

## **A world free of nuclear weapons : how to achieve it?**

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It is more than a year now since President Obama's speech in Prague set out the clear aim of achieving over time a world free of nuclear weapons. Since then the UN Security Council, which of course includes the world's five recognised nuclear weapons states, at its summit meeting last September, supported the agenda Obama set in Prague. And only two weeks ago, at the conclusion of the latest five-yearly review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) the consensus conclusions, endorsed by all except the four non-participants at that conference - India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan - re-affirmed the objective of a nuclear weapons-free world. So the aspiration of the international community is clear. But the key question remains how to achieve it; and that will be no easy or rapid task.

It is, however, an urgent one; because, as we have seen over the last two decades, it is all too easy to regress from rather than to progress towards the overall objective. A first burst of multilateral nuclear disarmament which followed immediately after the end of the Cold War was succeeded by what can best be described as a nuclear winter, when the US administration of President George W Bush turned its back on new, verified measures of arms control and indeed dismantled some of those already in place; and the recognised nuclear weapons states failed to make any progress towards fulfilling the disarmament commitments they had entered into at the NPT review conferences in 1995 and 2000. Over the same period, and by no means entirely coincidentally, the nuclear non-proliferation regime came under increasing stress as North Korea first broke its obligations under the NPT and then withdrew from it and as Iran was found to have a major clandestine uranium enrichment programme. Discovery of the existence of the Pakistani A Q Khan distribution network, ready to supply potential weapons technology to anyone who would pay for it, and the emergence of terrorist organisations which would dearly like to lay their hands on and to use fissile material, perhaps in what is called a dirty bomb,

introduced new and terrifying risk dimensions to what was already a troubling scene. We should have no illusions. If North Korea and Iran are able to consolidate their break-out from the non-proliferation regime, there will not be a soft landing. At the very least there is likely to ensue a nuclear arms race in two extremely fragile regions of the world, North East Asia and the Middle East. There could be worse. And, if the recognised nuclear weapons states again fail to deliver on the commitments they undertook in last month's review conference, then the unity of the international community to resist proliferation will be crucially undermined.

The only response to these complex challenges which has any chance of being effective is a multilateral one, drawing in gradually all the main actors and addressing in a multi-track process all three of the main areas which need to be covered, nuclear disarmament by all those who have nuclear weapons, strengthened anti-proliferation disciplines to prevent the number of those states increasing, and measures to enable those who wish to develop civil nuclear energy to do so in a way which minimises the proliferation risks. The fact that the process has to be a multilateral one in no sense means that the individual states concerned, ourselves included, can afford to take a pass on difficult and sensitive decisions at a national level or will be able to get away with merely paying lip service to the wider agenda.

Here then are some suggestions for the main elements of that multilateral process:

- First there is a need to consolidate progress that has already been made. That means sustaining the de facto moratorium on nuclear testing, and moving as rapidly as possible to the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty following ratification of it by the United States, China and a number of other states. And it also requires the United States and Russia to ratify the new strategic arms reduction treaty they signed in April of this year;

- Second the US and Russia, still the possessors of by far the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, need to move beyond the current reductions in their strategic weapons, and the other recognised nuclear weapons states, China, France and the UK, need to be drawn into those negotiations at some stage;
- Third a way needs to be found preferably to remove, or at least to reduce, the number of short range nuclear weapons still on European soil, the major proportion of which are deployed by Russia, the lesser proportion by NATO. The current review of NATO's strategic concept and the prospective NATO summit in November in Lisbon provides an opportunity which must not be missed to engage Russia in a negotiation on this issue;
- Fourth all nuclear weapons states need to move much further than they have done hitherto to de-alert their nuclear arsenals and to reduce the far too prominent role they still play in their military doctrines, while making those doctrines more transparent. The recent US nuclear posture review was a welcome step in that direction. The UK has now announced that it too will carry out a nuclear posture review and it will be important that this review places under critical scrutiny the UK's "continuous at sea" element of its doctrine which seems to me a clear relic of the Cold War and one whose abandonment would have implications for the implementation of the decision to replace Trident;
- Fifth there is an urgent need to engage negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. The five recognised nuclear weapons states are ready to do that, but procedural obstacles in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva have so far prevented negotiations being started. That log-jam needs to be broken at latest by the time of the high level meeting of the Conference on Disarmament which has been called by the UN Sec-Gen this September. If that cannot be achieved by consensus, in my view the five recognised nuclear weapons states should be prepared to negotiate a text between themselves as a precursor to wider buy-in.

