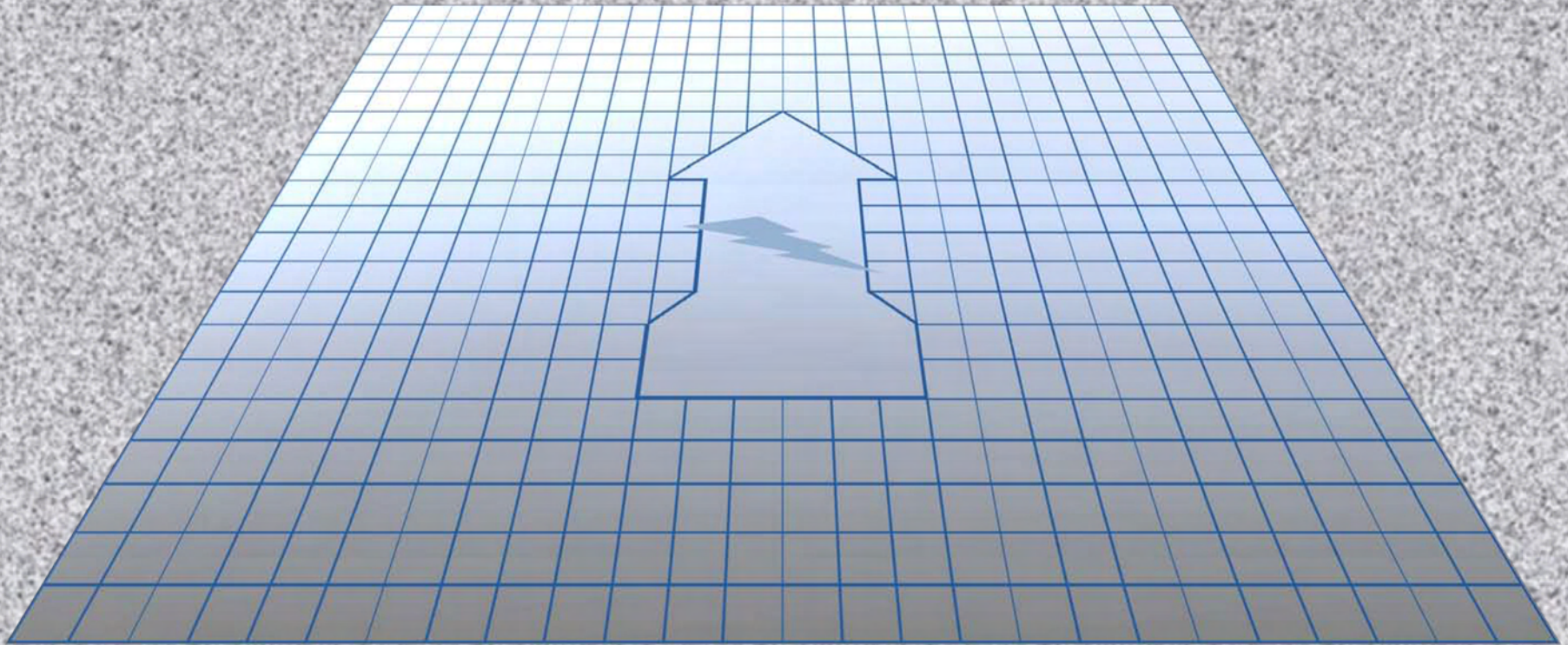


TOWARD A WORLD WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

2011 Report of the Joint Media Project

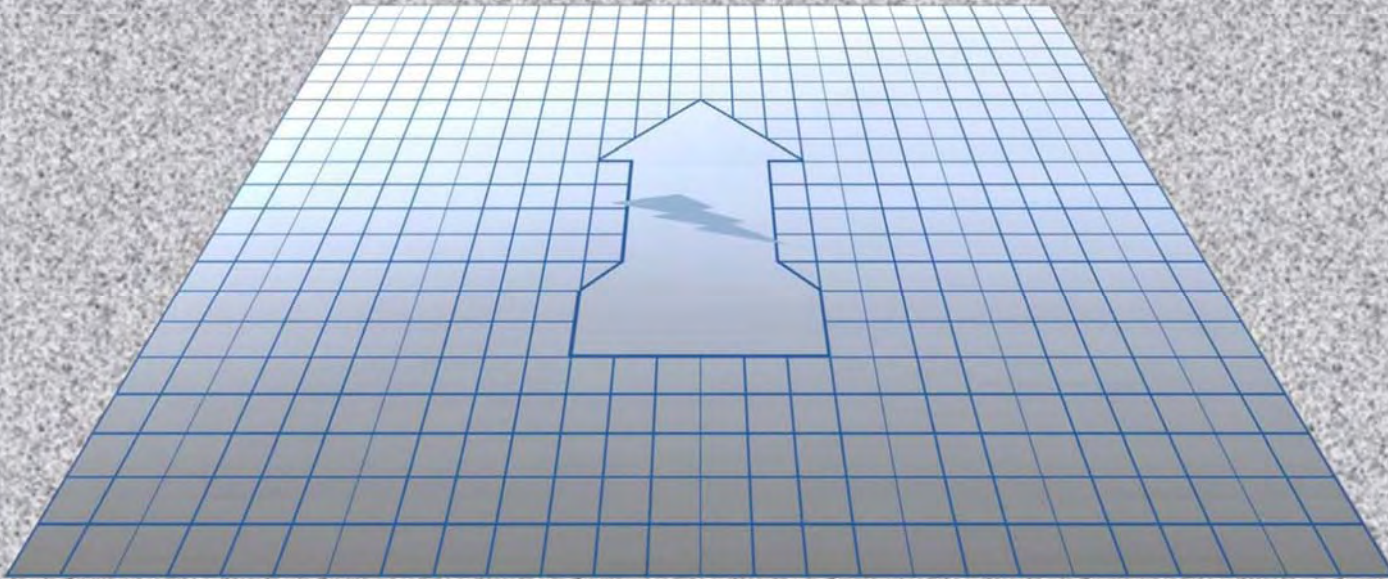


Conducted by Inter Press Service (IPS) and Soka Gakkai International (SGI)
in cooperation with Media Network of Global Cooperation Council



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MESSAGE FROM

JAYANTHA DHANAPALA

President | Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jody Williams used one tool – the email – to mobilize public opinion against anti-personnel landmines and successfully achieved the Mine Ban Convention. The Arab Spring has used the social media such as the Facebook to convey the powerful message of popular sentiment to threaten and topple dictators. Is it not time that the established media helps President Obama achieve his popular vision of a nuclear weapon free world in his lifetime thwarting the interests of the military-industrial complex?

The nuclear weapon is the most destructive instrument of violence and terror ever invented by humans. A nuclear war will not only kill millions of people, destroying entire cities, but also devastate our life-supporting ecology, inflicting genetic consequences on future generations. No nation's security justifies the retention of such a weapon, let alone its use.

Today nine states with nuclear weapons - five participants in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and four nonparticipants hold such weapons which we can never be certain will not be used again - whether through hostile intent or careless accident, whether by a state or by a non-state terrorist group. Huge stocks of highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium, the fissile material of nuclear weapons, lie around the world, all too often in deplorably insecure conditions.

Nor are the consequences of nuclear weapons use limited to death, destruction, and radiation poisoning. Scientific research says that using even 0.03 percent of the global nuclear arsenal can cause catastrophic climate change.

This situation cannot be sustained indefinitely. As long as some states have nuclear weapons, others will inevitably aspire to possess them for national security, as status symbols, or for terrorist uses. Only in a world verifiably free of nuclear weapons will there be no proliferation. That will be a safer world and a better world for all - equally.

The world has abolished two other categories of weapons of mass destruction – biological weapons and chemical weapons. It has also abolished nuclear weapon testing through a treaty that awaits entry into force. Universal treaties that are verifiable can delegitimize weapons even though they may not be disinvented.

Governments, especially Non-Aligned Movement members, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and civil society groups, such as the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, have urged a convention abolishing nuclear weapons. Opinion pieces by eminent elder statesmen have recently appeared in the United States and other countries calling for a nuclear weapons-free world. It is imperative that these voices for abolition of nuclear weapons are heard through the media and that people around the world are informed of the imminent destruction that can be caused by such weapons. The worldwide media coverage given to the Fukushima nuclear disaster has caused Governments to pause and re-think their energy strategies under the pressure of public opinion. The social conscience of journalists must move them to publicize worse disasters by nuclear weapons that will end human civilization. ♦



**PREFACE BY
HIROTSUGU TERASAKI**

Executive Director, Peace Affairs | Soka Gakkai International



Soka Gakkai International (SGI), one of the world's largest socially engaged Buddhist movements, has been promoting an international campaign called the "People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition" since 2007, in collaboration with various like-minded international movements calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The year 2007 was the 50th anniversary of a declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons which second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda described as "the foremost of my instructions for the future" in 1957.

In this joint media project launched by SGI with IPS in April 2009, our emphasis is on covering the issue of nuclear weapons abolition from the perspective of civil society, in line with the theme of our People's Decade initiative. With the support of IPS's global network, we've continuously provided information that we consider to be significant and beneficial to global civil society. I would like to express my appreciation for this great success so far.

When we look back upon the year 2010, one crucial event was the NPT Review Conference held at the United Nations headquarters in May. At the conference, global society succeeded in agreeing to a final document which reaffirmed that the only absolute guarantee against the threat posed by nuclear weapons is their total elimination, and sought compliance with international humanitarian law in light of the catastrophic consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. This is highly significant, although it does not go far enough. Other important developments during 2010 included the ratification of the New START treaty between the United States and Russia.

Looking at these developments, we cannot neglect civil society's approaches toward governments and the United Nations aiming for abolition of nuclear weapons. In addition, there are escalating calls for the establishment of a Nuclear Weapons Convention totally banning nuclear weapons, building on the examples of the agreements to ban landmines and cluster munitions. This is a development that SGI considers to be of great significance.

We believe these developments present the opportunity for a fresh starting point as the discussion moves away from debating whether or not to abolish nuclear weapons and coalesces around an agreement that these weapons must be abolished. Civil society is rallying in support of this position.

We are ever more deeply determined that, through continuing this project with IPS, these voices of civil society will be reflected throughout global society in the quest for the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. ◆

PREFACE BY

RAMESH JAURA

Coordinator & Editor-in-Charge | IPS-SGI Media Project

This compilation offers distinguished viewpoints, in-depth reports and news features on a wide range of themes and events at the United Nations in New York and in Europe as well as elsewhere around the world, organized by civil society organizations. Writers are knowledgeable people committed to abolition of nuclear weapons, and professional journalists who report and analyse incessant efforts under way to help usher in a nuke-free world.

It is the second compilation of its kind, marking the second – and a rather eventful year – of a media project launched by Inter Press Service news agency and the Soka Gakkai International with a view to strengthening awareness about the need to abolish nuclear weapons, which as David Krieger, President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, writes are "the ultimate weapon of terrorism, whether in the hands of a terrorist organization or those of the leader of a country," adding: "They are indeed weapons of mass annihilation that kill indiscriminately men, women and children. Most people fear the possibility of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorist organizations, but never stop to consider that in any hands they are terrorist weapons."

This is a critical aspect often missed in public debate, which also does not always pay adequate attention to "the double standards of nuclear powers", writes Ray Acheson, the director of Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom that advocates for nuclear disarmament and monitors nuclear weapon issues.

Kathleen Sullivan, the Programme Director for Hibakusha Stories, an arts-based initiative that brings atomic bomb survivors into New York City High Schools to share their testimonies, hits the nail on the head when she writes: "To achieve a nuclear weapon-free world we need an educated citizenry that fully appreciates the radioactive violence and Damoclean danger constituted by nuclear bombs." People need to be educated about the threat to all life that nukes embody, be they in the hands of (even) sensible governments or 'terrorists'. "There are three major issues concerning nuclear weapons, all very difficult: disarmament-nonproliferation, military use, and theological significance. But there is a universal remedy: solve the underlying conflicts," writes the veteran professor of Peace Studies, Johan Galtung, concluding: "Achieving disarmament through peace is much easier than achieving peace through disarmament."

