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Article:

The 'standardization of catastrophe': Nuclear disarmament, the Humanitarian

Initiative and the politics of the unthinkable

Abstract

This article reviews the recent Humanitarian Initiative in the nuclear disarmament movement and the associated non-proliferation and disarmament literature. It argues that this initiative, rather than being a transformative moment in nuclear politics as claimed by supporters, instead fits into a long history of nuclear politics as the politics of 'rethinking the unthinkable' and, as such, is located not only within the long-established institutions of international society, as realist critics claim, but also within the long-established and limiting forms of speech of international society. The article questions the limitations of the dominant framing of nuclear weapons as 'unthinkable', and claims that focusing on the seemingly trivial matter of the prevalence of cliché in this discourse actually reveals a deeper problem of the limits of this approach. In doing so, the article shows how the problem of standardised, repetitive ways of speaking, reliance on 'nukespeak' and dominant tropes of nuclear speech identified in much of the literature is not that of the somehow innate 'unthinkability' of nuclear weapons, but that this 'unthinkability' and the associated 'unspeakability' of the nuclear are rhetorical frames that limit the possibility for political change.

Keywords

Nuclear weapons, disarmament, humanitarian pledge, nonproliferation, nuclear critique

> Because they had brought something into the world that out-imagined the mind. They *didn't even know what to call the early bomb. The thing or the gadget or something.* And Oppenheimer said, It is merde. I will use the French. J. Robert Oppenheimer. It is merde. He meant something that eludes naming is automatically relegated, he is saying, *to the status of shit. You can't name it. It's too big or evil or outside your experience.*
>
> Don DeLillo, Underworld

Introduction

In May 2016, President Barack Obama became the first sitting US president to visit

Hiroshima. He spoke of how the world had been forever changed one morning, seventy-one

years previously, when 'death fell from the sky'. The suffering caused by this new weapon was 'unimaginable' and 'unspeakable', 'mere words' could not 'give voice' to such things (2016). Eight months earlier, Obama had described to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) the 'unthinkable power of the atomic age' (2015). These two presidential speeches typify what has become a dominant feature of nuclear weapons discourse: that the nuclear is, in its potency, novelty and mystery, unthinkable and that its consequences are unspeakable.[1] The most prominent expression of this conception of the nuclear at present is the Humanitarian Initiative, an international movement to reframe opposition to nuclear weapons through humanitarian law that is supported by a majority of non-nuclear states and anti-nuclear activists. This movement has grown as a response to global frustrations with the traditional, incremental arms control approach, mostly notably represented by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) process. The development of strategic modernisation plans by the NPT nuclear weapons states (NWS) and lack of commitment to a concrete programme of disarmament has led to what Ambassador Alexander Kmentt of Austria, speaking on behalf of forty-nine countries at the 2015 NPT Review Conference, described as 'a reality gap, a credibility gap, a confidence gap and a moral gap' between the NWS and the non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) on the meaning of disarmament (2015 NPT Review Conference Joint Closing Statement).[2]

The tensions and inequality within the NPT framework are not new. For five decades it has kept an uneasy balance between the nuclear and non-nuclear states, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain this institutionalisation of inequality, as the NWS continue to shift the function of the NPT from enforcing an obligation to disarm towards providing a permanent licence for nuclear ownership. There is an increasing recognition that this institution, the 'grand political and normative settlement of the nuclear age' (Walker, 2007:

452) has become increasingly problematic (Müller, 2010; Rathbun, 2006; Tannenwald, 2013). A recent outcome of this recognition has been what the Washington Post described as an 'uprising' among some activists and those states that are seeking a commitment to global nuclear disarmament in protest against the current system (Zak, 2015). These responses to the failure of the NPT propose action outside the parameters of the current treaty system, the most significant being the Humanitarian Initiative.

This article will review this recent movement and the associated academic literature on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It argues that despite placing itself as a critical alternative to the strategic and deterrence-based literature of nuclearism, this movement has not only failed to acknowledge the consequences of the challenge of nuclear weapons to the institutions of international society, as argued by critics, but is also trapped within limiting structures of dominant, institutional forms of nuclear speech. While hailed as a new and revolutionary step towards nuclear disarmament by its supporters, the movement and its accompanying literature are the latest manifestations of the repeated impulse to address the nuclear by 'rethinking the unthinkable' and have circumscribed that call into a process of re-knowing nuclear weapons through changing their collective meaning and value and creating anti-nuclear norms in a discourse that to a great extent, as Paul Boyer has shown, was shaped 'literally within days of Hiroshima' (1985: xix). It is thus condemned to repeat what this article will analyse as nuclear cliché. The article investigates the sources of this repetition of nuclear cliché, providing a way of conceptualising the limitations of non-proliferation and disarmament politics through an investigation of the consequences of conceiving of the politics of the nuclear as the politics of the unthinkable. By doing so, the article proposes an interpretation of the stagnation of current international politics of nuclear weapons that goes beyond the obvious instrumental motives and actions of the nuclear powers.

Nuclear politics as rethinking the unthinkable

On witnessing the explosion of the first nuclear test in the desert of New Mexico in 1945,

Brigadier General Thomas F. Farrell wrote in a report for the War Department that:

> The effects could well be called unprecedented, magnificent, beautiful, stupendous and terrifying. No man-made phenomenon of such tremendous power had ever occurred before. The lighting effects beggared description. The whole country was lighted by a searing light with the intensity many times that of the midday sun…It lighted every peak, crevasse and ridge of the nearby mountain range with a clarity and beauty that cannot be described but must be seen to be imagined. It was that beauty the great poets dream about but describe most poorly and inadequately (in Sherwin, ed. 1977: 312).