In addition a de facto moratorium on the production of fissile material could be a valuable step just as it has been in the context of the Test Ban treaty. It could helpfully concentrate peoples' minds if consultation could begin on these alternatives, including perhaps action by the General Assembly to break the deadlock;

- Sixth the preparations for the 2012 conference on a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, which it was agreed to hold at last month's NPT review conference, need to be put in hand without delay, with the UN Secretary General appointing a facilitator to begin what will clearly be an arduous and daunting task;
- Seventh the universal application of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Additional Protocol, which provides for more intrusive inspection procedures for civil nuclear facilities, needs to be pursued vigorously following the support it received at the NPT review conference. At some stage it may be necessary for acceptance of the Additional Protocol to become a condition of supply of civil nuclear materials;
- Eighth the proposals for the multi-nationalisation, under international surveillance by the IAEA, of uranium enrichment and reprocessing services need to be carried forward. So far only one such scheme, the Russian one, has been approved by the IAEA. If more schemes could receive that seal of approval then any country wanting to press ahead with a civil nuclear programme should be able to do so without concern about the availability of enrichment and reprocessing services and without the proliferation risks inherent in the multiplication of such installations;
- Ninth an acceleration of the research work on the technical requirements needed to verify nuclear disarmament measures should be put in hand. The UK and Norwegian governments' joint project, VERTIC, is a promising beginning but a major international research programme

involving the five recognised nuclear weapons states is now needed if progress at the negotiation table on other aspects of the disarmament agenda is not to be impeded by doubts over the effectiveness of verification capacity.

Well, that you may feel is a formidable agenda; and you would be right. But it is not an impossible one, if only the political will to carry it forward can be summoned up and sustained. The extremely depressing prospects in this field a year or two ago have been transformed by President Obama's Prague speech, by the recent US/Russian strategic arms agreement and by the success of last month's NPT review conference in such marked contrast to the fiasco of its predecessor in 2005.

It will be important if this process is to move ahead successfully to avoid one or two casuistical traps. The first of these is the argument that the actions of North Korea and Iran render all this talk merely academic. As I said earlier, it really is important to avoid a situation in which either country breaks out on a lasting basis from its NPT obligations. Doing so requires both increased sanctions and a continued willingness to engage with these two countries in a broad political dialogue which will encompass the concerns which drove them in the first place to develop their nuclear programmes in the way they have done. But the prospective scale of these programmes, even if it does prove impossible to halt or to roll them back for some time, are minimal in comparison with the arsenals of the recognised nuclear weapons states. So continued reduction in those latter arsenals will not remove the deterrent effect which they will continue to have. Indeed a reduction on those arsenals will increase the chances of creating a broad international consensus against any breakout by these two countries. The second trap is to fall into a debate over whether a world free of nuclear weapons is either a realistic or a desirable objective, it being argued that a world with a much lower level of nuclear arsenals than at present, still in a limited number of hands, is likely to be more stable and more secure than one with no nuclear weapons at all. But this is a completely unnecessary debate to bring

to a head at this moment for a very simple reason. The route that leads to a world free of nuclear weapons and the route which leads to a world with much smaller nuclear arsenals than at present are identical for a considerable period of time which it would be unwise to try to quantify at this stage. And the third trap is the argument that during the Cold War the existence of nuclear weapons made a major contribution to international peace and security and to the avoidance of hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union. We can surely leave that debate to the historians. But, even if it can be proved to be a tenable proposition, it does not demonstrate that in a much more fissiparous, multi-polar, post-Cold War world the same considerations will prevail. In my own view a future world which contained a substantially increased number of nuclear weapons states, some of them with much less reliable systems of political and technical control than had the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, would be a dramatically more insecure world and one which we should be doing everything we can to avoid.

I hope I have at least begun to answer the how and also the why of a world free of nuclear weapons. UNA is committed through its own "Towards zero" campaign and as a partner in the much wider, international "Global zero" campaign to working to achieve that objective. It will be a priority for us for many years to come but, as the Chinese saying goes "the longest journey begins with the first step" and that was taken at last month's NPT Review conference.