These basic tenets and independent analyses by a network of professional journalists not only explain the backdrop to the landmark Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May 2010 but also follow up on all aspects of the final document, including a conference for declaring the Middle East as a nuclear weapons free zone and establishing a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

As political gyrations in the Middle East indicate, time is ripe for profound paradigm shifts – away from the outdated militarized mind sets of yesteryears toward those that throw doors open to fresh winds that carry the fragrance of sustainable peace. ◆



VIEWPOINT

THE ULTIMATE WEAPON OF TERRORISM

By David Krieger*



SANTA BARBARA - Nuclear weapons are the ultimate weapon of terrorism, whether in the hands of a terrorist organization or those of the leader of a country. They are weapons of mass annihilation that kill indiscriminately men, women and children. Most people fear the possibility of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorist organizations, but never stop to consider that in any hands they are terrorist weapons.

Given the terrorist nature of nuclear weapons and their capacity to destroy civilization, what makes them acceptable to so many people? Or, at a minimum, what makes so many people complacent in the face of nuclear threats? These are questions I have grappled with for many decades.

The acceptability of nuclear weapons is rooted in the theory of nuclear deterrence, which its proponents argue has kept and will keep the peace. This theory is based upon many assumptions concerning human behaviour. For example, it assumes the rationality of political and military leaders. It seems quite evident that not all leaders behave rationally at all times and under all circumstances. The theory requires clear communications and the threat to use nuclear weapons in retaliation must be believed by opposing leaders, but as we know communications are not always clear and misperceptions may inform beliefs.

There is a madman theory of nuclear deterrence. It posits that to be truly believable, the leader of a nuclear armed state must exhibit behaviour that appears sufficiently insane to lead opposing leaders to believe that he would actually use the weapons. Thus, insanity, or at least the impression of it, is built into the system. At a systems level, can anyone doubt that the reciprocal threats of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) were truly mad, as in insane?

Another aspect of deterrence theory is that it requires a territory against which to retaliate. Thus, the theory is not valid in relation to a non-state terrorist organization. If a country has no place to retaliate, there can be no nuclear deterrence. If a terrorist organization acquires a nuclear weapon, it will not be deterred by threat of nuclear retaliation. This places a fuse on the nuclear threat, and means that there must be zero tolerance for a non-state terrorist organization to acquire a nuclear capability.

There should also be zero tolerance for states to possess nuclear weapons. I am not limiting this observation to states that seek to develop nuclear arsenals. I mean all states and, most importantly, those already in possession of nuclear weapons. Current nuclear arsenals may be used by accident, miscalculation or intention. And so long as some states possess nuclear weapons and base their security upon them, there will be an incentive for nuclear proliferation. ☺

*David Krieger is President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (www.wagingpeace.org). He is a leader in the global movement to abolish nuclear weapons.

Widespread nuclear complacency is difficult to understand. Most people are aware of the tremendous damage that nuclear weapons can do, but perhaps feel reassured that the weapons have not been used since 1945. The weapons are largely out of sight and out of mind. It is also possible that people feel impotent to influence nuclear policy and thus defer to experts and policy makers. This is unfortunate because until large numbers of people assert themselves on the need to eliminate nuclear weapons, the countries with nuclear weapons will continue to rely upon them to their peril and to the world's peril.

The New START agreement between the US and Russia is a modest step forward in reducing the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons on each side to 1,550 and the number of deployed delivery vehicles to 700. The greatest value of the treaty may be in restoring inspections of each side's nuclear arsenal by the other side. But these steps provide only meagre progress.

At the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation we advocate the following next steps forward:

- reducing the total number of nuclear weapons strategic, tactical and reserve to under 1,000 on each side;
- making a binding commitment to No First Use of nuclear weapons and to never using nuclear weapons under any circumstances against non-nuclear weapon states;
- de-alerting all nuclear weapons so that there will be no use by accident, miscalculation- or in a fit of anger;
- placing limits on missile defense systems and banning space weapons;
- commencing multilateral negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, which would ban all nuclear weapons worldwide in a phased, verifiable, irreversible, and transparent manner.

These steps would be indications that the immorality, illegality, and cowardice of threatening to use nuclear weapons were being met with a seriousness of purpose. It is not necessary for ignorance, apathy, and complacency to dominate the nuclear arena. With due regard for the sanctity of life and for future generations, we can do better than to live with such inertia. We can eliminate a weapon that threatens civilization and human survival; we can move to zero, the only stable number of nuclear weapons. This is the greatest challenge of our time, a challenge that we must respond to with engagement and persistence. It is time to replace Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) with Planetary Assured Security and Survival (PASS). [IPS | February 2011]



VIEWPOINT

THE DOUBLE STANDARDS OF NUCLEAR POWERS

By Ray Acheson*



NEW YORK - On 5 February, the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) entered into force. New START is an agreement between Russia and the United States that sets 1550 as the limit of how many nuclear warheads each country can deploy at any given time (down from 1700-2200 under the old arrangement). The treaty does not affect the number of nuclear warheads each country can possess, which is estimated at 8500 for the US and 11,000 for Russia.

New START has been hailed as a victory by most arms control and disarmament advocates, who claim that while the treaty does not do much for disarmament, it should pave the way for actual reductions and will strengthen the relationship between the two major nuclear powers.

In reality, however, the treaty has stark consequences for the future of nuclear disarmament. In exchange for US Senate ratification of the treaty, the Obama administration promised 185 billion USD for the modernization of nuclear weapons, delivery systems, and related infrastructure over the next twenty years. Similarly, the Russian Duma adopted the treaty only on the condition that the government will invest in the development and production of new types of strategic offensive weapons and in "preserving and developing the necessary research and development base and production capabilities" of Russia's strategic nuclear forces.

In May 2010, all 189 states that are party to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) -including Russia and the United States- agreed to an action plan to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Action 1 of this plan commits all members "to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons".

In 2005 and 2010, all of the NPT-recognized nuclear weapon states (China, France, Russia, the UK and US, which are also the permanent five members of the UN Security Council) espoused an "unequivocal undertaking" to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The obligation to disarm is a core element of the NPT, embedded in article VI, which also mandates an end to the modernization of and investment in nuclear weapons by obligating the nuclear weapon states to negotiate a cessation of the nuclear arms race. ➔

*Ray Acheson is the director of Reaching Critical Will, a project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom that advocates nuclear disarmament and monitors nuclear weapon issues. She is the editor of RCWA's reporting publications and also an anthology of NGO writings, *Beyond Arms Control: Choices and Challenges for Nuclear Disarmament* (2010).

Despite these legal obligations, all of the nuclear weapon states are engaged in or have plans to modernize their nuclear arsenals and related facilities over the coming decades.

Modernization of existing US warheads is ongoing to extend their life and other features, including in some cases additional military capabilities. There are also efforts underway to increase investment in new infrastructure for building nuclear weapon components. Russia's government has pledged its commitment to modernize all three legs of its nuclear forces -intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarines, and bombers.

In 2010, the French navy deployed a new submarine-launched ballistic missile, the M-51. It is expected that the missiles will be armed with a new warhead later this decade. The United Kingdom has postponed its plans to modernize Trident but has not scrapped the idea. China is deploying new mobile missiles and a new class of ballistic missile submarine, and reportedly is increasing its number of nuclear warheads.

As for those states not party to the NPT, new US intelligence reports indicate that Pakistan has expanded its nuclear arsenal over the last several years (to 90-110) and is building its capacity to produce more fissile material for nuclear weapons. According to NGO estimates in 2010, India is continuing to develop a triad of offensive nuclear forces and is planning to introduce several additions to its arsenal, including ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, and possibly a nuclear-capable cruise missile. The plans for Israel's nuclear weapon forces are unknown.

The implications of nuclear weapon modernization for international security and the stability of the non-proliferation regime are grave. At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the majority of states that do not possess nuclear weapons complained about the double standards of the nuclear powers, which seek to strengthen controls against proliferation while at the same time engaging in the refurbishment of their own arsenals.

While the leaders of many of the nuclear powers have by now professed their interest in seeking "a world without nuclear weapons", their budgets and policies contradict this claim, leading to frustration and cynicism among non-nuclear states and threatening the integrity of the NPT.

As the Norwegian ambassador warned, "A world without nuclear weapons cannot continue to be just a vision. It is an objective which we, states parties to the NPT, are committed to achieve." The Western countries seeking increased restrictions on nuclear technology to prevent proliferation were unable to push through reforms largely because the majority of non-weapon states refused to accept more controls on their activities while the weapon states continue to invest in their arsenals and refuse to commit to a process and timeline for complete disarmament.

Plans to modernize nuclear arsenals cast dark shadows over prospects for disarmament in any near-term future. While some governments and a large number of civil society groups are trying to initiate negotiations of a nuclear weapons convention -a ban on nuclear weapons- the nuclear weapon possessors appear far from ready to engage in multilateral disarmament talks. But if the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process. [IPS | February 2011]

VIEWPOINT

ELIMINATING NUCLEAR WEAPONS: EDUCATION IS CENTRAL

By Kathleen Sullivan*



NEW YORK - Upon hearing the stories of atomic bomb survivors, a high school student in Manhattan remarked, "It made me realize how fast and instantly the world as we know it could turn literally into nothing but dust and ashes." Today the proliferation of nuclear weapons continues in a climate of decreased concern.

We no longer have the massive global disarmament movements of the 1960s and 1980s; instead nuclear issues are a kind of background noise. Nuclear news items appear almost daily and are reported in a fairly straight-forward manner. However, they also contain deeper meanings that evade the awareness of many, particularly young people who are growing up with scant knowledge of the distinctive risks of the nuclear age.

To achieve a nuclear weapon-free world we need an educated citizenry that fully appreciates the radioactive violence and Damoclean danger constituted by nuclear bombs. As acknowledged in the United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education, UN member states need to regard the education of future leaders and citizens with urgency and dedication. Educators should seek creative means to engage young people in nuclear issues, and this requires a thoughtful approach -not only education about disarmament but education for disarmament.

Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan defined this as an absolute necessity: "There has never been a greater need for education in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation, especially with regard to weapons of mass destruction, but also in the field of small arms and international terrorism. Since the end of the Cold War, changing concepts of security and threat have demanded new thinking. Such new thinking will arise from those who are educated and trained today."

Still, few students understand the basic facts and are often surprised to learn that approximately 23,000 nuclear weapons are owned by nine nations and remain a threat to all life on earth. Many people are unaware that nuclear weapons are unique and are not at all like conventional bombs. We are rarely reminded that the primary effects of a nuclear explosion include a blast, heat, fire, and radiation, producing destruction on an unimaginable scale.

The immense light and heat of a nuclear explosion is three times greater than at the interior of our sun and can initiate firestorms, which deplete oxygen from the environment and create hurricane-force winds that in turn attract debris and feed the storm, causing super-infernos. According to Lynne Eden of Stanford University, a 300 kiloton bomb, the average size of most strategic nuclear weapons (dwarfing the one dropped on Hiroshima, which was around 15 kilotonnes), would create firestorms over a 40-65 mile radius where "virtually no one...would survive". ☹

*Kathleen Sullivan is the Programme Director for Hibakusha Stories, an arts-based initiative that brings atomic bomb survivors into New York City High Schools to share their testimonies. She has produced two films about survivors from Nagasaki: *The Last Atomic Bomb* (2005) and *The Ultimate Wish*.

Educators also need to encourage awareness of another, much-misunderstood effect of nuclear weaponry -long-lived radiation. Once released, radioactive elements can hang around for millennia, putting future generations at risk of developing cancer and genetic mutations. Long after a nuclear weapon is detonated, radiation does its deadly work in secret. Plutonium, one of the main radioactive ingredients of nuclear weapons, has a half-life of 24,000 years.

Many students are unaware that there are still people alive today who survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. In Japanese, atomic bomb survivors are called hibakusha. Listening to their stories can help provide young people with a confident understanding of nuclear issues. In hearing their first hand testimony, students can begin to understand the exceptional dangers of nuclear weapons and radiation and thus grasp the daily realities of our nuclear age.

