



Labor and Nuclear Disarmament

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Date: 2000

It is a pleasure to speak at this National Conference of the Medical Association for the Prevention of War.

As you will be aware, the Labor Party held its National Conference this week. In Hobart we adopted a new National Platform which, among many other things, sets out the foreign policy framework for a Beazley Labor Government. In this we affirmed the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as a key Labor foreign policy. We also adopted a National Conference Resolution expressing Labor's strong concerns about the potential consequences of the proposed United States National Missile Defence system.

So it is timely this afternoon to speak Labor's plans in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, to speak about the approach we intend to pursue in regard to these vital issues should the Australian people entrust us with the responsibility of government at the next federal election.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction -- nuclear, chemical and biological -- remains one of the most serious challenges facing the world. As the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace recently noted, eight nations possess more than 32,000 nuclear weapons capable of yielding almost 5,000 megatons of destructive energy. The equivalent of about 416,000 Hiroshima-size bombs, this global arsenal is sufficient to kill everyone on earth many times over.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the danger of a global thermonuclear war has greatly diminished. However there remains a very real danger that weapons of mass destruction will be used in smaller, but still horrifically deadly numbers. The use of just one modern thermonuclear weapon would be the most catastrophic event in recorded history.

Moreover while the immediate aftermath of the Cold War allowed important gains in arms control and disarmament, progress has faltered with serious implications for efforts to prevent weapons proliferation. Few if any observers are optimistic about the current state of disarmament and non-proliferation.

In January this year, New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade declassified an assessment that read as follows:

"The [international security] environment has deteriorated over the past eighteen months and progress is currently stalled, particularly in the field of nuclear disarmament. Contributing factors include the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan and their claim to nuclear weapon state status; the failure of the Russian Duma to ratify START II and consequent delays in negotiations on further US/Russia bilateral reductions; and US plans to mount National Missile Defence and possibly Theatre Missile Defence with consequent fall-out for



US/Russia and US/China relations. The recent US Senate vote against CTBT ratification was a blow to confidence in this long-sought disarmament and non-proliferation measure. Multilateral processes such as the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva are inevitably affected by this uncertain international environment. The next step on the nuclear disarmament agenda, negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty, has yet to get underway and the nuclear weapon States continue to veto wider discussion on nuclear disarmament in that setting."

You will agree with me that this was a bleak assessment. And subsequent developments have been far from encouraging with the proclamation of a new Russian security doctrine emphasising the importance of nuclear weapons, the continuing impasse on entry into force of START II, the extremely modest outcome of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and now the prospective US decision on deployment of a National Missile Defence system.

In these circumstances leadership from non-nuclear middle powers is vital to help rebuild momentum for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It is all too clear that these are not matters which can be responsibly left to the nuclear weapons states.

And in this Australia's potential to play an important role should not be underestimated. Australia has a long and proud track record of promoting disarmament and non-proliferation. We played a leading role in establishing the South Pacific Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. We have been a major player in strengthening International Atomic Energy Agency Safeguards. We were a prominent contributor to the negotiation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and later the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Australia not only has much to contribute to the pursuit of disarmament, but also the diplomatic resources and expertise to do so. What is required, and what has been so conspicuously lacking from the Howard Government, is the political commitment to push the envelope in making the world a safer place.

Labor is determined that Australia should return to the forefront in advancing disarmament and non-proliferation. On nuclear disarmament, we are committed to pursuing initiatives such as those urged by our own Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and more recently the New Agenda Coalition to maximise international pressure for further reductions in nuclear arsenals. Labor in government will seek to work closely with like-minded countries, especially the members of the New Agenda Coalition, for real progress in building a nuclear weapon free world.

We will continue to give our strong support to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the earliest possible entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and the negotiation of a convention banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Early conclusion of a Cut-Off Convention would be a significant advance. De-alerting of nuclear weapons and separation of warheads from delivery vehicles must also be an urgent priority.

We strongly support strengthening and widening of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards as indispensable to creating an environment conducive to nuclear disarmament. Australia should also use the new opportunity provided by diplomatic relations with North Korea and seek a more direct role in resolving concerns about that country's nuclear program.



Labor will continue our longstanding support for nuclear weapon free zones in the South Pacific, Africa, Latin America and South East Asia. We will explore linkages between those zones, including the possible formation of a Southern Hemisphere Nuclear Forum, and so seek to consolidate a Southern Hemisphere free of Nuclear Weapons.

Further progress is also required in eliminating the other weapons of mass destruction. Chemical and biological weapons pose very serious threats. A significant number of countries either retain or are pursuing the development of extremely lethal chemical weapons. Biological weapons pose a potential threat of equal magnitude to nuclear weapons.

Labor will continue our strong support for the Chemical Weapons Convention and pursue the earliest completion of negotiations for a verification protocol for the Biological Weapons Convention. We believe Australia should provide direct support for efforts to achieve accelerated chemical and biological disarmament in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet Union, and halt the transfer of chemical and biological weapons technology to proliferators.

Australia should also explore what direct contributions we can make to the elimination of North Korea's ballistic missile and chemical and biological weapons capabilities.

In the longer-term, and notwithstanding current concern about the state of disarmament processes, Labor is determined to maintain a focus on the ultimate goal -- the achievement of a nuclear weapon free world. Nuclear weapons abolition will be an enormously difficult and complex task. We have no illusions about that.