This exemplifies much of the tone of early reports on the new nuclear age, which was soon

crystallized in public debate into the terms of the nuclear 'unthinkable'. In August 1945, Time

magazine described the consequences of the development of the atomic bomb: 'In an instant,

without warning,' the magazine pronounced, 'the present had become the unthinkable future'

(in Boyer, 1985: 133). The 'Baruch Plan' for atomic control presented by the US to the UN

Atomic Energy Commission in 1946 described 'a secret so vast in its potentialities that our

minds cower from the terror it creates.' In one of the most influential works of strategy on the

nuclear age, Bernard Brodie (1959: 313) later also declared total nuclear war to be

'unthinkable, too irrational to be borne'. Historian Jeff Hughes has characterised the work of

the Strath Committee, set up by the British government in 1954 to assess the implications of

H-bomb nuclear war on Britain, as reaching 'the limits of language – not just the

indescribable, but also the unthinkable' (2003: 258 [emphasis in original]). Psychiatrist

Robert Jay Lifton (1967) applied the concept of 'psychic numbing' to public lack of response

to the nuclear threat in the 1960s, claiming that the possibility of nuclear annihilation was so

threatening that the collective reaction is to deaden one's emotions. Nuclear-caused psychic

numbing, the muting of response to nuclear threat, is a reaction to our inability to think the

'totality of destruction' (Lifton and Falk, 1982: 45) that comes with nuclear war. Jonathan

Schell's influential anti-nuclear book The Fate of the Earth, remarks that the 'world has declined, on the whole, to think about [nuclear weapons] very much' and so he challenges himself to think 'the unthinkable' (1982: 4). The unthinkability of the import and consequences of nuclear weapons has become a defining feature of nuclear discourse. Outside comprehensibility, outside language, outside thinking itself, nuclear weapons have been consistently categorised as altogether new, different and beyond our existing ways of knowing.[3]

Characterising the nuclear as belonging to the realm of the 'unthinkable' has political consequences. The anthropologist Joseph Masco has labeled the 'unthinkability of the nuclear age' as 'perhaps the American nation-building project since World War II' (2006: 3 [emphasis in original]), arguing that the ubiquity of this apocalyptic image of nuclear weapons has, in fact, been responsible both for obscuring the vast US nuclear economy and for the 'banalization' of nuclear weapons in everyday life. He contends that, by promoting a particular understanding of nuclear weapons focused on total annihilation, the characterisation of nuclear politics as the politics of the unthinkable has led to the dominance of a particular 'apocalyptic vision' (2006: 4) that renders invisible the everyday material, social and cultural effects of the nuclear and the massive nuclear industrial complex.[4] Masco claims that this unthinkability can be interrogated and overturned by returning to the realm of the everyday, thinkable consequences of nuclear technology on different groups in society.

Frances Ferguson has linked this idea of nuclear unthinkability to the notion of the sublime, which has a long intellectual history that originates with writing attributed to the Greek Longinus and includes works by Kant, Edmund Burke and Friedrich Schiller.[5] The sublime has been expressed in various forms but, to give a basic explanation, traditionally in

aesthetics the sublime is differentiated from the beautiful, which merely gives pleasure, and has been characterised as an encounter with that which inspires wonder, awe and fear. Sublime are phenomena that 'surpass our understanding and our imagination due to their unbounded, excessive or chaotic character' (de Mul: 2013, 34) and which we are thus unable to grasp, either in their potency or in their totality. Ferguson describes the sublime in terms of its incomprehensibility, as things that are '"great beyond all measures," objects … that elude the apprehension we think ourselves to have of the objects of our perceptions' (1984: 6-7). This approach understands the sublime not as a property of the object but as a response to it; it is the individual's perception of the scale, power or danger of the object that characterises the encounter as one with the sublime, for no 'sensible form can contain it' (Kant cited in Ferguson: 1984, 6). While classical, early modern and romantic visions of the sublime were to a large extent concentrated on nature, more recent work has shifted its focus to technological and industrial sublimes (Marx: 1965; Nye: 1994; de Mul: 2013). Masco applies Kant's construction of the sublime to nuclear weapons, showing how the nuclear encounter fits the form of a confrontation with an 'infinitely powerful or infinitely complex form' that 'threatens to obliterate the self' (2004, 351). The reaction of the human psyche to this confrontation with that which is 'inexpressible' and 'outside of language' is to attempt to name it, 'thereby containing the infinite within a conceptual category' (Masco: 2004, 351) and reasserting a (false) sense of the power and control of reason. Conceiving of nuclear weapons as the unthinkable is thus following a long tradition of the discourse of the unthinkable sublime, with its ensuing response of speaking and thereby containing the incomprehensible.

In tandem with the label of unthinkability, at the beginning of the nuclear age was the simultaneous call for new thinking and the idea that the challenge of these weapons to

entrenched assumptions about international political space might not only desperately require, but also enable ways of thinking beyond our current limits. For, as President Harry Truman announced in a speech on atomic weapons in October 1945, 'the release of atomic energy constitutes a new force too revolutionary to consider in the framework of old ideas.' This new force would require innovative ways of thinking that could be commensurate with what the Acheson Lilienthal Report (1946) called 'the really revolutionary character of these weapons'. The idea of a new and revolutionary 'atomic age' became axiomatic in early US public discourse about the atomic bomb. This 'atomic age' was widely heralded as beginning a new phase in human history, what Hans Morgenthau (1961) termed 'a qualitative transformation of the meaning of our existence', one that required, for John Herz (1959: 349), 'a revolution in minds and attitudes' and that embraced, according to Lewis Mumford, 'the art of the impossible' (in van Munster and Sylvest, 2014: 539).

Nuclear discourse was thus from early on set into the twin and related structures of unthinkability and the repeated need for new thinking. In the initial years of the atomic age, these demands to change how we think often took the form of a call for world government, from groups including realist scholars of international politics, one-world federalists, journalists and scientific figures such as Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard, who argued that in the wake of the development of nuclear weapons there was a need for a political framework of control of the technology that would go beyond national borders (Boyer, 1985). Early 'nuclear realists' (van Munster and Sylvest, 2014) such as John Herz (1959) claimed that the fundamentally changing nature of power and imposition of unavoidable mutual vulnerability that accompanied the advent of nuclear weapons required new political institutions and frameworks that could transcend the state.[6] This argument has been echoed recently by authors such as Daniel Deudney (2007) and Campbell Craig (2008), the latter asserting that

the advent of the nuclear age, specifically the thermonuclear revolution, demands a radical rethinking of the foundations of international politics. However, this approach to the politics of the unthinkable had mostly faded from global public imagination by the end of the 1940s and today, while there is a body of academic work on the topic, it certainly does not have the public profile or receive the institutional and political support and funding of the mainstream non-proliferation and disarmament agenda (see Craig and Ruzicka, 2012). It is therefore to this mainstream agenda that this paper turns its focus.