This urgent education and understanding is needed not only for young people but, sadly, for some adults as well, many in positions of political power, who believe that nuclear weapons are a fact of life and we will just have to learn how to live with the threat.

Even though there has been some talk of the importance of disarmament (in some unidentified future) and there are international laws and agreements to usher in the end of the nuclear weapon era, there is still a yawning gap between rhetoric and reality.

Which countries have Nuclear Disarmament Agencies? Which nations are prepared to plan for the dismantling of their arsenals? What monies and personnel are allocated for this most noble of tasks?

And given the choice, do we really want to live in a world where we have the power to switch off the lights on all complex life forms?

Not great social calculus is needed to understand that the farther we get from the realities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the closer we are to the use of nuclear weapons again, by accident or by design. In recent major media, we have heard a re-mix of the duck and cover mentality that sheltering in place can save lives. The only way to avoid the dangers of a nuclear attack is to educate ourselves about the true meaning of nuclear weapons, and get rid of them.

[IPS | December 2010]

"To achieve a nuclear weapon-free world we need an educated citizenry that fully appreciates the radioactive violence and Damoclean danger constituted by nuclear bombs. As acknowledged in the United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education, UN member states need to regard the education of future leaders and citizens with urgency and dedication. Educators should seek creative means to engage young people in nuclear issues, and this requires a thoughtful approach -not only education about disarmament but education for disarmament."

VIEWPOINT

HOW TO OVERCOME THE KEY OBSTACLES TO NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

By Johan Galtung*



BRUSSELS - There are three major issues concerning nuclear weapons, all very difficult: disarmament-nonproliferation, military use, and theological significance. But there is a universal remedy: solve the underlying conflicts. Achieving disarmament through peace is much easier than achieving peace through disarmament.

The first issue involves a possible US-Russia treaty to eliminate some of the estimated 23,000 aging "strategic" (genocide) nuclear bombs; the "nuclear summit" of 46 countries in Washington convened by Obama to secure fissionable material; the nuclear disarmament conference of 60 countries convened in Tehran by Iranian president Ahmadinejad, demanding the destruction of all atomic weapons, starting with the US arsenal; and the NATO meeting in Estonia on the 240 "tactical" bombs stationed in Europe.

The US nuclear triad (land, submarine, and air-based delivery) has not been touched, nor have those tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, nor, most importantly, the use of depleted radioactive uranium in weapons by the US which cause slow, agonizing death. To call the recycling of some monstrous old weapons 'disarmament' is pure public relations. Storing uranium in the US -the fox in the hen house- not even under supervision of the United Nations International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), sounds like a bad joke. This is a rerun of the Cold War, just as Afghanistan is a rerun of Vietnam.

The second nuclear issue is catastrophic. In 1967 I published an essay for the Pugwash organization, warning of suitcase bombs that could be hidden near crucial targets, for example on a sail boat, operated by remote control, and used for blackmail to obtain particular demands (in "Peace, War, and Defense", www.transcend.org/tup).

This method is far simpler than delivery by missile, where the sender can easily be identified. An unsigned letter making threats is far harder to deal with, particularly if non-state actors are among the suspects. Dismissing the letter as a bluff would carry heavy risks. Determining the culprit after a nuclear explosion though analysis of the fallout would be impossible if laboratories were no longer functional. ↻

*Johan Galtung, a professor of Peace Studies, is founder of TRANSCEND, a peace-development-environment network. His most recent book is "The Fall of the US Empire--And Then What?" (www.transcend.org/tup).

Picture: The writer on YouTube

The 15th anniversary of the Oklahoma bombing reminds us of how the "experts" perceived clear indications of involvement of the Middle East, though without specifying which country. But the origin was the US Midwest, not the Middle East.

Timothy McVeigh learned extreme violence as a US soldier in the 1991 Gulf War massacre, and was upset about the Waco massacre two years earlier. He was executed in 2001. But death is no deterrent to suicide bombers, and there are many of them around.

The third nuclear issue, which presents an obstacle to disarmament, is the "divinity problem". God uses extreme force to punish pagans, such as the plagues He sent to Egypt to force it to let the Jews go. Similarly the US used nuclear bombs to punish the Japanese (who had already capitulated), telling them whose God was mightier. Nuclear weapons confer divinity on their owners -civilizations, not states and certainly not non-states.

Giving such divine power to "savages" is worse than proliferation: it is profanation. For the US, the ideal scenario is that the US alone would have nuclear bombs; second best, certain allied Christian countries would as well. A hyphenated Judeo- bomb -as in Judeo-Christian- is also acceptable. And with Bolshevism gone, even an Orthodox Christian bomb might be tolerable, if tamed by a treaty and some shield.

But what about a Confucian bomb?

Suspect. A Hindu bomb (1998, code-named "The Buddha has smiled")? Controversial. A "buddhist bomb" is an oxymoron, but a Shinto bomb? Also problematic - could they seek revenge?

But the real problem in a West unable to respect Islam is an Islamic bomb. What if Iran saw itself as the Persian civilization? Indeed, it does, being older than most others. An even worse possibility would be an Islamic non-state, one claiming to be as close to the divine as anybody else, Al Qaeda ("the base"), bent on protecting the sacred in Mecca-Medina-Jerusalem and on punishing the unfaithful intruders, for example by destroying some buildings on 9/11.

Giving up nuclear status is seen as giving up divinity. For the inner club, this seems unreasonable. Is there a way out? English women played a significant role in opposing and ultimately abolishing slavery and colonialism. Some English unilateralism might lead the way. Ladies of England, join forces with that great gift, the liberal Nicholas Clegg, who even doubts the usefulness of the UK's Trident nuclear programme! Please, do it again! [IPS | May 2010]

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ARAB WORLD PROTESTS COULD REIGNITE ANTI-NUKE CAMPAIGN

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The global civil society campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons could be politically reignited by the phenomenal successes of the grassroots demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia, shadowed closely by Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Jordan.

"Developments in the Middle East [and North Africa] show how fragile 'stability' is when people's needs and desires are ignored," says Hirotsugu Terasaki, executive director of the Office of Peace Affairs at the Tokyo-based Soka Gakkai International (SGI).

"There is no more natural desire than to be free from the threat of nuclear weapons. This is something shared widely, universally, among the world's people," he said.

Asked what role global civil society can play in the worldwide campaign to abolish nuclear weapons, Terasaki told IPS: "The mission of civil society is to empower and amplify the voices of ordinary citizens so that we can move the world's policy-makers, insisting they take real and meaningful steps towards nuclear weapons abolition."

Because the threat is so vast and pervasive, he pointed out, "We need a new paradigm of leadership - the leadership exercised by ordinary people who have decided to reject the 'stability' of deterrence, which rests ultimately on the threat of mutual annihilation."

A lay Buddhist organisation with an estimated 12 million members in over 192 countries and territories, SGI has long been active in the growing NGO campaign towards a nuclear weapons-free world.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, one of the strongest proponents of nuclear disarmament, has dismissed the theory of "nuclear deterrence" advocated by most of the world's nuclear powers.

The five "declared" nuclear powers are the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia while the four "undeclared" nuclear states are India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea.

"It is necessary to thoroughly challenge the theory of deterrence upon which nuclear weapons possession is predicated: the assumption that the maintenance of security is realised through a balance of terror," says Ikeda.

Last month, a coalition of peace activists and civil society organisations meeting in Santa Barbara, California discredited the long-held myth of "nuclear deterrence" and called for its replacement with an "urgent commitment to achieve global nuclear disarmament". ➡

"Nuclear deterrence is a doctrine that is used as a justification by nuclear weapon states and their allies for the continued possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons," the coalition said in a statement.

A declaration adopted by the coalition said: "We call upon people everywhere to join us in demanding that the nuclear weapon states and their allies reject nuclear deterrence and negotiate without delay a Nuclear Weapons Convention for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of all nuclear weapons."

The civil society participants at the meeting ranged from representatives from the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation to Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Disarmament and Security Centre.

Last year, member states agreed on a proposal for an international conference on a nuclear-free Middle East, scheduled to take place in 2012. Currently, Israel is the only nuclear power in that region and has been long shielded by the United States.



"The enduring regional stability in the Middle East is unthinkable without de-nuclearisation," says Ikeda, who is calling for "conditions propitious to negotiations for a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), including nuclear weapons". The WMDs also include biological and chemical weapons which have been banned by the United Nations. The uncertainty about the 2012 conference underlines the need for further efforts to create the conditions for dialogue, said Ikeda. The SGI president has laid out three steps towards the goal of nuclear disarmament.

First, the need to establish structures "within which states possessing nuclear weapons will move rapidly toward disarmament." Secondly, the need to forestall "further nuclear weapons development or modernisation", and thirdly, the need to "comprehensively" outlaw "these inhumane weapons through a Nuclear Weapons Convention." Asked how effective a global campaign would be - particularly in the face of growing indifference towards an international convention to ban nuclear weapons - Terasaki told IPS nuclear weapons are not something to which people can be indifferent because they threaten lives and the very existence of the world.

"The real choice is whether this indifference will be broken down by proactive human wisdom, or by overwhelming tragedy and horror," he said. "Our work as a civil society organisation is dedicated to ensuring that the former is the case," Terasaki declared. [IPS | March 2011]

Photo: The "Day of Revolt" on 25 January | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

BRIDGES COULD BECOME BARRICADES

By Kester Kenn Klomegah



MOSCOW - Although the ratification of a new strategic arms reduction treaty (START) with the United States is considered a top priority for the Medvedev administration, experts are debating whether such an agreement could threaten to reduce Russian military power in the future.

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ratified the treaty on Feb 5, 2011. The document slashes the maximum amount of Russian and U.S. strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,550 warheads, down from the current ceiling of 2,200.

One expert, Alexander Fomenko, a member of the foreign relations and security committee at the Russian State Duma, does not believe that the agreement will result in weakening Russian military might.

"The reduction of strategic offensive weapons is quite understandable today, as the strategic arsenals were created during the cold war time," Fomenko told IPS.

"Today, we see that real modern war is special operations war - it is something new," he explained.

Fomenko added that the strategic weapons serve as a guarantor of non-use of nuclear weapons, and that Russia currently possesses new Topol-M and Iskander missiles, as well as other weapons capable of responding to an aggressive move.

Tom Collina, of the Washington-based Arms Control Organization, told IPS that the signing of the new START treaty will greatly strengthen U.S.-Russian relations and build trust between the two nations, as well as make the citizens of both countries safer.

"The treaty is in the interests of both nations, and increases the security of both sides by reducing nuclear forces, resuming inspections, and increasing trust," he explained. "It is now time to build on this success by moving on to the next treaty that should cover long-range, as well as short-range (tactical), nuclear weapons," he said.

But Russia also has its critics of the treaty: Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy claimed that the treaty substantially weakens Russia's military power. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov said any reduction of nuclear potential will undermine Russia's security. And retired general Leonid Ivashov warned that the treaty is disastrous for Russia because it does not address the U.S.'s superiority in conventional arms. ➡

Picture: Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov / Credit: www.armybase.us

Chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee Konstantin Kosachev explained the Duma's position to local media: "Its key idea is that the U.S.'s unilateral understanding of certain provisions of the new treaty does not impose any new commitments on Russia."

"The document stipulates significant cuts in both sides' nuclear arsenals, but will not affect the development of strategic components of their armed forces," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov pointed out.

"This treaty does not envision any duties from Russia except the necessity of observing the limits it stipulates. Russia, like the United States, reserves the right to continue to develop its strategic forces in the future," he said.

"In this regard," Ivanov added, "the new START treaty slaps no restrictions on the two sides' strategic offensive arms levels. The plans we earlier mapped out to develop the strategic component of the armed forces remain in full force."

This means that Russia will continue to develop the Bulava submarine-launched ballistic missile and the Yars RS-24 missiles, among other sophisticated weaponry. The U.S. will undoubtedly pursue similar aims.

Evgeny Bazhanov, vice chancellor of research and international relations at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told IPS, "Russia and the West came together and had a very good discussion."

According to Bazhanov, the conference signaled to other countries that have or are seeking to acquire nuclear weapons that Russia and the U.S. are ready to continue the process of disarmament, and that others should join them in this effort.

