Rarely in the atomic age have hopes been raised as high as they are now for genuine progress towards disarmament. The new receptivity to nuclear abolition is reflected in the policy declarations of the Obama administration and other governments, and was sparked by a wave of private initiatives that started in 2007 led by former US Secretary of State George Shultz and other former senior officials and political leaders in many countries. Yet despite the glowing pledges of support for a world without nuclear weapons, questions arise about the sincerity of the nuclear-weapons states. They vow to get rid of these weapons at Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences and international summit meetings, yet in their national security policies they cling to the bomb and show no sign of abandoning nuclear deterrence policies. The new US-Russia strategic reduction treaty lowers ceilings for deployed nuclear warheads by more than 30%, but the number of readily useable weapons will decline very little. A broad consensus exists on the urgency of stemming proliferation, yet little progress is visible in attempts at persuading North Korea and Iran to abandon nuclear capability or in reducing nuclear
dangers in South Asia. Russia and the West affirm their common commitment to security cooperation, yet they differ on a broad range of issues and have lost much of the spirit of partnership that flourished briefly in the immediate post-Cold War years. A critical juncture may be approaching. If the soaring rhetoric of disarmament can not produce more substantive policy results, efforts to build support for nuclear abolition could collapse into cynicism, and an opportunity may be missed to advance international security.

Officials who cling to nuclear weapons are reluctant to part with policies they consider vital to security. Nuclear deterrence has kept the peace, they claim, and must be preserved to prevent world war. Security concerns are the fundamental justification for maintaining reliance on nuclear weapons. They are also principal reasons why proliferating states seek to acquire these weapons, to guard against perceived security threats and enhance national power and status. Yet empirical evidence and case studies cast doubt on these justifications. Nuclear deterrence was not the only factor preventing war between the major powers. It has not stopped wars and armed conflicts in other states. It cannot prevent or deter global terrorist threats. The presumed link between extended deterrence and non-proliferation is not confirmed in quantitative studies. Great-power adherence to nuclear weapons validates these weapons for others. The continued divide between nuclear haves and have-nots impedes non-proliferation cooperation and threatens the NPT regime.

The security argument can be turned around: nations are safer and more secure without the bomb. Dozens of governments have made that determination in giving up nuclear-weapons programmes. Countering the threat of proliferation requires a commitment to disarmament. A strategy of progressive denuclearisation can enhance security and
is fully compatible with political realism. Deterrence and the balancing of power do not disappear as nations reduce nuclear dependency. Deterrence continues in new forms even in a world without nuclear weapons as nations rely on the knowledge and capability to reconstitute weapons as a hedge against cheating.

This book examines the challenges and opportunities associated with achieving a world without nuclear weapons. It is inspired by the conference, ‘The Nonproliferation Treaty and a World Without Nuclear Weapons’, held in Helsinki, Finland, 22–24 October 2009, co-sponsored by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. At the conference former US Defense Secretary William Perry, former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett, and former Australian Foreign Secretary Gareth Evans joined dozens of other experts and former officials from many countries to examine the complex issues and dilemmas associated with ending reliance on nuclear weapons. This volume is not a record of the conference proceedings but a synthesis of participants’ insights and an expression of our own analyses and perspectives. We intend these pages as a contribution to a more informed and realistic assessment of achieving security without nuclear weapons.
Towards Nuclear Zero