The Humanitarian Initiative

Currently, 127 states have endorsed the 'Humanitarian Pledge', originally issued by Austria at the December 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. This pledge is the outcome of three international conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and is an attempt to reframe the issue in terms of the 'profound moral and ethical questions that go beyond debates about the legality of nuclear weapons' (Humanitarian Pledge). The pledge declares the effects of nuclear explosions as 'significantly greater than it was understood in the past' and recognises the severity and complexity of the consequences 'on health, environment, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion and global economy'. Consequently, it calls on all states party to the NPT to renew a commitment to Article VI and to take measures to 'fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons'. This pledge is part of a wider initiative on nuclear disarmament based in humanitarian law and a reframing of the issue of nuclear weapons so as to have regard not merely for their legality but also the ethics, morality and humanitarian consequences of their possession and use (Doyle, 2015).

The Humanitarian Initiative rests on the claim that nuclear weapons are fundamentally inhumane and thus incompatible with the principles of discrimination, proportionality and precaution that are embedded in international humanitarian law. Tom Sauer and Joelien Pretorius (2014) provide a history of this movement, which has its roots in post-Cold War international reports on disarmament in the 1990s and 2000s by the Canberra and Blix Commissions and was facilitated by high profile public statements on the need for disarmament by the so-called 'Four Horsemen' of US foreign policy, George Schultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry and Sam Nunn in 2007, and by President Obama in 2009. The end of the Cold War and an increasing frustration with incremental arms control approaches and the flaws of the NPT system led to a feeling among anti-nuclear states and activists that the dominant approach to disarmament was inadequate. New NGOs, particularly the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and (to a lesser extent) Global Zero began to push for an alternative approach. The 'catastrophic humanitarian consequences' of nuclear weapons use were mentioned in an NPT final document for the first time in 2010 (in Sauer and Pretorius, 2014: 241) and, at the last of the three large international conferences on the issue in Vienna in 2014, 158 states as well as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC), civil society groups and NGOs discussed the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and the Austrian government issued the Humanitarian Pledge. In 2013 the United Nations General Assembly established an open-ended working group to discuss this avenue for disarmament and, in November 2015, the UNGA adopted four resolutions based on the Humanitarian Initiative, committing to work together to 'fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons' (UNGA, 2015).

The Humanitarian Initiative, while rejecting as flawed the dominant structure of disarmament as embodied in the NPT process, nonetheless still aims for multilateral nuclear disarmament, to be achieved through the promotion of anti-nuclear norms within the existing institutions of international society. The movement attempts to rethink the issue of nuclear weapons in terms of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use and the harm already done by previous nuclear testing. This involves the need to 'stigmatize' nuclear weapons in terms of their 'unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks' (Humanitarian Pledge). While it is clear that the nuclear weapons states and their allies would not sign a ban on nuclear weapons initially, the success of a potential legal prohibition would rest on the promotion of a norm of unacceptability of both use and possession that would spread over time as more states sign. Supporters argue that there are precedents in existing international conventions on cluster munitions and anti-personnel mines, which have de-legitimised these weapons over time (Borrie, 2014: 626).

Framing opposition to nuclear weapons in humanitarian terms is not new; Sauer and Pretorius (2014) provide an overview of this discourse that can be traced back to 1945. However, combining this with a legal prohibition in order to de-legitimise the possession of nuclear weapons has been welcomed as an innovation in disarmament politics by many academics and civil society actors working on nuclear non-proliferation, who have labelled it as a 'seismic shift in the global structure of norms around nuclear weapons' (Burke, 2015), a 'game changer', which 'fundamentally challenges the nuclear deterrence paradigm' (Sauer, 2015) and, as such, 'will go down in history' (Johnson, 2015). However, rather than a new or transformative approach to the international politics of nuclear weapons, the Humanitarian Initiative, as the latest extension of an on-going attempt to rethink the unthinkability of nuclear weapons through re-framing and de-legitimisation, is another recurrence of a cycle of

disarmament activism that began over seventy years ago and has been repeated ever since. This can be seen in various forms, from the 'Franck Report' written by scientists involved in the Manhattan project in June 1945, acknowledging the 'infinitely greater dangers than were all the inventions of the past', to protests against atmospheric testing in the 1950s, to the nuclear freeze movement, the Pugwash organization, the Catholic Bishops and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).[7] The familiar and cyclical nature of the anti-nuclear debate was noted by Boyer in the 1980s, who argued that '[e]xcept for a post-holocaust "Nuclear Winter," every theme and image by which we express our nuclear fear today has its counterpart in the immediate post-Hiroshima period' (1985: 364).

Rethinking as norm creation – re-speaking nuclear weapons

Concomitant with the cycles of nuclear activism, much of the mainstream academic work on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation has been founded in an either explicit or implicit commitment to rethink the unthinkable. This can be seen in two related and often overlapping sets of work. The first body of work focuses on rethinking the meaning of nuclear weapons to move towards disarmament through processes of delegitimising, devaluing and stigmatising nuclear weapons within a broadly international society approach. This has become a key feature of work on nuclear weapons, where rethinking the unthinkable has been most often articulated and operationalised as a process of changing social meaning and value. Nick Ritchie's work is based on reducing the value assigned to nuclear weapons, most notably for what he terms the 'defence and security elite' (2013: 146). Ritchie claims that in order to progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons, one must understand the process by which they gain value and so the question to be asked is 'how do we "know" nuclear value?' (2013: 151; also Ritchie, 2014). In a recent European Journal of International Relations article, Senn and Elhardt take a Bourdieu-inspired approach and argue that we need to 'change the

doxa' (2013: 317 [emphasis in original]) of nuclear weapons. This generally constructivist reading of the disarmament process is also associated with further work on nuclear weapons and norms, for example that of Nina Tannenwald (2007) on the nuclear taboo, in which the use of these weapons is agreed to be so abhorrent that it has become, as Press et al describe it 'virtually unthinkable' (2013: 189). T.V. Paul (2009) has also argued that there is a tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons based largely on reputation, which is combined with the knowledge of horrible consequences of nuclear weapons use and has fixed a policy of nuclear non-use over the past sixty years (see also Rost Rublee, 2009).