Many people believe that the treaty will lead to a significant improvement in U.S.-Russian relations and to greater opportunities for cooperation between them. Proponents claim that it paves the way for further talks between Moscow and Washington on military issues, particularly the thorny question of a joint missile defense system.

"If an agreement can ultimately be reached on joint missile defense, Russia, the United States and NATO will become true partners," said Bazhanov.

"(One) positive result of the agreement is that it helps ease tensions on a global scale," he concluded. [IPS | March 2011]

"Russia has the right to withdraw from the strategic nuclear weapons treaty if a quantitative and qualitative increase in U.S. strategic missile defense significantly influences the effectiveness of Russian strategic nuclear forces."- Lavrov

CIVIL SOCIETY CHALLENGES NUCLEAR DETERRENCE DOCTRINE

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - As the world's nuclear powers continue to drag their collective feet, stalling all attempts at nuclear disarmament, a group of peace activists and civil society organisations is vigorously challenging the long-held myth of "nuclear deterrence".

"Nuclear deterrence is a doctrine that is used as a justification by nuclear weapon states and their allies for the continued possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons," says the coalition, which met in Santa Barbara, California last week.

Jacqueline Cabasso, executive director of the Western States Legal Foundation and one of the participants at the meeting, told IPS that members of the coalition agreed that the longstanding doctrine must be discredited and replaced with an urgent commitment to achieve global nuclear disarmament.

"Before another nuclear weapon is used, nuclear deterrence must be replaced by humane, legal and normal security strategies," she said.

A declaration adopted by the coalition states: "We call upon people everywhere to join us in demanding that the nuclear weapon states and their allies reject nuclear deterrence and negotiate without delay a Nuclear Weapons Convention for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of all nuclear weapons."

The participants at the meeting ranged from representatives from the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation to Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Disarmament and Security Centre. The world's five "declared" nuclear powers are the five veto-wielding permanent members of the UN Security Council: the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

Additionally, there are four "undeclared" nuclear powers: India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel (which studiously maintains a "don't ask, don't tell" nuclear policy).

Asked if a worldwide campaign for nuclear disarmament by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would succeed - as it did in the campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines years ago - Peter Weiss, president of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, told IPS the analogy with the international campaign against landmines and cluster munitions must not be overdone.

Those weapons, unlike nukes, were never seen by the countries that had them as ways of projecting their power to their neighbours or throughout the world, even if they never used them, he said. He pointed out that the last word on the difficulty which nuclear weapons countries have in giving them up was spoken years ago by Miguel Marin Bosch.

In his capacity as Mexico's ambassador for disarmament, he said, in refreshingly undiplomatic language: "The big boys are scared shit that we're going to take away their toys," recounted Weiss, who is also a vice president of the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA). ↻

Alyn Ware, director of the New Zealand-based Peace Foundation, said during the past four decades the international community has achieved treaties prohibiting and eliminating inhumane weapons such as anti-personnel landmines, cluster munitions, biological weapons and chemical weapons. However, the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, the most inhumane and destructive of all, remains elusive.

Ware acknowledged the role played by civil society in achieving the mine ban treaty and the convention on cluster munitions. He said two key factors in the success were a focus on the humanitarian consequences of the use of these weapons, and the application of international humanitarian law. Ware also said that civil society action has been effective in changing public attitudes to nuclear weapons, especially in the states possessing nuclear weapons or covered by extended nuclear deterrence.

Whereas public opinion polls in the 1980s indicated majority acceptance of nuclear weapons, recent public opinion polls indicate the majority now supports the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, he noted. However, such a change in public opinion appears to have had only a minimal impact on government policy.

But there has been a slight shift, in that most governments now accept the vision and responsibility for achieving a nuclear weapons-free world, he added.

Nonetheless, said Ware, few of the nuclear weapons states or their allies are prepared to abandon nuclear deterrence, prohibit the threat or use of nuclear weapons, or commence negotiations on anything other than minimal steps towards disarmament.

The real potential of civil society to effect change in nuclear weapons policy is probably somewhere in between two polarised perspectives: public pressure is not irrelevant to a political realist world, but nor is it a magic cure that will by itself deliver the abolition of nuclear weapons, Ware declared.

Dr Mary-Wynne Ashford of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War said there are many NGOs working on the issue of nuclear disarmament, including the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

"Yes, an NGO campaign is practicable and feasible," she said. "I think consistent pressure from civil society is essential to motivate the nuclear weapons states to move to zero."

Doctors continue to raise the issues of the health consequences of the entire nuclear cycle from mining to production of weapons, said Ashford, who is also an associate professor at the University of Victoria in Canada.

Dr Dale Dewar, executive director of Physicians for Global Survival (PGS), told IPS her organisation has been sustained by donors for 30 years in its campaign for a nuclear weapons-free world. "It will continue to do so as long as a donor base is willing to support it," she added.

Nancy Covington, also of PGS, told IPS: "I personally don't see any other option than to mobilise civil society." "If there is enough public education (on nuclear disarmament), then maybe civil society can make a strong enough statement that we can be heard," she declared. [IPS | February 2011]

UNREALISTIC AGENDA UNDERMINED U.S.-IRAN NUKE TALKS

By Ali Gharib

NEW YORK- No observers of U.S. relations with Iran over the past three decades were surprised when late-January talks in Istanbul failed to hint at, let alone deliver, a breakthrough that would ease tensions between the Islamic Republic and the West.

The U.S. was negotiating as part of the P5+1, which includes the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany, with Iran over its nuclear programme. While many in the West believe Iran is aiming at a nuclear weapon, Iran says its programme is only for peaceful medical and energy purposes.

The lack of movement in talks, though overshadowed of late by the crisis in Egypt, has left many analysts in the U.S. struggling with just what to do about the wily and stubborn Islamic Republic.

Many experts think that the U.S. view of the talks has been fraught with unrealistic assessments about everything from Iran's capabilities to U.S. offers and expectations.

"We're not going to get closure. We're not going to get the kind of certainty that we think we can. Many of the options out there hold up this false hope," said Marc Lynch of George Washington University. "None of the options that claim they're going to solve this problem really will. They just try recast it in different strategic terms."

The slow progress in talks leads some to believe that Tehran may indeed be bent on developing a nuclear weapon. If that is the case, experts say, there is little the international community will be able to do to stop it.

"If Tehran is determined to develop and deploy nuclear weapons no matter what, it will do so," said Greg Thielmann, a non-proliferation expert with the Arms Control Association, at a recent forum in Washington.

The U.S., with the help of allies and international bodies, is pursuing a so-called "dual-track" policy to dissuade Iran from developing a weapon. The pillars of the strategy are engagement to provide Iran benefits should it forgo weapons production, and sanctions as punitive measures to demonstrate the high international costs of Iran working toward such a goal.

But Thielmann noted that, while these options could persuade Iran, if its leadership is determined, they will pass over inducements and eat the costs, making the sanctions moot.

Thielmann added that even a military strike – an option put forward by rightists and hotly debated in policy circles – would not be able to completely end an Iranian nuclear programme. ➡

"Even the air strikes advocated by some would only slow, and not end progress," he said. "Nothing short of an invasion and occupation could permanently force an end to the attempt to acquire nuclear weapons by Iran."

Thielmann added that, instead of focusing its efforts on "zero enrichment" for Tehran – an unrealistic goal considering how far the Iranian nuclear programme has come – more emphasis should be put on closely watching Iran's nuclear activity. "We have to maintain strategic focus on the transparency needed to (monitor Iran's nuclear programme)," he said.

At the same conference, hosted by the National Security Network and the Center for American Progress, Barry Blechman of the Stimson Center argued that the U.S.'s dual track policy had not gotten a fair shake. "The U.S. needs to rebalance its policy," he said. "It's done quite well on coercive elements in the past two years, but now we need to put emphasis on inducement."

Blechman co-authored a Stimson report on the topic, which he said called for the U.S. to broaden the focus of engagement with Iran beyond the nuclear issue, which he admitted was "most urgent".

He said it was "silly" that U.S. diplomats around the globe are not permitted to have "normal interactions" with Iranian diplomats, and called for a "bilateral track on issues where we have a common interest - drug trafficking, for example."

"There is time to give diplomacy a chance through a more realistic approach, a more generous approach," he said.

Indeed, Iran has been somewhat hobbled by sanctions, and its ascendancy in the region has slowed.

"Iran right now does not resemble this rising hegemony of 2005 and 2006," said Lynch at the same forum.

Lynch noted that while Iran seeks to exploit recent unrest in the Arab world, the Islamic Republic had little to do with it.

"The Al Jazeera audience is deeply attuned with protest movements against authoritarian regimes," he said. "For the Arab public, (the 2009 Iranian crackdown on the Green opposition movement) diminished Iran's soft power in the region."

With Iran's regional clout on the wane, inducements offered to Iran could have more potential appeal for its leaders. But Lynch added that the U.S. needed to do more to ensure its offers were credible.

Lynch pointed to U.S. laws that tie sanctions against Iran to the country's stances on issues like Lebanon and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Those laws might hinder any sanctions relief offered to Iran in talks.

"If you're trying to get negotiating leverage, you have to be able to credibly signal that you will actually be able to deliver on your end," he said. [IPS | February 2011]

CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS TOWARDS A NUCLEAR TEST-BAN TREATY

By Jaya Ramachandran

VIENNA - An international pact outlawing all atomic explosions for military or civilian purposes is not yet around the corner but there is reason to rejoice at considerable advances made towards entry into force of a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty.



The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed some "remarkable achievements" driven by "a vision to bring an end to the era of nuclear weapons," says Tibor Tóth, Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

This is underscored by the fact that the monitoring system of the treaty -- adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996 -- has expanded to 263 certified facilities from zero in 2000. Ten years ago there were 51 ratifications. In 2010 with the ratifications by Trinidad and Tobago and by the Central African Republic the number has tripled to 153 ratifications and the Treaty has been signed by 182 States.

Taking stock of the advances achieved in the previous decade, the CTBTO says that new ratifications entered into law two days before the successful outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference -- on May 26, 2010 -- when they were presented at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

On the eve of the conference to review the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Indonesia had announced its intention to ratify the treaty. During the conference, four more CTBT signatories -- Iraq, Papua-New Guinea, Thailand, and the United States -- also declared their intention to move forward with ratifications, the CTBTO informs.

And, as the NPT Review Conference advanced, an exhibition opened in the UN headquarters on May 4, 2010, depicting the history of nuclear testing and the road to adopting the CTBT. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon declaring: "Putting an end to nuclear explosions is more than the name of this exhibition -- it is one of the longest-standing goals of the United Nations."

In 'annual highlights' web posted at the turn of the year, the CTBTO quotes actor/producer and UN Messenger of Peace Michael Douglas stating at the opening of the exhibition that there was no reason "our children" should live in the shadow of "these terrible (atomic) weapons." Douglas' appeal that "the necessary steps can be taken now," were echoed by Indonesia's Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, who stated that his country believed it could enhance its contribution to nuclear disarmament by acting now to begin the process of ratifying the CTBT, the CTBTO said.

"This underscores the leadership role of Indonesia in regional and global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts," Tóth said in April 2010, when Natalegawa first announced his country's decision. The outcome of the NPT Review Conference that put an end to a decade-long political deadlock and adopted an action plan giving strong support for the CTBT, was warmly welcomed by Tóth. ↻

"Support for the Treaty in 2010 also came from the UN General Assembly, which gave strong endorsement of the CTBT. The Russian Federation and the United States introduced for the first time a resolution on bilateral strategic arms reductions including recognition for early entry into force of the CTBT. Earlier in the year the new Nuclear Posture Review released by the U.S. clearly underlined the importance of the CTBT," the CTBTO said in its 'annual highlights'

It added: "The September 23 Joint Ministerial Statement launched by Foreign Ministers at the Fifth Ministerial Meeting to promote early entry-into-force of the CTBT was another strong political message in favour of the Treaty. The CTBTO also deepened cooperation with its pool of partners. In February UNESCO and the CTBTO signed an agreement to enhance disaster mitigation efforts and capacity-building in developing countries."

