

## **Submission to the Australian Foreign Policy White Paper 2017**

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### **Advancing nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament**

Australia has a long history of active diplomacy in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This bipartisan policy stance has driven Australia's key role in the Nuclear Suppliers Group governing trade in and safeguards over uranium; the extension in perpetuity of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which also promotes disarmament; the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty including a global network to monitor tests; and efforts to develop a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty to end production in nuclear weapons grade material. Australia also backed the US led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to intercept illegal shipments of materials and technology that could be used for weapons of mass destruction.

Yet there have been inconsistencies in Australia's approach to non-proliferation largely due to the way it chooses to manage its alliance with the United States. The paradox for Australia as a non-nuclear weapons state is that it has long relied upon the security blanket of extended nuclear deterrence from the US. In return Australia has hosted American C31 communications bases that support US nuclear targeting strategy, indeed, it still does at Pine Gap. And it designed the South Pacific Nuclear Free Weapons Zone (SPNFZ) in such a way that it would not impinge on US nuclear weapons related activities such as transit of nuclear weapons through the zone and US bases in Australia.

Most perplexing is Australia's attitude to nuclear disarmament. Australia signed onto the NPT, the principal aims of which are to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and work towards their elimination. Contrary to this latter aim, in 2008 Australia failed to sign a United Nations resolution by 137 countries to instigate negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) to achieve universal disarmament. In keeping with US policy, Australia has steadfastly maintained this position ever since, thus when negotiations of this critical treaty finally commence on 27 March 2017 in New York Australia will boycott them. As a result, Australia is suffering a serious loss in credibility as a proponent of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

In regards to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament the US has often not been helpful to causes championed by Australia. It has not ratified the SPNFZ or the CTBT even though the latter was an explicit condition of the 1995 NPT renewal and extension. Despite President Obama's first term rhetoric in favour of a nuclear weapons free world, in 2015 he committed the US to a multi-decade, trillion dollars renovation of their nuclear arsenal over thirty years. Moreover, President Trump's pronouncements on nuclear weapons have been alarming as to his willingness to use them, encouraging allies to obtain nuclear weapons and his readiness for an arms race with Russia. Given these trends it is unsurprising that the US is opposed to negotiations for a NWC to ban this class of weapons.

In 2017 there are an estimated 14,900 nuclear weapons, 93% of which are held by the US and Russia or about 7,000 apiece.<sup>1</sup> The nuclear armed states and many of their allies, such as Australia, are opposed to the NWC. All the nuclear arsenals are being modernised and moves to reduce numbers of weapons have slowed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other side of the ledger, the overwhelming majority of Australia's neighbours support a ban on nuclear weapons. This includes New Zealand, the ten Southeast Asian nations and ten Pacific Island microstates. Australia is in a small global minority that opposes the NWC - 38 at the UN vote in December 2016 - and an outsider in its region. This stance needs to be revisited as a matter of urgency.

Apart from adopting a principled stance in support of negotiating a NWC there are many transitional measures that Australia could campaign for that have been outlined in a series of Australian initiatives such as the 1996 Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, the 2009 International Commission on Non-proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament (ICNND co-chaired with Japan) and the 2009 Australian Joint Standing Committee on Treaties report on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

These reports variously advocated measures that would reduce the risk of nuclear war, facilitate arms reductions (notably by Russia and the US) and work towards the ultimate goal of disarmament. They included: no first use assurances by all nuclear weapon states, no use assurances against non-nuclear weapons states, taking all nuclear weapons off high alert, concluding a verifiable treaty to ban production of weapons grade fissile materials, creating multilateral controlled nuclear fuel banks, and establishing more nuclear weapons free zones such as in the Southern hemisphere and the Middle East.

Australia can promote these measures for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament bilaterally with the United States, multilaterally via the United Nations and agencies such as the IAEA, and it can join coalitions of likeminded states to pursue these goals. A large majority of Australians support working towards a nuclear weapons free world and in 2015 the Labor party adopted a policy in favour of a treaty banning nuclear weapons. Australia has actively backed bans on other classes of weapons of mass destruction. It is time for the government to let go of its anxieties over the alliance and attachment to the US nuclear deterrence; it is time for a return to committed bipartisanship on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, 'Status of world nuclear forces, Federation of American Scientists, 2017, <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>