy. In the United States, former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Defence Secretary William Perry, and former Chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn said in an important article the *Wall Street Journal* in January:

‘The accelerating spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear know-how and nuclear material has brought us to a nuclear tipping point. ... The steps we are taking now to address these threats are not adequate to the danger.’

Relevant to our deliberations here, this eminent group of Americans has suggested steps for the future. They have said we should:

- strengthen the means of monitoring compliance with the NPT – which could be achieved through requiring all NPT signatories to adopt monitoring provisions designed by the International Atomic Energy Agency;
- develop an international system to manage the nuclear fuel cycle – given the growing interest in nuclear energy; and
- adopt a process to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty into force.

It is time for a new approach – of which the revitalisation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency is a critical part.