The CTBTO recalled that in November 2010 support for the nuclear test-ban treaty was voiced by Nobel Peace Prize laureates, at their meeting in Hiroshima. "They urged the remaining nine countries, whose ratification will bring the CTBT into force, to act now."

The CTBTO notes with obvious satisfaction that the architects of the CTBT made no concessions to the standards it sets for verification. "Very high system capabilities and performance, as well as a rigorous certification process are required for each station." According to the CTBTO 'annual highlights', at the end of 2010 there were 264 stations in the International Monitoring System (IMS), representing more than 80 per cent completion of its system of 337 stations. Six new facilities were certified in the Russian Federation alone in 2010. In August the first noble gas monitoring station was officially integrated into the system in the United States, the CTBTO said.

The Vienna-based Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization further informed that the International Data Centre (IDC) in January 2010 completed a five-year project to renew its computer system with a migration to Linux systems. New global communications infrastructure is also in place and fully operational providing higher availability and reliability of data.

A highlight was when in November 2010 the CTBTO staged a simulated on-site-inspection beside the Dead Sea, in Jordan, says the 'annual highlights', adding: "A team of 35 experts from 20 countries participated in the exercise, preparation for conducting on-Site Inspections, which will form a major component of the verification regime, available to member states, when the Treaty enters into force." In addition, the CTBTO is giving priority to training experts from member states. A series of national and regional training workshops and seminars have been held on-line and at the headquarters in Vienna.

"Many courses offer Member States the technical capabilities to better access and use data collected by the CTBTO's global monitoring system. Every day 10 gigabytes of data flows into the Vienna headquarters of the CTBTO and is made available to all Member States on an equal basis," the 'annual highlights' said. According to the 'annual highlights', the CTBTO's verification network also provides significant civil benefits. In November 2010 France became the eighth country to sign an agreement with the CTBTO on receiving tsunami warning data.

"The continuous expansion, upgrading and maintenance of a vast, state-of-the-art global monitoring network and communications infrastructure, represents an unprecedented joint investment. Since the treaty opened for signature in 1996 almost \$1 billion has been invested by member states in the verification regime," the CTBTO said. [IDN-InDepthNews | January 2011]

OBAMA SCORES WIN WITH NEW START RATIFICATION

By Jim Lobe*



WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama scored key wins on December 22 in both foreign policy and domestic politics as more than the required two-thirds of the Senate - including 13 Republicans who defied their party's leadership - voted to ratify the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia.

Obama hailed the bipartisan outcome during a short-notice press conference in which he claimed that it "sends a powerful signal to the world that Republicans and Democrats stand together on behalf of our security".

"This is the most significant arms control agreement in nearly two decades, and it will make us safer and reduce our nuclear arsenals along with Russia," he declared. On the foreign policy front, ratification not only preserves Obama's vision of strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and promoting a gradual global denuclearization remain alive.

More immediately, it also gives renewed momentum to his much-heralded "re-set" of relations with Russia. Moscow's cooperation on Obama's two most pressing overseas priorities - curbing Iran's nuclear programme and prosecuting Washington's counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan - is seen here as critical to prospects for their success. In a sign of approval, officials in Moscow said that the Russian Duma is likely to vote for ratification later this week.

On the political front, the fact that so many Republicans voted with the administration confirms the existence of serious internal differences - at least on national security issues - that can be effectively exploited by Obama, even as it faces a new, more Republican Congress next month.

Moreover, the December 22 vote comes on top of several other perceived legislative victories by Obama since last month's disastrous mid-term election. Notably, these include the passage of an \$850-billion package of tax cuts and stimulus measures and the repeal - strenuously opposed by right-wing Republicans - of the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy that banned openly gay men and lesbians from serving in the U.S. military.

"The result is that the president is closing out the year looking a lot more formidable as a political player than he did just a week ago, let alone after the mid-terms," said one Capitol Hill staffer, referring to the self-described "shellacking" Obama suffered in the November elections.

The December 22 ratification of New START capped an intense three-week lobbying campaign conducted by the White House and backed by the Pentagon, the chiefs of the armed services, and former top national security officials ranging across five Republican administrations, including former President George H. W. Bush himself, and former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice. ↻

Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

Signed last April, the substantive provisions of the treaty are considered relatively modest. It requires both Washington and Moscow to reduce the number of strategic nuclear warheads from around 2,200 to no more than 1,550 within seven years.

It will also permit the resumption of mutual inspections by both parties. They were halted last year when the previous START treaty, signed by Bush senior in 1991, expired.

Despite the treaty's modest provisions, right-wing Republicans, led by Minority Whip John Kyl, opposed ratification, arguing that some of the treaty's language might be used to curb the development of U.S. missile- defence systems and that the thousands of tactical nuclear weapons held by Russia were not covered under its terms. They also insisted that the treaty's verification provisions were inadequate.

But their strongest objection was political: that Obama should not try to force through an arms-control treaty during a lame-duck session of Congress, particularly when the Democratic majority will be substantially reduced in the incoming Congress.

"I can't understand why we can't wait five more weeks to ratify," complained Sen. Lindsey Graham on December 21 when the chamber voted 67-28 to end five days of debate on the treaty.

Treaty supporters knew that, with six additional Republicans in the incoming Senate, the administration would have found it much more difficult and politically costly to gain ratification.

As it was, the administration conceded on a number of issues during negotiations with Kyl before the November elections. Among other things, it agreed to commit nearly \$85 billion for a proposed five-year nuclear-arms modernization programme.

The administration was stunned when, after the elections, Kyl, backed by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, suggested that the vote on ratification be delayed until next year.

At that point, the White House's lobbying efforts shifted into high gear, while peace, disarmament, and church-based groups mobilized their supporters to press "swing" senators at the local level.

Although at the time only one Republican senator - Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee - had come out in strong public support of the treaty, at least half a dozen others had hinted they were inclined to vote yes under the right circumstances.

In the following weeks, the White House lined up all living former secretaries of state, most secretaries of defence, and all living former presidents except George W. Bush. It also elicited strongly supportive statements by key NATO allies and by several key Jewish groups worried that the treaty's defeat would result in the end of Moscow's cooperation with Washington on Iran. ➡

Ranged against them were the far-right Heritage Foundation, former UN ambassador John Bolton of the American Enterprise Institute, a number of prominent neo-conservatives, such as the Weekly Standard's William Kristol, and several likely 2012 presidential candidates, including, most notably, Sarah Palin and Mitt Romney.

Despite polling showing overwhelming public support for ratification, McConnell and Kyl sided with the latter group in what now appears to have been a major political miscalculation, one that became much clearer when the number-three Republican, Lamar Alexander, broke ranks on December 21.

"Republicans have only themselves to blame here," wrote Adam Serwer on the American Prospect website.

"Because Senate Republicans turned ratification into a huge partisan brawl, a Democratic president renewing an agreement with Russia designed by Republican presidents now looks like a massive victory for the administration."

"In the end, over one-quarter of the Republican Caucus took the advice of the Joint Chiefs and nearly every living former secretary of defence and state over the recommendations of Jon Kyl and John Bolton," said Joe Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, one of the treaty's major non-governmental backers.

"Their extreme views advocating more weapons and more wars have been rejected by those who know them best," he went on. "This is a very hopeful sign for future debates on nuclear policy, on military action and on military budgets."

Despite that assessment, however, most observers believe that Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) – Obama's top legislative priority on his disarmament agenda after New START – will not be possible with the incoming Senate, where right-wing Republicans will be stronger than ever.

As a result, the administration is considered likely to pursue more modest measures, such as an accord with Russia to reduce tactical nuclear weapons, designed to persuade the international community that Washington is committed to denuclearization as a long-term goal.

Meanwhile, Wednesday's vote is likely to further warm ties with Moscow where Russian officials this week publicly warned against the treaty's defeat or delay.

"Perhaps as significant as the treaty's impact on the two countries' nuclear arsenals is its contribution to the ongoing improvement in U.S.-Russia relations," said Dylan Myles-Primakoff, a Russia expert at Georgetown University's Emerging Threats Project.

"If this hadn't passed, it could have jeopardized Washington's use of Russian territory and airspace to transport troops and supplies to Afghanistan and Moscow's willingness to refrain from vetoing any new UN Security Council sanctions against Iran," he added. [IPS | December 2010]

DEBUNKING THE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE MYTH

By Kanya D'Almeida

UNITED NATIONS- When the horrors of the Cold War began to wane in the late 1980s, U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev met in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik to discuss the "complete abolition of nuclear weapons".

Over two decades later, global political leaders continue to assemble enormous nuclear arsenals.

According to 2010 statistics taken from the United Nations NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security, nine states currently own - or possess the means to develop and deploy - nuclear weapons. Of these countries, the combined arsenals of the U.S. and Russia account for 95 percent of the weapons.

For years, particularly in the public discourse of U.S. foreign policy, the disarmament debate has been dominated by the Deterrence Theory, which suggests that potential aggressors to a state are deterred by the mere threat of nuclear warfare.

At a panel discussion this week hosted by the NGO Committee on Disarmament, legal experts John Burroughs and Ward Wilson sought to expose the fallacy of this theory and redirect the dialogue on disarmament into more constructive channels.

Wilson, a senior fellow at the Centre for Non-Proliferation Studies (CNS), stressed that the international community needs to undergo a "paradigm shift, a radical change in our approach to disarmament, akin to Copernicus's revolution in understanding the very world we live in."

For years many countries, particularly the U.S., have considered the deterrence theory to be "dangerous, possibly immoral, but certainly necessary", he said. Yet, according to Wilson's research, the annals of history are filled with evidence that neither the use nor the threat of nuclear weapons have deterred war, induced surrender, or guaranteed victory to any side. Perhaps the most widely cited example of the potency of nuclear weapons has been Japan's surrender, following President Truman's order to drop Little Boy on Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945.

For years, the U.S. has touted this tragedy as a nuclear success story, using it as a trope with which to prop up, and justify, subsequent nuclear development, Wilson said. He debunked this idea by calling attention to several obscured facts that never made it into the mainstream, such as the fact that Hiroshima was only one of 68 Japanese cities that had already been mercilessly fire-bombed for months on end.

The number of deaths in Hiroshima caused by the bombing bring its rank to just ninth or tenth on the scale of atrocities in Japan at the time - why, then, did the Japanese only surrender after Little Boy?

The answer, according to Wilson, is a simple matter of myth-making. Many historians, legal experts, and scholars now believe that in reality, Japan only surrendered following the Soviet invasion, prior to the explosion of Fat Man in Nagasaki on Aug. 9. ➡

There are countless legal implications to the debunking of this myth, not least of which is clear violations of international humanitarian law.

John Burroughs (right in picture), executive director of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy (LCNP), recently co-authored a statement entitled "Ending U.S. Reliance on Nuclear Weapons and Achieving their Global Elimination: Wise Policy and Required by Law", which lays out in detail the illegality of possessing nuclear weapons, for deterrence or otherwise.

"In this environment," write the authors, "the substantial U.S. nuclear arsenal numbering thousands of weapons does not serve U.S. security interests. Nuclear weapons have themselves become the main security threat the United States faces."

The article goes on to contextualize the law of war and of armed conflict as agreed upon in the Hague and Geneva Conventions, as well as in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

According to Burroughs, the "fact that the use of nuclear weapons would be unlawful under the law of armed conflict necessarily means that any specific U.S. threat to use those weapons would be unlawful, and strongly suggests that the policy of deterrence is also unlawful. Why would a country possess nuclear weapons if there was not readiness to use them in certain circumstances?"

"We are now faced with a sad reliance on the threat of annihilation as a permanent condition. This isn't the kind of world that we should want to live in," Burroughs told IPS. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues, unabashed, to strengthen its formidable nuclear arsenal while simultaneously turning the spotlight of international condemnation onto countries like Iran, North Korea and Syria.

"There is no current obvious way in the international arena to go beyond the court's 1996 advisory opinion to challenge states' reliance on nuclear weapons as 'threats', notably given that the Security Council is run by the nuclear-armed Permanent Five," Burroughs told IPS.

"However, Mexico is now proposing that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court be amended to specifically criminalize the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons," he added.