The drive to delegitimise nuclear weapons through the creation of norms as the first step to disarmament has been the main focus of anti-nuclear NGOs and civil society groups, particularly in the post-Cold War period; indeed the NPT itself is founded on the idea of spreading and maintaining the norm of nuclear non-proliferation (Nielsen and Hanson, 2014). Marianne Hanson writes about this consensus that in general 'there is agreement that although these weapons cannot be disinvented, their possession and use – and their eventual elimination – can nevertheless be managed by strong norms and institutions' (2002: 364).[8]

The second strand of literature grounded in the nuclear unthinkable is characterised by William Chaloupka as work on the 'unspeakability' of nuclear weapons (see also Fishel, 2015). There exists a common public discourse that begins with the premise of a collective muteness in the face of the nuclear. Obama's remarks at Hiroshima typify this and it is also common in NGO and diplomatic language, often regarding the 'unspeakable suffering' caused by nuclear weapons.[9] In the academic literature the unspeakability of nuclear weapons is exemplified in the work on 'nukespeak', defined by Edward Schiappa as the 'use of metaphor, euphemism, technical jargon and acronym to portray nuclear concepts in a

"neutral" or positive way' (1989: 253; see also Chilton, 1982, 1985; Hilgartner et al, 1982) The literature on nukespeak is founded on the need to overcome the unspeakability of the nuclear and argues that the deficiencies of nuclear weapons politics are because it has not been properly spoken, that the dominant obfuscatory language not only naturalises the ideological basis behind the supposedly neutral strategic deterrence language, but also prevents us from understanding and expressing the 'new reality' of the nuclear world, which leads to a 'crisis of comprehension' (Chilton, 1982: 95-96). This literature is based on the idea that we could rethink nuclear weapons by getting past the bureaucratic and euphemistic speech that constrains debate and instead somehow overcome their unspeakability, returning to 'a prior condition of innocence where things had "real" names' by speaking the unthinkable (Chaloupka, 1992: 20).

Thus, in both the mainstream anti-nuclear movement and the academic literature that is positioned as the dominant challenger to the state-centric and strategic assumptions of deterrence theory, we are left with a drive for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament that is based, in broad terms, on changing how we know nuclear weapons; rethinking and respeaking their meaning, role and value within the institutions of international society. These approaches rest on the argument of changing the meaning of nuclear weapons for political and defence decision-makers and/or for broader global populations as a way of coercing these decision-makers; nuclear disarmament as a process of devaluing or stigmatising requires the nuclear states to 'think differently about the values currently assigned to their nuclear weapons' (Ritchie, 2013: 147). Rethinking the politics of nuclear weapons has been translated into changing our collective understandings of nuclear weapons, either by clearly speaking their 'reality', or by speaking them differently in order to promote and manage anti-

nuclear norms, all within existing international political structures and all grounded in a discourse of the unthinkable.

Why this matters

Of course, the fact that the Humanitarian Initiative and associated work on rethinking nuclear weapons and creating and promoting anti-nuclear norms is not an entirely original or transformative approach to the politics of nuclear weapons does not automatically mean that it is not a valuable and worthwhile endeavour. One could argue that the consequences of nuclear weapons are indeed 'unthinkable' and that such things need to be repeated because they are important. In fact it might be even more important today to repeat them in a context that might be more receptive to their message. There has been an obvious and fundamental change from previous cycles of non-proliferation and disarmament activism: the end of the Cold War and the bi-polar world of arms racing, 'missile gaps' and superpower nuclear crises. This is combined with the growth in prominence of humanitarian approaches in other areas, for example ideas of human security and the Responsibility to Protect, as well as increasing prominence of International Law approaches and the further development of international institutions. All of this, one could claim, makes the humanitarian approach, if not original, at least timely.[10]

However, this paper contends that the dominance of the broadly international society-based approaches to the political problem of nuclear weapons carries with it limitations that not only render the approach ultimately ineffectual, but also potentially damaging. This is the case for two overlapping reasons. The first is related to what Campbell Craig and Jan Ruzicka (2012, 2013) have labelled as the 'non-proliferation complex'.[11] Craig and Ruzicka argue that the non-proliferation and disarmament agenda is doomed to failure because of the nature of

nuclear weapons and the vast benefits accruing to any state that would cheat on a disarmament process. Claiming that the problem of nuclear weapons can be solved while failing to challenge the interests of what they term the 'nuclear haves' (2013: 330) and while remaining within the current international system simply ignores the true nature and extent of the problem and the transformative effects of the thermonuclear revolution. They argue that there is a wide industry of think-tanks, NGOs, government agencies and academics, the aforementioned 'non-proliferation complex', who have access to a large amount of resources to push mainstream non-proliferation and disarmament agendas that do not significantly challenge the status quo and fundamentally ignore the completely revolutionary nature of the problem of nuclear weapons, instead proposing, as Deudney (1995) put it, a solution of reformation to an issue of transformation. While the limitations of the existing disarmament regime are well known and acknowledged by those within the complex, the response to these limitations, by continuing to push another variation of this approach, only acts to, as Craig and Ruzicka state, 'entrench the permanent nuclearization of international politics' as well as permitting action by powerful states, in particular by the United States, against those who they say may be attempting to gain nuclear weapons illegitimately (2013: 337). Attempting a solution to the problem of nuclear weapons within the current international environment is therefore not only a futile endeavour, but also sustains an unacceptable status quo through the maintenance of a facade of action.

This argument is an important challenge to a dominant mainstream consensus and makes a key intervention into the nuclear weapons debate that highlights how the existing non-proliferation and disarmament approaches have, so far, failed to really challenge entrenched global powers and power structures. Craig and Ruzicka wrote their article when the Humanitarian Initiative was still at a nascent stage but, while the new initiative pushes back

against the interests of the NWS and challenges the status quo and the 'hypocrisy inherent in the NPT system' much more strongly than previously, by continuing to promote the same goals without acknowledging the need for alternative political forms, it remains vulnerable to Craig and Ruzicka's complaint of pushing for disarmament 'within the current international environment' (2013: 337). However, while critiquing the corruption of the NPT regime by the interests of the great powers, Craig and Ruzicka nonetheless give general support to the underlying idea of the NPT and the international society approach to nuclear politics. They do not challenge the value of strong anti-nuclear norms and institutions in the politics of nuclear weapons but rather lament how these have been damaged.[12] The 'endless betrayals' of the 'nuclear haves' (2013: 341) have undermined the power of international regimes such as the NPT to effectively stigmatise nuclear weapons, subverting the original intentions of the NPT and weakening the anti-nuclear norm and the nuclear taboo. While contesting the institutional constraints of the current disarmament agenda and its overall compliance with existing power structures and international structures, they do not challenge the conceptual constraints of this agenda and its compliance with dominant modes of understanding and expressing the nuclear. Craig and Ruzicka speak about this in terms of interests and power. The great powers get to keep their weapons and the non-proliferation complex receives its publicity and funding and continues to push an uncontroversial, progressive disarmament agenda.