The elimination of nuclear weapons will not be possible in the absence of a robust verification regime as the basis for building a wide and politically acceptable level of confidence against clandestine weapons development and possible treaty breakout. This is an enormous challenge and preparatory work should begin early even if practical realisation is a long way down the track.

We will also need to build an enduring legal framework, linked to the Charter of the United Nations. Labor supports exploration of potential legal frameworks including the possible negotiation of an umbrella Nuclear Weapons Convention to ban all nuclear weapons and provide a global framework for the elimination of existing arsenals. Exploration of these possibilities should not be put aside for the distant future, but must be undertaken alongside the other step-by-step disarmament measures.

For the immediate future, however, the big challenge will be to rebuild momentum for disarmament and to keep the process on track in the face of new obstacles.

In the mid 1980s, President Reagan's "Star Wars" defence program threatened the 1972 ABM Treaty, one of the keystones of nuclear arms control and disarmament. Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative was eventually consigned to the rubbish heap of history. Or so it seemed.

Now fifteen years later the US is poised to make a fateful strategic decision on its National Missile Defence system.

Having initially resisted Republican calls for NMD, the Clinton Administration last year responded to political pressure and announced a timetable for its possible deployment.

Likely to be the thin end of a strategic wedge, this scheme is centred on a proposed interceptor base in Alaska to defend the US against the possibility of a limited ballistic



missile attack from a "rogue state" such as North Korea. President Clinton is due to make a decision on deployment in the final countdown to the Presidential election. Republican candidate Bush has already declared his intention to press ahead with even more ambitious NMD deployment.

As I have publicly stated, National Missile Defence is a disproportionate, counterproductive and technically questionable response to ballistic missile proliferation. It has the potential to derail world progress towards disarmament.

Russia has expressed strong opposition to re-writing the ABM Treaty to allow NMD and warned it may respond by walking away from key nuclear arms control agreements.

A growing number of countries including Canada, Germany and France have expressed strong concerns about the adverse implications of NMD.

China has repeatedly warned that it will respond to NMD by increasing its small strategic nuclear missile force. While some expansion is probably already planned, it is likely to be much larger if NMD proceeds. China may also respond by blocking negotiation of the Cut-Off Convention and reviewing its long-standing "no first use" nuclear weapons doctrine. These possible developments would be highly undesirable whatever the circumstances.

If China boosts its arsenal, the prospects for future nuclear arms reductions will be dealt a severe blow. In the US there will be demands for more advanced NMD systems. India is likely to be prompted by a Chinese build-up to review its "minimum nuclear deterrence" doctrine and seek a greater measure of nuclear parity with China. This would prompt further expansion of China's capability. NMD has the potential to trigger a new nuclear arms race and gravely undermine global disarmament and non-proliferation agreements.

These are very sobering possibilities which require cool-headed analysis.

NMD is of further concern to Australia due to the role of the new Satellite Relay Ground Station at Pine Gap which services US Defence Support Program early warning satellites.

These early warning satellites have long contributed to strategic stability and nuclear arms control. DSP Satellites and the follow-on Space-Based Infra-Red System will also be key components of any NMD system. The automated Pine Gap Relay Station has not yet been involved in NMD intercept tests, but this may well change as more and increasingly complex trials are carried out.

It's worth remembering that the Hawke Labor Government took a highly critical view of President Reagan's "Star Wars". Labor banned Australian involvement, including through the Joint Facilities. Contrary to the claims of the then Opposition led by John Howard, the ANZUS Alliance was unaffected. Indeed with Kim Beazley as Defence Minister the Alliance went from strength to strength.

Labor first highlighted the dangerous implications of NMD in March this year and we have repeatedly called on the Howard Government to urge Washington to suspend further steps towards deployment.

In contrast, Foreign Minister Downer and Defence Minister Moore have effectively endorsed NMD. Alone among US allies, they have disregarded NMD's implications for nuclear arms control. China's concerns have been casually dismissed.



In a major departure from Australia's previous policy, the Howard Government has endorsed the potential involvement of the Pine Gap Relay Station in NMD tests and as part of the system if deployment proceeds. The Howard Government's approach to the ANZUS Alliance involves the suspension of Australia's independent strategic judgment. This is certainly not Labor's view.

In government, Labor will review any Australian involvement in NMD through the Pine Gap Satellite Relay Station or other arrangements. Our judgment is that Australia should not support or be involved in NMD research, development or trials. Labor's approach will be consistent with our past stance and our longstanding support for the integrity of the ABM Treaty.

At the same time Labor is determined to see Australia make greater efforts to combat ballistic missile proliferation by strengthening the Missile Technology Control Regime and by pursuing a multilateral ballistic missile and space vehicle launch notification regime and possible bans on ballistic missile testing.

Disarmament and non-proliferation will be key priorities for a Beazley Government. In their pursuit, Labor will take an independent view of Australia's strategic situation and our national interests. In the context of our US Alliance, that means being honest with our friends. If necessary it means telling them we think they're embarking on something ill considered and likely to be very counterproductive.

Ballistic missile proliferation is a serious issue, and it is our considered view that the unilateral "solution" of NMD will leave the world less rather than more secure. It is not a scheme Australia should support. In preparing for government, Labor has made our opposition very clear.

Thank you.