"It is conceivable that in the near term states parties would adopt this amendment. Adding nuclear weapons to the list of prohibited weapons already in the Rome Statute (poisons and poisonous gases, expanding bullets) would help entrench the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons," he said. [IPS | December 2010]

OBAMA PUSHES START TREATY TO TOP OF LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

By Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON - With time running out before he faces a much more hostile and Republican Congress, President Barack Obama appears to have made Senate ratification of the pending New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia his top legislative priority.

Not only has he bowed to Republican demands to allocate more money for Washington's nuclear arms programme, but he has suggested that he's also willing to cave in to Republican demands to extend tax cuts for high-income households - despite record federal deficits - in order to gain START ratification. And he's getting considerable help from big guns in what remains of the Republican foreign policy Establishment, including five former secretaries of state whose service spanned the last five Republican administrations.

In an op-ed heralded by the White House on the eve of its publication in Washington Post (of December 2), former secretaries Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, James Baker, Lawrence Eagleburger and Colin Powell concluded that the New START was "clearly in our national interest" and should be ratified.

The five men who, respectively, served under Presidents Nixon and Ford, Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush, argued that their former bosses "recognised that reducing the number of nuclear arms in an open, verifiable manner would reduce the risk of nuclear catastrophe and increase the stability of America's relationship with the Soviet Union and, later, the Russian Federation."

Nonetheless, the treaty's fate remains uncertain. Hard-line neo-conservatives and far-right Republicans, whose ranks will be swollen in the Congress that will be sworn into office one month from now, remain adamantly opposed to START, which requires, among other things, a reduction in the nuclear arsenals of both countries of deployed, long-range missiles from 2,200 to 1,550. It will also permit the resumption of mutual inspections by both parties. They were halted last year when the previous START Treaty, which was signed by the senior Bush in 1991 and ratified shortly thereafter, expired.

The treaty's foes object most strongly to what they claim are inadequate verification provisions and implicit limitations on Washington's ability to develop and deploy missile defences against possible strikes by Iran, North Korea, or other foes, including Russia itself.

"President Reagan knew that in arms control, the U.S. should play to win, and negotiate from a position of strength," wrote Ed Meese of the far-right Heritage Foundation and Richard Perle of the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in an op-ed also published December 2 in the Wall Street Journal. Meese served as attorney-general and political adviser to Ronald Reagan, while Perle worked in the same administration as an assistant secretary of defence with some responsibility for arms control negotiations.

"With all the concessions the U.S. made to the Russians to secure this flawed agreement," they argued, the invocation of Reagan's memory both by Obama and the Republican luminaries who have called for ratification was "a brazen act of misappropriation". ➡

Under the U.S. constitution, ratification of a treaty requires two-thirds of the Senate – or 67 of 100 senators – to vote in favour. In the current Senate, Democrats hold 58 seats, so Obama needs only nine Republicans to prevail. So far, however, only Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has come out in strong support of the treaty, although at least half a dozen others have hinted they are prepared to back it, too, under the right circumstances.

When the new Congress is seated, however, the Democratic majority will be substantially reduced, and Obama will have to persuade at least an additional six Republicans to cross the aisle to gain ratification. While most analysts believe that ratification will still be possible, the president will have to spend much more political capital to prevail. Because of the evident importance he accords to his nuclear agenda, Obama has already spent quite a lot.

In negotiations with the chief Republican interlocutor on the accord, Sen. John Kyl, last month (November 2010), the White House agreed to add 4.1 billion dollars to 80 billion for a proposed five-year nuclear arms modernisation programme, a key demand of the arms control sceptics. The administration was stunned when Kyl and other Republicans announced last month that he still had questions about the modernisation programme and missile defence and that there wasn't enough time left in the year to take up the treaty.

In a letter released on December 1, the directors of the country's three national nuclear laboratories wrote to Lugar and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry that they were "very pleased" with the plans which, they went on, would "provide adequate support to sustain the safety, security, reliability and effectiveness of America's nuclear deterrent within the limit of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads established by the New START Treaty with adequate confidence and acceptable risk."

While the treaty's supporters insisted that the scientists' assurances should be adequate to gather sufficient support for ratification now, it appears that Obama is willing to pay much more to secure ratification. Indeed, Republicans, whose top priority at the moment is securing extensions of the sweeping Bush-era tax cuts on the country's wealthiest citizens, appear now to be holding out for Obama's concessions on that front before committing themselves to a vote on New START. The tax cuts, which were enacted shortly after the 9/11 attacks, are due to expire at the end of the month.

Obama, who had promised during the 2008 election campaign not to raise taxes on households earning 250,000 dollars a year or less, had hoped that allowing the cuts to expire on those earning more than that would help cut the federal deficit by several hundred billion dollars over the next few years. His apparent willingness to compromise on this issue in order to secure START is causing growing dismay among his supporters.

"(Y)es, the Senate should ratify the New START treaty with Russia before the end of the year," wrote E.J. Dionne in his weekly Washington Post column (on December 2), "though what does it say about us as a country when the president has to offer a tax-cut payoff to get a key foreign policy initiative through." As Obama has suggested flexibility on the tax-cut issue, however, a growing number of Senate Republicans, including Kyl, have suggested that there may yet be time to ratify START before the Congress adjourns.

Indeed, a sufficient number of Republicans have indicated their support that Congressional aides were confidently predicting (on December 2) that the treaty will be brought up before the Senate as early as late next week, once the tax issue is resolved. "It's a two-step process," Lugar said (on December 1). "We do taxes and then we do START." [IPS | December 2010]

START SUPPORTERS PLAY IRAN CARD IN LAME-DUCK U.S. CONGRESS

By Barbara Slavin

WASHINGTON - Of all the arguments the Barack Obama administration is marshalling in support of a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, the one that may have the greatest resonance with Republicans is over Iran.

White House nuclear non-proliferation chief Gary Samore made the link on November 18, saying that failure to ratify START in the lame-duck Congressional session would "weaken the coalition" against Iran's nuclear programme, especially with regard to "maintaining coordination with Russia".

Russia has proved more helpful against Iran than many had expected. It voted in favour of tough new sanctions in the UN Security Council last summer and cancelled the sale of the S-300 air defence system that Iran had sought to deter a U.S. or Israeli attack on its nuclear sites.

Experts agree that this cooperation could be jeopardised if the Senate fails to ratify START, the jewel in the crown of the U.S.-Russia reset.

Mark Katz, a specialist on Russia at George Mason University in Virginia, said Russia's cancellation of the air defence sale "was a concession to get the Senate to come to the right conclusion" about the arms reduction treaty. Russia will "revisit" that decision if the treaty does not go through, he said.

Richard Burt, a former arms control negotiator who now chairs Global Zero, a group seeking to rid the world of nuclear weapons, said November 17 on the News Hour with Jim Lehrer that "there are only two governments in the world that wouldn't like to see this treaty ratified, the government in Tehran and the government in North Korea."

START would limit the U.S. and Russia to 1,550 warheads and 800 delivery vehicles each, a modest reduction from current levels. Prospects for the treaty's ratification dimmed earlier this week when Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, who has led Republican talks with the administration over START, said he doubted there would be time in the current session to bring the measure to a vote on the Senate floor.

The only Republican senator who has come out strongly in favour of swift passage is Richard Lugar of Indiana, ranking minority member of the Foreign Relations Committee. To gain the 67 votes needed for passage, the Obama administration needs eight more Republicans.

Democrats have accused Republicans of stalling to undermine Obama's re-election prospects. Samore, speaking to an audience at the Nixon Center, said the issue was much bigger than that and that the treaty "has become an important symbol of U.S. leadership".

Intense negotiations are continuing to try to sway Senate Republicans including Kyl, who was just re-elected to a leadership position in the Republican caucus. ➔

Stephen Rademaker, a former assistant secretary of state dealing with non-proliferation under the George W. Bush administration, said Kyl "has not said he's opposed" to the treaty and that the Arizona Republican is negotiating for more money for the modernisation of the remaining U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal. The administration has already promised nearly \$85 billion over the next 10 years, a pledge that Samore said would be jeopardised if the treaty does not pass this year.

Rademaker, a Republican who has criticised the treaty in the past, said that the prospect of weakening the international consensus on Iran could lead him to support the accord.

"If I were a senator, I would try to find a way to vote in favour of the treaty," he said. He added later, however, that, "I would need a lot more conditions and other clarifications than are currently in the resolution of advice and consent in order to fix as many of the treaty's problems as possible."

Samore stressed that Iran is the administration priority when it comes to non-proliferation. Although Iran denies that it seeking weapons, Samore said he had no doubt that nuclear weapons was Iran's goal. He called it a country that is "eating away at it [the international non-proliferation regime] like a cancer".

The administration is hopeful that sanctions and Iran's growing international isolation will persuade it to slow its nuclear progress and negotiate meaningful limits to the programme. A new round of talks is expected as soon as Dec. 5, although Iran has yet to agree on where they will take place. The Tehran government has suggested Turkey, but Samore said that was not possible because Turkey voted against sanctions in the UN Security Council and thus "is not a neutral venue".

Samore confirmed that the U.S. and its partners are revising a year-old offer to Iran to exchange fuel for a research reactor that produces medical isotopes for low-enriched uranium Iran has stockpiled at its facility in Natanz. Samore said the U.S. is still insisting that Iran also agree to suspend its entire uranium enrichment programme, in accordance with UN resolutions, but indicated that the suspension could be temporary.

The duration of such a suspension and "the terms under which it could be lifted" would be a topic for negotiations, he said. Iran insists that it has a right to enrich uranium as a signatory of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). Samore rejected the suggestion that Israel would have to clarify its nuclear weapons programme as part of a resolution of the Iranian nuclear file. Israel, he pointed out, is not a member of the NPT while Iran, he said, is "working within the regime to destroy it". [IPS] November 2010]



Picture: Stephen Rademaker, a former assistant secretary of state dealing with non-proliferation under the George W. Bush administration
Credit: Wikimedia Commons

LOOMING U.S. PARTISAN SHIFT ADDS URGENCY TO NUKE TREATY

By Matthew O. Berger

WASHINGTON, - When U.S. President Barack Obama capped a flurry of activity on nuclear non-proliferation this spring by welcoming the largest gathering of world leaders ever in Washington for a Nuclear Security Summit, many experts hoped to see cascading effects that would lead to even further elimination of nuclear weapons.

But progress has stalled since then, with Republican gains in the U.S. Senate threatening not only additional reductions in nuclear weapons but even the reductions already agreed to in a New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty).

Credit: White House Photo by Pete Souza

That START treaty was signed by Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev in Prague just before the start of April's Washington summit. Since then, a long line of high-profile officials and former diplomats have praised the treaty, but the policymakers who must actually decide whether it gets ratified have given it decidedly mixed reviews.

The U.S. now finds itself in the awkward position of seeing what was viewed as Obama's top foreign policy achievement so far – and a critical step for nuclear non-proliferation – on the verge of falling into legislative limbo.

The treaty also still awaits approval in Moscow. Citing concerns over whether the Senate will ratify the treaty as it was agreed, the Russian Duma's foreign affairs committee has withdrawn its recommendation for ratification in the wake of the Republican victories in last week's U.S. election.

While travelling in Asia, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said this week that the Senate should try to get the treaty approved during its current "lame-duck" session, before the newly elected senators arrive and the voted-out ones leave.

Senator John Kerry, chair of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, said on November 10 he is very hopeful the Senate will take up debate on the accord before that session ends and that it is likely it will.

Many Republicans are less sure.

The treaty would require a two-thirds majority to be ratified, or 67 of the 100 senators. Currently, 57 of those seats are held by Democrats, but that number will drop to 53 when the new Congress begins in January.

Even with the several high-profile Republicans who have announced their support for the treaty, then, the path to ratification is expected to get much steeper after the lame-duck session ends. ➡

But though some on the right are pushing against the New START treaty, which is a follow-up to the original signed in 1991, others are pushing for the next START treaty to go even further.

Micah Zenko, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), points out that even after the implementation of the New START the U.S. and Russia will still have enough nuclear weapons to annihilate each other several times over.