By contrast, the argument of this article is that there is something at work here that goes beyond interest as a reason for a lack of action or political imagination and instead can be investigated by returning to the dominance of the discourse of the unthinkable. The question to which the nuclear realists answered with a definitive negative in the 1950s and 60s, and which has been repeated since by authors such as Craig and Ruzicka, was 'can nuclear

weapons be reconciled with the foundational institutions of international society?' (van Munster and Sylvest, 2014: 535). This question, while crucial, needs to be supplemented with an additional query of whether we can reconcile the nuclear, as a political, cultural and conceptual change in our very way of being and understanding the world, with the foundational, institutional discourses of international society that dominate anti-nuclear politics. If, as so many have claimed, nuclear politics demand new ways of thinking, one must question how the dominant understanding of nuclear politics as the politics of the unthinkable and anti-nuclear politics as norm-creation and institution-building has constrained our ability to politically conceive of, and thus address, this demand and what this can show us about the limits of these approaches to international politics more broadly.

Indeed, it is not an International Relations scholar but the poet Seamus Heaney who has best articulated a central problem of the nuclear age as 'our inability to trust too far a language of continuity' (in Schley, ed. 1983: 150). The darkness of the shadow of nuclear annihilation is not only that of our own destruction but of the loss of what Morgenthau (1961) termed symbolic immortality: that which 'gives the individual at least a chance to survive himself in the collective memory of mankind.' The possibility of nuclear destruction changes this by 'making both history and society impossible' (1961). Heaney has eloquently expressed our resulting struggle to speak in a language of nuclear politics that is premised on universal claims. The mainstream approach to non-proliferation and disarmament replaces one 'language of continuity' (nuclearism and deterrence) with another (humanitarianism and universal anti-nuclear norms) without interrogating how the very form of this language is undermined and subverted by what Morgenthau (1961) terms 'nuclear death'. Both the deterrence and humanitarian discourses, though oppositional in their content, are nonetheless based on the same foundation of nuclear politics as the politics of the unthinkable and

propose responses of containment based on similar claims to universality and continuity, whether through the perceived universal rationality of deterrence or the perceived universality of an appeal to humanitarian law. They are an extension of each other, both trying to address the nuclear through rethinking the unthinkable in a discourse that, as Chaloupka states, 'constantly moves to universalistic levels' (1992: 2).

An example of this universalistic tendency can be seen in the claims of the Humanitarian Pledge, which are founded on 'the security of all humanity' (Humanitarian Pledge, 2015). 'Humanity' is at once the object of security, the basis from which nuclear weapons are denounced and the foundation upon which universal anti-nuclear norms can be built. The danger to 'humanity' posed by nuclear weapons also leaches into a continuous future, simultaneously threatening the total destruction of human existence as well as an empty, post-apocalyptic eternity, 'enabling both the absolute end of time and the exponential proliferation of a toxic future' (Masco, 2006: 12). The often-repeated goal of a 'nuclear-weapons-free' world (sometimes shortened to NWF as if it were a technical status) is another example of this language of continuity, representing the process as one of the permanent eradication of a condition, with nuclear weapons as an external affliction imposed upon 'humanity'. This obscures the political structures and processes involved, instead predicating a future in which a global 'we' is 'freed' from nuclear weapons.[13] Shampa Biswas has described this nuclear 'we' as a 'mythical international community', whose creation precludes certain questions about the existing nuclear order (2014: 3; also Chaloupka: 1992).

It is therefore important to think about the limits that our current ways of expressing the politics of nuclear weapons place on the possibility of political action. For, as Chaloupka has argued, political opposition to nuclearism is generally phrased within 'familiar political ways

of speaking, despite their proponents' considered judgment that precisely these understandings have made the world so different, so dangerous' (1992: 1 – 2). Both the deterrence and the mainstream disarmament discourses propose the solution of containment as a response to nuclear weapons, whether containment as military strategy or containment through (re)speaking and thus taming the nuclear sublime. In fact, despite the drastic statements about the extreme, unthinkable consequences of nuclear weapons used in the repeated calls for non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, there is something conservative and conceptually limiting about this approach, which speaks to a deeper problem of the politics of nuclear weapons and of International Relations as a discipline than Craig and Ruzicka's diagnosis of the sway of interests.

The Humanitarian Initiative as the latest manifestation of this approach continues the assumption of a particular relationship between speaking and thinkability as a way of addressing the problem of nuclear weapons, in which speaking and respeaking tame and contain the unthinkable. Rather than perpetuating or even contesting this relationship, one might better question this by challenging the idea of either unspeakability or unthinkability as permanent boundaries imposed by qualities of the nuclear, and instead, as W.J.T. Mitchell writes, consider them as 'rhetorical tropes that simultaneously invoke and overcome the limitation of language and depiction, discourse and display' (2005: 293).[14] The unspeakable is, in fact, a 'strategy' that actually says something specific about the nuclear, for as Mitchell notes, 'the invocation of the unspeakable is invariably expressed in and followed by an outpouring of words' (2005: 293). This is borne out by the fact that the label of nuclear unspeakability does not generally result in silence but in 'its rhetorical opposite; namely a proliferation of discourses about vulnerability and insecurity' (Masco, 2006: 3). In anti-nuclear political discourse the 'outpouring' often takes the form of a series of contradictions:

the bomb is unthinkable but must be continually rethought; we are rendered dumb by the unspeakable effects of nuclear war but they must be spoken; the nuclear is uncontainable but has been contained by the pernicious effects of nukespeak; the bomb changes everything but can be managed within existing international political structures.

The prevailing conception of the nuclear as unthinkable demands speech and the dominant assumptions of mainstream anti-nuclear politics require that this speech takes the form of a 'language of continuity', where rethinking the nuclear is circumscribed into changing how we collectively think about the nuclear. Attempting to change the content of the politics of nuclear weapons while within this language of continuity, as so much of the literature does, or attempting nuclear critique while tied to its limits can only lead to another repeat of the cycle of discourse identified here. The problem identified by the nuclear realists, of reconciling nuclear weapons with international society is not only one of the limits of institutions, but also the limits of forms of speech, whose perpetual repetition maintains the political status quo. It is therefore in form that one can begin to challenge this discourse. The following section of the paper will propose that one way to accomplish this is by examining the form of nuclear speech through a study of cliché.

Cliché and the '**déjà-dit'**
The fact that nuclear language often falls into the rut of familiar themes and phrases has been well-established. There is much work across disciplines on the dominance of certain ways of speaking about nuclear weapons: on the standard tropes of guilt, redemption and responsibility (Peoples, 2016, Taylor et al, 2007; Taylor, 2010), on prevailing themes of mystery, secrecy, potency and entelechy (Kinsella, 2005), on the highly gendered language in nuclear strategy (Cohn, 1987) and on Nukespeak (Aubrey, 1982, Chilton, 1982, 1985:

Hilgartner et al, 1982; Schiappa, 1989). Indeed, the very idea of saying something 'meaningful' in the face of nuclear holocaust has often been characterised in literature as impossible (Schley, 1983; Schwenger, 1986) for, as Martin Amis writes, 'everything that adapts to the nuclear reality is going to look preposterous – or ugly, or insane, or just preternaturally trivial' (2002: 47). The language of the Humanitarian Initiative repeats many continuities and clichés, what Senn and Elhardt call the 'commonplaces' (2013: 326), of nuclear discourse. These commonplaces include conceiving of nuclear weapons as an 'existential threat' and as approaching 'a point of no return' with nuclear disarmament as 'a possible way out' (2013: 326). It also features what Masco describes as 'an imagined end of the nation, or the human species' which, he claims, 'continues to this day to enable social movements both for and against the construction of the US nuclear complex' (2006: 4). This can be seen by comparing the text of the Humanitarian Pledge, adapted by the UNGA in Resolution 70/48 (2015), with several historic UNGA documents on nuclear disarmament. These texts rest on the same fundamental bases. First, that the threat is both urgent and 'unprecedented' (UNGA, 1978), a 'new and disastrous war' (UNGA, 1959) which has 'reached a dangerous stage' with increasing proliferation (UNGA, 1961) or, as the pledge states, presents a risk that 'is significantly greater than previously assumed and is indeed increasing with increased proliferation' (UNGA, 2015). Secondly, that any use of nuclear weapons would bring about 'indiscriminate suffering' (UNGA, 1961) and destruction to mankind because of its 'unacceptable humanitarian consequences' (UNGA, 2015), and is thus 'contrary to the laws of humanity and to the principles of international law' (UNGA, 1961). Thirdly, that all states are affected by the threat and therefore 'share the responsibility' (UNGA, 2015) so must be 'actively concerned with and contribute to the measures of disarmament' (UNGA, 1978). Finally, that this action is necessary now to secure the 'very survival of mankind' (UNGA, 1978), for both 'present and succeeding generations' (UNGA,

1959), or, as put in the Humanitarian Pledge, 'the very survival of humanity' (2015). These texts assume a common responsibility to 'humanity' and to future generations that demands global cooperation 'in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons' (UNGA, 2015).

But, while the link between nuclear weapons and cliché has been previously established, this paper claims that this is not just a discursive side effect of a repeated cycle of nuclear power politics but that cliché, as part of the dominant framing of the nuclear as unthinkable with all its consequences, actually perpetuates the political status quo rather than simply reflecting it. Analysing the repetitive nature of the discourse in terms of cliché can highlight not only the current circumscription of the call for rethinking the unthinkable into a process of collectively re-knowing nuclear weapons, but also how this circumscription is an inevitable result of the restrictions of the original framing of nuclear weapons in terms of the politics of the unthinkable. A cliché is a phrase or opinion that is overused, considered trite and lacking in originality. Cliché, as such, has not received much specific attention in literary theory but is instead often subsumed into the terms of kitsch or stereotype (Norberg, 2010). Indeed, the idea of cliché might seem like a superficial critique of the politics of nuclear weapons, as mere grousing over style rather than engaging substantively with 'the issues': as not a meaningful criticism but an everyday throwaway comment on form. However, the cliché is in fact a useful frame through which to examine the limitations of our understanding of the nuclear for several reasons.

Cliché is about the formulaic, about a mechanical reproduction of function in speech. The cliché does not exist in classical rhetoric and only came into being at the end of the 19th century, referring to the sound made by the stereotype block used in mass printing and later

associated with photographic negatives (Princeton, 2012: 267). It originally referenced an industrial technique and its associated concept of repetition was thus intrinsically linked to the development of mechanical reproduction (Norberg, 2010). As Ruth Amossy (1982) notes, before this, repetition was less associated with the idea of overuse and its accompanying negative connotations, and more with the accepted use of stock examples to tell stories. To be alert to cliché thus supposes a move away from the previous 'canonical use of tropes' to a 'dichotomy between Creation and Imitation, Originality and Banality, the Individual and the Collective' (1982: 35). To label something as cliché is to make a judgement on an expression's overuse but also, as Jakob Norberg writes, to link 'questions of verbal form to the study of maintained consensus within groups' (2010: 76). Because the cliché is about intelligibility, the reader or listener doesn't need to work out its meaning because they are already 'in full possession' of its total recognisability and indisputability (Norberg, 2010: 77). In this way, the cliché in its very form is profoundly non-political, for, as Hannah Arendt states, it protects us against any 'claim on our thinking' (in Norberg, 2010: 85).

Amossy notes that cliché 'dis-originates' speech (1982: 35). The cliché is something that must exist in its recognition and recognition of overuse requires a familiarity with a preceding discourse, with the 'déjà-dit' (Amossy, 1982: 34). Because cliché is subsumed into the 'déjà dit', the prevalence of cliché in nuclear speech highlights how this political discourse does not need an originator, it is a self-perpetuating cycle stemming from the idea of the unthinkable, an unvarying, repeated call for the need for rethinking. Rather than just an aesthetic judgement, to call attention to the cliché that is widespread in non-proliferation and disarmament discourse is therefore to call attention to a conversation where meaning is completely set and agreed, where there is a lack of a need for active engagement but instead the mechanical repeated statements of, for example, the unthinkable and unspeakable

consequences of nuclear weapons. The Humanitarian Initiative may have been hailed as an innovative and transformative move but if so, it is one that resides not only in the long-established institutions of international politics but also completely within its equally long-established understandings and modes of speech, where everything is already fully intelligible. Examining the non-proliferation and disarmament discourse in terms of cliché therefore exposes the lack of politics as contestation in the current debate.