The treaty continues the gradual reductions in nuclear stockpiles that have occurred since the end of the Cold War. Specifically, it calls for a reduction in nuclear warheads on deployed missiles and rockets from the 2,200 now allowed to 1,500 for each country. This reduction will take place within seven years of the date the treaty enters into force.

It will also lower the limit of the deployed and non-deployed missiles, rockets and bombers that transport the warheads to 800 total and allow the U.S. and Russia limited monitoring of each others' progress.

Zenko argues that further reductions would be even more advantageous. In a report issued by CFR November 9, he says 1,000 warheads, including tactical nuclear weapons, would be both strategically and politically advantageous through decreasing the risk of nuclear weapons theft and nuclear attack and increasing international political support for future U.S. initiatives to reduce or control nuclear warheads – while still maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent.

"An arsenal of one thousand nuclear weapons is more than sufficient to allow the U.S. military to sustain the nuclear triad to deter any plausible current and future threats, or respond with a devastating retaliation in the case of a nuclear first strike," Zenko writes.

But Senator John Kyl fears reducing nuclear weapons will mean less spending on the U.S.'s nuclear infrastructure and on modernising its arsenal, with corresponding job cuts.

Republicans have also expressed concern over language in the treaty that acknowledges Russia's fears over possible expansion of missile defence systems by the U.S. They see these programmes as vital to U.S. national security, while most Democrats, including the Obama administration, do not.

Republicans have also expressed concern over the verification procedures used to ensure Russia complies with the provisions.

Democrats have reassured Republican senators that 80 billion dollars has already been committed to the U.S. nuclear infrastructure over the next 10 years and argue that the verification measures are adequate.

Meanwhile, the START treaty continues to enjoy what U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates calls "the unanimous support of America's military leadership", opening the door for Zenko and others – including former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov – to begin issuing recommendations for how best to continue the work of the first two START treaties. [IPS | November 2010]

WORLD CLOSER TO ENFORCING TREATY OUTLAWING NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS

Interview of Tibor Tóth, CTBTO Executive Secretary

The Executive Secretary of the CTBTO | CTBTO Photo: Sophie Paris >

BERLIN/VIENNA - Almost 190 countries around the world have reaffirmed the critical importance of enforcing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996. The treaty outlaws all atomic explosions in all environments, for military or civilian purpose.

Though the CTBT has yet to enter into force, it has been ratified by 153 countries and enjoys almost universal membership of 182 signatory states. "Bringing the Treaty into force is the obvious and logical next step to take and with adequate political leadership such a step is virtually around the corner," says Ambassador Tibor Tóth of Hungary, who is Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

Among the countries which have yet to ratify is the United States. But Tóth considers it "of utmost importance that all of the 44 countries whose ratification is required for the entry into force provide leadership and not use as an excuse that they are waiting for the United States to ratify."

Tóth and his highly committed international staff have been working hard almost unnoticed by the public eye to mobilize universal support and build a reliable verification system since the CTBTO was established in 1997 with headquarters in Vienna, Austria.

"The verification system has already proven its worth," Tóth tells IDN global editor Ramesh Jaura in an exclusive interview. When North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006, the CTBT member states received exact information about the magnitude, location, depth and time of the test only two hours after it occurred. This was repeated in May 2009, he adds.

The full text of the E-Mail interview follows:

Question: What would you describe as the highlights of CTBTO Preparatory Commission's work since its inception in 1996? More successes rather than failures? Or the other way round?

Tibor Tóth: Today, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) boasts 153 ratifications and almost universal membership of 182 signatory states. Ten years ago 51 of the 155 states that had signed the CTBT had ratified it and not one monitoring system stations had been certified. Today a global network of nearly 250 stations is in place to detect any sign of a nuclear explosion anywhere in the world. It is remarkable to note that all this happened during a time when the Treaty faced an adverse political climate. Countries voted with their feet in support of this Treaty, and in actual fact have established the Treaty as a universal norm. ➡



The political landscape today looks vastly different as well. A number of key high level events in recent years have demonstrated that multilateralism is not a relic of the past and furthermore that support for the CTBT is widespread and growing. Last year's Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT enjoyed unprecedented high level attendance with representatives from 103 countries taking part.

The Conference adopted, by consensus, a strongly worded Final Declaration calling on the hold-out States to sign and ratify the CTBT for it to enter into force. Signatory states such as the United States, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran and Israel joined ratifying States in this call. Also at last year's United Nations General Assembly First Committee, an overwhelming number of countries expressed support for the Treaty by voting in favour of the CTBT resolution. More recently the statement launched at the fifth Ministerial Meeting to promote the entry into force of the CTBT has so far been endorsed by Ministers from over 70 countries.

The Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has built a verification system that is 80% complete -- a system that has already proven its worth. Although a deplorable event, when North Korea tested a nuclear device in October 2006, the CTBT Member States received exact information about the magnitude, location, depth and time of the test only two hours after it occurred. 24 stations detected the test. This was repeated in May 2009 with the difference that as many as 61 stations detected the test that was slightly larger.

CTBTO data can also help mitigate disasters and provide civil and scientific benefits. For example, since 2005, the CTBTO has contributed data directly to regional and national tsunami warning alert centres in the Pacific and Indian oceans. The data can enhance the ability of the centres to identify potential tsunami-generating earthquakes and provide vulnerable communities with faster warning so that they can move out of affected areas. This is just one example of the many potential opportunities for applications of scientific research to everyday life.

POSITIVE IMPETUS

Q: Has your task become easier since President Obama's famous Prague speech in April 2009? Or was that speech just a drop in the ocean with detractors of nuclear disarmament or abolition all around?

TT: The Obama administration's support for the CTBT, articulated not only in his Prague speech but in various other forums has certainly created positive impetus for realizing the Treaty's entry into force. As one of the remaining nine among the 44 nuclear technology-capable states (so-called Annex 2 States) whose ratification is needed for the Treaty's entry into force, the significance of U.S. ratification cannot be overstated.

Having said this, I cannot stress enough that it is of utmost importance that all of the 44 countries whose ratification is required for the entry into force provide leadership and not use as an excuse that they are waiting for the United States to ratify.

The announcement by Indonesia in May that it had initiated the ratification process of the Treaty is another positive step in the right direction. While the remaining Annex 2 States bear special responsibility to fully commit themselves to the CTBT, the signature and ratification of all States that have not yet done so will provide important momentum towards bringing the Treaty into force. ➡

Q: How would you describe the present situation in terms of ushering in a world free of nuclear weapons being achieved in the foreseeable future?

TT: Renewed optimism exists today for nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of nuclear weapons. In May, the 2010 NPT Review Conference overcame the failure of 2005 breathing new life into the multilateral disarmament process. Its nearly 190 Member States reaffirmed the vital importance of the CTBT's entry into force as a core element of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime in its final document.

By providing a firm legal barrier against nuclear testing, thereby curbing the qualitative improvement and development of new types and new designs of nuclear weapons by possessor states, the Treaty's entry into force would be a milestone in the global endeavor to rid the world of nuclear weapons. In addition, the CTBT is a valuable instrument for nuclear non-proliferation in that testing is necessary for establishing technical and scientific confidence in any developing programme on the part of would-be nuclear possessors. Bringing the Treaty into force is the obvious and logical next step to take and with adequate political leadership such a step is virtually around the corner.

CIVIL SOCIETY 'INDISPENSABLE'

Q: How do you see your relationship with NGOs and civil society organisations?

TT: The role that citizens and civil society worldwide play in ensuring and putting pressure on their governments -- and their parliaments -- to act on commitments made is indispensable to promoting the entry into force of the CTBT. The International Test Ban Campaign, the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement, and Greenpeace action in the Pacific to mention but a few examples, were all instrumental in achieving the CTBT in the mid-1990s. Today, we need NGOs and civil society in the remaining holdout states to hold their governments accountable. We need to see much more grassroots movement and action by citizens and civil society to raise awareness and rally support for the Treaty's object and purpose. Active NGO and civil society participation can push their governments to go the final mile in delivering on their commitments.

Q: Does the NPT Review Conference open up new realistic possibilities for a CTBT?

TT: The fact that the most recent NPT Review Conference adopted a final document, which for the first time recognized the CTBT entry into force as a core element of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime attests to the international community's strong support for the Treaty's entry into force. I believe that the CTBT -- more than any other measure at our disposal -- bridges the divide between State Parties as it serves to promote all three pillars of the NPT. It signals commitment to disarmament, strengthens non-proliferation, and facilitates peaceful uses.

The CTBT in force would be a critical confidence and security building measure in regions such as the Middle East and Asia. It is a practical tool where progress can be achieved in a relatively short time since the Treaty already exists and enjoys near-universal support. It has a strong verification regime that has been tried and tested. It is the norm that there is no more nuclear testing and political will by the international community to ban nuclear testing is evident. What we need now is tangible progress in bringing the CTBT into force thereby taking the first, most importance step towards the complete abolition of nuclear weapons. ➡

VERIFICATION SYSTEM NON-DISCRIMINATORY

Q: Will the International Monitoring System and the verification regime when complete be without any loopholes?

TT: The CTBT boasts an extensive verification system that is transparent, democratic and non-discriminatory and, the verification regime is already operational. Despite being only partially complete the system was able to detect the North Korean nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 in a timely and accurate fashion.

Upon completion there will be 337 facilities in the International Monitoring System employing seismic, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide technologies to detect any nuclear explosion regardless of yield. While it may be inevitable that cheaters will attempt to challenge the system and exploit loopholes, the verification regime will provide a strong deterrence against noncompliance with the Treaty's provisions.

Q: Would it be appropriate to describe your organisation as THE body paving the path toward nuclear abolition?

TT: Permanently banning all forms of nuclear testing is a necessary, though not sufficient condition toward realizing a world free of nuclear weapons. As the body mandated to promote such an important objective, the CTBTO plays an instrumental role in ushering in a world free of nuclear weapons. The nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime cannot be strengthened without a CTBT in force and the CTBT will become a more powerful tool within a more robust overall nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

Q: More than 30 countries, which are presently not harnessing energy from the atom, are actively considering embarking upon nuclear power programmes. These include both industrial and developing economies. How far does this jeopardise your efforts for promoting the cause of CTBT?

TT: There is no denying that the upsurge in interest in introducing nuclear energy to a country's energy mix raises proliferation concerns because of the inherent dual-use nature of fuel cycle technologies. Under these circumstances, the urgency of bringing the CTBT into force is even greater. The CTBT in force will not only provide a strong and verifiable final barrier to a nuclear weapons capability, but will be an important tool for building confidence in a country's motivations. [IDN-InDepthNews | November 2010]

UN HOSTS NUKE ABOLITION EXHIBITION IN VIENNA

By Ramesh Jaura

VIENNA - "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." These words from the preamble of UNESCO's Constitution, inscribed on an exhibition panel, have caught the attention of Ana María Cetto as she walks around the exposition.

This is "one of the most evocative . . . phrases of any UN constitution," declares Cetto, opening the exhibition at the UN headquarters in Vienna. Cetto is the deputy director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), set up as the 'Atoms for Peace' organization in 1957.

Referring to the exposition titled 'From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit', Cetto says: "Exhibitions in the cause of peace, like this one, are devoted to a single aim: to construct those defences in the minds of each person that comes into contact with them."

Pointing to another telling phrase on a different panel, "the silent violence of apathy", she says, it underlines "a state of human willingness to live comfortably while ignoring the suffering of others".

"Apathy is a great threat to the defence of peace," Cetto cautions. "It's the parent of the insidious whisper that tells us that an individual can't do very much, or that the problems of people far away are inevitable, impossible to prevent, not that bad really, or maybe even their own fault."

What lends a particular significance to the exhibition, says the IAEA deputy chief, is: "It examines what is meant by human security, and how the sense of human security lies at the heart of a culture of peace. It brings before us the issues that apathy turns into problems, problems that have a much wider reach than the purely local." ↻



Picture: A view of the exhibition | Credit: SGI

Cetto adds: "In the IAEA, we are convinced that ensuring human security is key to ensuring global peace. We say that no lasting security is achievable without development, and that no sustainable human development is possible without security."