Furthermore, putting focus on the form of nuclear speech rather than questioning its content does not have the underlying assumption of much work on nuclear discourse, for example the literature on nukespeak, that there is somehow a deeper 'reality' of nuclear weapons to get to if only we were not inhibited by technocratic or euphemistic language. It also does not claim that we can solve the political problem of nuclear weapons by speaking them in a different way. Looking at the form of language and its repeated patterns through cliché and thereby asking what this could expose about the limitations of our political understanding of the nuclear itself, is different to the claim that we simply need to change the words that we use or the value we collectively assign to nuclear weapons. Trying to transform how we speak nuclear weapons while limited by the very same ways of speaking is itself conducive to the repetition that this paper has identified. Focusing on the form of cliché is one way of illuminating this repetition as the first step to understanding these limits. Placing critique on the form of expression rather than changing content is an attempt to expose the underlying formal limitations of the discourse, which are not a matter of calling things by their 'real' names but of how existing nuclear discourse is based on a structure of language that assumes a particular set of characteristics for its object and is limited by the implications of this assumption.

Hannah Arendt sketched the most notorious example of this distinction in her reports of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1963. Her characterisation of Eichmann's inability to speak without using cliché is not the same as his use of what she terms the 'language rules' of the Nazi regime, which sanitised atrocities through euphemism and bureaucratic language (1994: 108). In fact, it was Eichmann's 'inability to think' (1994: 49) as expressed in cliché that made him so receptive to these language games, according to Arendt. She notes, 'officialese became [Eichmann's] language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché' (1994: 48). Similarly, it is the limitations of the form of the dominant means of rethinking the nuclear, exposed by the reliance on cliché that can illuminate how, as William Kinsella (2005: 57) contends, these responses 'have been constrained by the same deep structure of meanings that produced the nuclear situation.' Cliché points to the limitations of the framing of 'the unthinkable' and the ensuing receptiveness of the discourse on nuclear weapons to euphemistic and bureaucratic language, rather than attempting to find a better way to speak the nuclear within this current form.

Finally, thinking about cliché as reproduction of the 'déjà-dit' also reveals something about how the advent of the nuclear age was assimilated into earlier discourses. It highlights how nuclear talk became cliché almost instantly and how the 'deep structure of meaning' that Kinsella (2005) identifies was in place even before the weapons themselves existed. Nuclear discourse was cliché straight from the outset. As early as 1945 the humourist Frank Sullivan, writing for the New York Times as 'Mr. Arbuthnot, the Cliché Expert', satirised the often-used phrases and early clichés still recognisable today, such as the inevitable use of the verb 'usher' in descriptions of the 'ushering' in of the atomic age' (1996: 24).[15] 'Harness' Mr. Arbuthnot says to his interlocutor in the piece, who asks 'Harness, Mr. Arbuthnot? What

about it?'- 'Harness and unleash' he replies, 'You had better learn to use those two words, my boy, if you expect to talk about the atom.'[16]

That this language of cliché on nuclear weapons was so quickly established in the 1940s is, according to Spencer Weart (2012), a result of the fact that the set of meanings and language around nuclear weapons pre-dates the weapons themselves. When President Truman made the first public speech to announce the atomic bomb, the world public 'immediately associated the news with certain long established images which held important personal meanings for almost everyone' (Weart 1985). This was due to the fact that journalists and other writers had been writing for decades previously on radiation and atomic energy, HG Wells coined and popularised the term 'atomic bomb' as far back as 1913, and this language of the atomic age tapped in to an even earlier world of myth around themes of alchemy, transmutation, science fiction and millennialism (Weart, 2012). Indeed, Boyer notes that what is remarkable, though perhaps not surprising, about the early nuclear discourse is the 'general banality and lack of originality' (1985: 136) of the content and the extent to which calls for new thinking simply reproduced previous principles, concerns and assumptions about the world. The effort to speak the unthinkable must fall short and collapse into cliché and the 'déjà-dit', for any attempt to 'think the nuclear sublime' as Ferguson writes, 'dwindles from the effort to imagine total annihilation to something very much like the calculations of exactly how horrible daily life would be after a significant nuclear explosion' (1984: 7). The ensuing pattern of nuclear protest as a standardised repetition of the horrible imposes a limit on political action and imagination.

Conclusion

This article has examined the Humanitarian Initiative and has contended that it is not, as claimed by several commentators, an historic or transformational moment in anti-nuclear politics, but rather another repetition of the call to 'rethink the unthinkable' first made in the days after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It has also claimed that, in its current incarnation in the mainstream non-proliferation and disarmament discourse, rethinking nuclear weapons has become equated with collectively changing how we think about nuclear weapons through respeaking their meaning and value. The limitations of this approach, evaluated by Craig and Ruzicka in terms of interests, are also a result of a larger, foundational problem of conceptualising the politics of nuclear weapons not only within the limitations of the institutions of international society, as nuclear realists argue, but also within the conceptual limits of a response to the unthinkability of the nuclear.

The article has thus added a further question to that posed by the early nuclear realists on the compatibility of the nuclear era with existing international institutions by also examining the compatibility of the nuclear with the foundational, institutional forms of speech of international society. The nuclear realist approach, while a necessary challenge to dominant structures of power, needs to be supplemented by a parallel challenge to the dominant forms of speech and the structures of repetition in which the politics of nuclear weapons has become stuck. One way that this article has highlighted this structure of repetition and political stasis is through the formal critique of nuclear cliché. Examining the disorigination of nuclear political speech through cliché can illustrate the limits of our understanding while avoiding the trap of trying to speak differently while within these limits. This is important because a response to the call for political imagination cannot happen in a space in which the terms we use and approaches that we think of as alternative or transformative are

unchallenging repetitions of those set seventy years ago. Indeed, the problem exposed by the reliance on nuclear cliché is not that of the somehow innate 'unthinkability' of nuclear weapons, but of the reiteration of dominant 'rhetorical tropes' of nuclear unthinkability and unspeakability and the consequences of this repetition. In this way, nuclear weapons are not themselves representative of the limits of speech or international society; they merely illuminate a pre-existing set of limits, both in our political institutions and our political language.

There are two main directions of inquiry that this suggests. First, to think further and critically about the limitations of disarmament politics as a process of rethinking the nuclear through the creation of anti-nuclear norms, and to move beyond these limitations to develop a politics that takes to heart a call for political imagination. This could include but is certainly not limited to the recent appeal by van Munster and Sylvest (2014) for an engagement of those working on Critical Security Studies with the nuclear realists of the 1950s and 60s. Secondly, to further investigate Masco's (2006) question on the impact of framing the nuclear issue as 'the unthinkable' within the study of international politics and to ask what work this discourse of unthinkability is doing in limiting our conceptions of politics and the nuclear more generally. Masco's solution to this is to withdraw back to the thinkable, to the everyday and the effects of nuclear weapons on communities, effects that have been obscured by the alarmist talk of the unthinkability of nuclear holocaust. This paper proposes a different approach. If the 'unthinkable' and 'new thinking' are conceptually bound together, in that our ability for new thinking about nuclear weapons must always be with reference to this original and governing idea of their 'unthinkability', then retreat to the domain of the thinkable contained in the everyday does not overcome this problem, it simply avoids dealing with it. Challenging how 'the unthinkable' has limited nuclear thinking must instead involve

confrontation and disruption of the existing boundaries of the discursive form and an interrogation of what these boundaries tell us about the limits of international politics. Calls to collectively change how we think the nuclear must recognise the deep structures of repetition within which the international politics of nuclear weapons have become trapped. Research should confront the implications of the nuclear as 'the unthinkable', the dominant patterns of nuclear speech and ask why the nuclear, from the very beginning, took the form of repetition. One way that this paper has suggested this can be accomplished is through an acknowledgement of the role of cliché in maintaining a nuclear politics of the status quo.

In 1946, the journalist Norman Cousins was covering some of the earliest US nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Before the tests there was significant international public concern about their potential consequences (which were sadly all too real for the Marshall Islanders), yet after the first series of explosions there was a marked decline in public outcry. Cousins wrote at the time about this general public acceptance: 'After four bombs, the mystery dissolves into a pattern ... There is almost a standardization of catastrophe' (in Boyer, 1986: 293). It is this standardisation of catastrophe, evident in the prevalence of nuclear cliché in current disarmament debates that has motivated this paper. As one diplomat after another stands up at the NPT Review Conference or UN General Assembly to repeat the unthinkable horror of the use of nuclear weapons and the need to work together towards a nuclear free world, or another NGO demands of the public to think the unthinkable, and one more call is made to change how we know and speak nuclear weapons, the mystery once again dissolves into a pattern, whose rhythm of nuclear colloquium (Derrida et al, 1984) recalls the pattern of explosions of the nuclear tests of the 40s and 50s and the mechanised, rhythmic crash of the plates of the printing press before that. By illuminating the form of cliché that both results from and perpetuates the contemporary

nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament debate, the contribution of this article is to begin

to confront and disrupt this pattern.

Notes

[1] William Kinsella has used the categories of potency and mystery as two of the themes of nuclear discourse, the others being secrecy and entelechy (2005).

[2] The US modernisation plan is estimated to cost a trillion dollars over the next three decades. See 'Backsliding on Nuclear Promises,' New York Times editorial, 22 September 2014.

[3] Joseph Masco (2006) provides a further account of both official and academic work on the 'unthinkability' of nuclear weapons including writings by the father of nuclear strategy Herman Kahn.

[4] The focus in the United States on the threat of nuclear terror provides an excellent example of these discourses of apocalypse and insecurity; see Mueller (2009) for discussion and critique.

[5] A comprehensive review of the literature is beyond the scope of this article. For histories of the concept in an IR context see Blieker (2009) and, with a focus on Burke, Devetak (2005). For a good short review of the move to the technological sublime see de Mul (2013) and for more comprehensive outline see Nye (1994) and Marx (1964). This paper does not cover the post-modern sublime of writers such as Lyotard and Jameson.

[6] Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest (2014) have recently advocated greater historical understanding and engagement with what they label the 'nuclear realists' of the 1950-60s (Günther Anders, John Herz, Lewis Mumford and Bertrand Russell) and argue for further engagement between critical security studies and such nuclear realists in dealing with nuclear weapons – this paper has adopted this term.

[7] This list is by no means exhaustive or even representative if the various international groups and discourses on this issue but a complete overview is beyond the scope of this article. For an outline of the various cycles of nuclear activism since the 1940s see Boyer (1985) chapter 8.

[8] It should be noted that there is a nascent body of literature that disputes the broadly assumed fact that nuclear weapons cannot be 'uninvented' founded in work on 'tacit knowledge' (see Mackenzie and Spinardi, 1995; McNamara in Taylor et al eds. 2008) and new materialism (see Bourne, 2016). This work could pose a challenge to the dominant 'norms and institutions' approach.

[9] For example in recent statements from the ICRC available at:
https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/statement/nuclear-weapons-statement-200410.htm
See also the recent publication by the group Reaching Critical Will titled Unspeakable suffering: the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, February 2013. Available at:
http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/7422-unspeakable-suffering-the-humanitarian-impact-of-nuclear-weapons

[10] For example, the humanitarian law approach can also be seen in the action currently brought by the Marshall Islands, site of 67 nuclear tests in the 1940s and 50s, against all nine nuclear weapons possessing states at the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Alvarez, 2015). The suit charges the five NWS states with violating their responsibilities to disarm under the NPT and the four non-NPT member states possessing nuclear weapons with breaches of international customary law, arguing that the development of nuclear weapons violates humanitarian principles and adding its voice for 'a new legal framework towards the time bound elimination of weapons' based on recognition of the 'humanitarian dimension of disarmament' (see de Brum, 2015).

[11] A similar if slightly more encompassing account of what is termed the 'Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime' is given by Shampa Biswas (2014), who develops a post-colonial approach to nuclear weapons and nuclear order.

[12] For more on conflicting nuclear norms see Freedman (2013).

[13] This could be seen as the flipside of the metaphor of 'proliferation' that, as Benoit Pelopidas (2011) has noted, carries the assumption of a pathological condition with the connotation of self-perpetuation that implies a particular nuclear logic.

[14] A somewhat similar argument, though with a different intent is made by Chaloupka who labels the unspeakability of the nuclear a 'rhetorically determined stance' that defends an 'absolutized, natural humanity' (1992: 7) and speaks of the 'paradox' of nuclear politics (1992: 19).

[15] I first saw an excerpt from this in Weart (2012: 56).

[16] In fact US President Obama made use of both 'harness' and 'unleash' in his celebrated Prague speech (Obama, 2009).

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