The exhibition, the IAEA's deputy chief opened on October 4, comprises of 36 panels and will continue till October 15. Its venue, the Vienna International Centre, also hosts the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) Preparatory Commission and several other UN agencies and offices.

The CTBTO Preparatory Commission, set up in 1996, is an interim organization tasked with building up the verification regime of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in preparation for the Treaty's entry into force as well as promoting the Treaty's universality.

CTBTO Preparatory Commission's external relations director Genxin Li is pleased that: "There is fortunately no longer large scale nuclear testing as was the case in previous decades. We have the CTBT and we have a fully functioning and capable verification regime to monitor compliance of the prohibition of nuclear testing."

"However, despite moratoria on nuclear testing, the legal door is not yet firmly closed. Although 182 countries have signed and 153 have ratified the CTBT, the Treaty is not yet in force," adds Genxin Li in his opening remarks. Though, that would be an important step towards nuclear disarmament and against nuclear proliferation.

"To achieve that step and to move forward on disarmament and non-proliferation, we require the utmost unity of purpose of the international community. It is therefore important to mobilize interest and to inform the public that this is an issue that directly concerns them," says CTBTO Preparatory Commission's external relations director.

He adds: "The 'People's Decade of Action for Nuclear Abolition' is the type of grassroots activity that can help achieve this goal."

The exhibition in the Austrian capital has been jointly organized by the NGO Committee on Peace Vienna and the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a Tokyo-based Buddhist organization, which launched it first in 2007 as part of the campaign entitled People's Decade of Action for Nuclear Abolition, with a view to building international public opinion against nuclear weapons and calling for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC).

Vienna NGO Committee on Peace chairman Klaus Renoldner makes an impassioned plea for a Nuclear Weapons Convention: "We know about the destructive effects of nuclear weapons, and as a physician I can certify that there is no treatment against this disease. A megaton bomb can destroy a large city and kill a million or more of innocent people at once. There is only prevention, and prevention in this case means abolition of these weapons."

The significance of the exhibition lies in the fact that it communicates the links between the nuclear weapons issue and human security, making clear that nuclear abolition is at the heart of the work of building human security. It demonstrates that, in order to solve nuclear weapons issues, changes in values and perspective -- from arms-based security to human security and from a culture of war to a culture of peace -- are indispensable. ➡

Since its launch, the exhibition has been shown in more than 200 cities in 24 countries. Notable showings include those at the Palais des Nations in Geneva during the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Preparatory Committee session in April-May 2008, the Mexican Senate Building during the 62nd Annual UN Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference in September 2009, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre during the Parliament of the World's Religions in December 2009 and the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum in February 2010.

"This long itinerary in itself is a testament to the universality of the message it carries," states Cetto. "In Vienna, however, it has a special resonance, as it is in this very building that the international community mobilizes its efforts to create a world free from the threats of nuclear proliferation and nuclear test explosions and thus bring us closer to the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons."

"We are very happy to be able to hold this exhibition in Vienna, host city to the CTBTO Preparatory Commission and the IAEA, both key UN agencies in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation, and to do so in collaboration with important civil society partners," SGI vice president and executive director for peace affairs, Hirotsugu Terasaki, tells IDN.

The latest showing comes within four months of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May 2010 in New York. The conference expressed its "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and reaffirmed the need for all states at all times to "comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law".

"In contrast to much intergovernmental debate on the nuclear issue, which has often been framed in political or military logic, this language in the Final Document gave clear precedence to humane values and human dignity," says Hiromasa Ikeda, SGI vice president in his opening remarks.

For the first time ever, the conference's Final Document made reference to proposals to outlaw nuclear weapons through a Nuclear Weapons Convention. This outcome was achieved through the determined efforts of global civil society and governments working together toward a shared vision and goal.

"We must make this experience the basis for further collaborative endeavors as we advance, step by step, toward the establishment of an NWC," adds the SGI vice president conveying the message from his father Daisaku Ikeda who presides over the organization.

Complete versions of the exhibition are available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Nepali with partial translations in Serbian. A German-language version will soon be completed, and this exhibition will be seen in schools and other educational institutions in Austria.

"There is nothing more important than empowering young people with the confidence that they can bring a world without nuclear weapons into being," says Terasaki. [IDN-InDepthNews | October 2010]

EASTERN EUROPE UNWILLING TO BACK FULL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Pavol Stracansky interviews Czech analyst Tomas Karasek



PRAGUE- More than a year ago U.S. President Barack Obama came to Eastern Europe to announce his vision of a world without nuclear weapons. One year later, in the same place, the Czech capital Prague, he signed a deal slashing nuclear weapons stocks with his Russian counterpart Dmitri Medvedev.

Many commentators saw the choice of location as symbolic -- one of the most prominent capitals in a region where nuclear weapons had been deployed in the depths of the Cold War when the world was thought to be its closest yet to nuclear war.

But its choice also stood at odds with what analysts say is a societal indifference to the debate on nuclear abolition matched only by its leaders' diffidence in committing to fully backing a Global Zero plan for nuclear weapons. Prominent Czech international relations analyst Tomas Karasek of the Association for International Affairs in Prague explained to IPS the reasons why full nuclear disarmament is unlikely to ever get the region's political support.

Q: U.S. President Barack Obama has said he wants to push for a world free of nuclear weapons and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said he sees world leaders wanting the same. Do you think that leaders in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) hold the same view? Would they fully back nuclear abolition?

A: I doubt it. Though I think it's difficult to defend the benefits of nuclear weapons publicly, they are regarded as an essential component of NATO's defence and deterrence strategies. In relation to the possibility of a terrorist attack by WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) but also vis-a-vis Russia, I believe many key players in the foreign policy and defence establishments in CEE still regard nuclear deterrent as a necessary (though not necessarily immediately usable) component of NATO policies.

Q: It has been suggested that some Central European leaders might not want complete nuclear abolition as it would mean the U.S. abandoning tactical nuclear weapons in Europe which raises concerns over regional security with the might of Russia's military on its doorstep. Do you think there is any real security reason for leaders in the region not to support complete abolition of nuclear weapons?

A: From a purely military perspective it's probably fair to assume that NATO could defend itself against a conventional Russian attack even without the use of nuclear weapons, while emphasising that such a scenario of a military confrontation. But in a situation when Russia still maintains its nuclear arsenal, it's simply politically unacceptable, and not just among the CEE leaders, that NATO would abolish its own. Since it's hardly imaginable Russia would accept total abolition of nuclear weapons which are one of the few remaining sources of its international prestige, such a development is also highly unlikely. ➔

Photo: Tomas Karasek

Q: Not being nuclear powers, could Central and Eastern European countries ever have any real influence on moves to abolish or even limit nuclear weapons or their testing?

A: Vis-a-vis the U.S., the CEE countries could at least send strong signals of disapproval to such American policies which they regard as grossly unfavourable. This could include withdrawal from U.S.-led missions, example Afghanistan, or stronger inclination to ESDP (the EU's European Security and Defence Policy) as an alternative to NATO. However, such developments are not very likely. In practice, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would probably simply 'lobby' the U.S. government to modify its steps to fit their perceived needs and interests. Since the U.S. cannot completely ignore the voices of its (Eastern) European allies, such diplomatic negotiations have a reasonable chance of at least partial success.

Q: Does the region have any role to play globally in at least stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, perhaps because of its Cold War history and the fact that nuclear weapons were deployed in the region under communism?

A: Probably not beyond participation in NATO and EU policies and initiatives.

Q: In the light of what critics said was a disappointing outcome to the non- proliferation treaty review earlier this year, could, or should, Central and Eastern Europe do more to show its support for non-proliferation, or a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty?

A: Even if they did, I doubt their weight in the international system would make it a significant move. The problem with the review of the non- proliferation treaty lies in the effort to change it into a disarmament instrument -- a move the current owners of nuclear weapons simply will not accept, despite all rhetorical dances. In fact, missing in the zeal towards disarmament is a clear explanation of why in fact the ownership of nuclear weapons is in itself a bad thing.

Q: Under communism nuclear weapons were deployed in the region but since the fall of communism and their withdrawal nuclear weapons seem to have been a relatively low subject on the political and public agenda in Central and Eastern Europe. Why do you think this is?

A: First, with the disappearance of the Soviet threat and the risk of U.S.-Soviet military confrontation, nuclear weapons ceased to be a relevant issue in regional discourse on security threats. Even discussion on the link between terrorism and WMDs after 9/11 did not result in plans for more reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent, not the least because of the official U.S. position that suicide terrorism simply cannot be deterred, or defence, taking into account the political and human costs of a hypothetical response to terrorist attacks by nuclear weapons.

Q: The UN has recently held meetings with high-level representatives of various governments in a bid to push for a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, and disarmament education in schools. Do you think Central and Eastern European governments will back these plans and even if they do, do you think they are realistic goals?

A: Personally, I am a bit sceptical about this, not the least because I tend to assess the role of nuclear weapons in international relations in much more positive terms than the prevailing disarmament discourse. In my opinion, any education on these matters should include a fair and critical assessment of the role of nuclear weapons in the international system along with the virtues of disarmament, in order to prevent turning education into indoctrination. [IPS | September 2010]

RUSSIA'S NEW START MAY END WITH A WHIMPER

By Kester Kenn Klomegah

MOSCOW- Efforts by the U.S. and Russian governments to move speedily towards the abolition of strategic nuclear weapons have hit stumbling blocks and continue to generate debates among experts about the practicality of achieving a nuclear-free world in the near future.

The main point, experts say, is that Russia and the U.S. have only taken weak steps to fulfil the objectives of the first strategic arms reduction treaty signed in 1991.

"Russia assigns significant military utility to its nuclear arsenal and so has less interest than the U.S. in promoting nuclear disarmament. For instance, it maintains several thousand tactical nuclear weapons in western Russia to counterbalance NATO's conventional military superiority," Ben Rhode, a research associate for non-proliferation and disarmament at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London told IPS in an e-mail interview.

"Many in the West have said such weapons will need to be included in future arms control talks, but I don't know how enthusiastic Russia would be about this. A world free of nuclear weapons would see the U.S.'s military superiority increased, and Russia would lose one of the very few ways in which it can justify its claims to be a great power."

The first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty or START expired in December 2009. The new START agreement, signed on Apr. 8, 2010 by the Russian and U.S. presidents in Prague (and followed by the first round of negotiations in Moscow from May 18 to 20) has allowed Russia to limit U.S. nuclear forces at the expense of its own rapidly aging delivery vehicles and unattainable warhead ceilings – each country being limited to 1,550 strategic warheads on 700 delivery vehicles.

But, Robert Ortung, a senior fellow at the Jefferson Institute in Washington DC, told IPS: "In order to keep the past achievements valid and in force, the two parties have engaged in updating the key provisions of that treaty. When finalised, this may have positive repercussions in the wider world."

Beyond the agreements on nuclear weapons and Afghanistan, Ortung noted that it would be hard for the U.S. and Russia to work together because of the fundamental values underlying their regimes.

He pointed out "Russia is increasingly authoritarian and relies heavily on official anti-U.S. rhetoric to boost its legitimacy. Through the election of Obama, the U.S. recently proved that change is possible through a peaceful political process. This is the kind of message that the Russian leadership does not want to hear or transmit on to the rest of the population."

Tom Collina and Greg Thielmann, both senior fellows at the Washington-based Arms Control Association told IPS "Russia can commit to President Obama's call to negotiate another treaty after New START is approved, that will cover strategic, tactical and non-deployed weapons. The greatest challenge will be Russia's reluctance to give up its tactical weapons as it would not want to reduce its nuclear arsenal any more. And it will also seek limitations on U.S. missile defences, which the U.S. will not want to provide." ➔

However, to make major strides toward nuclear abolition, it is also imperative to address the complicated issues of tactical and non-deployed nuclear warheads. The major obstacle here is the difficulty of verifying arms control limits in these categories.

For example, Russia has no intended use for the hundreds of nuclear warheads for surface-to-air missiles and many of Russia's shorter-range nuclear weapons have little utility in the post-Cold War era. Once Russia comes to recognise its large tactical nuclear arsenal as a liability in a world where the most dangerous threat is nuclear terrorism, it will be free to take unilateral initiatives and propose mutual arms control limits.

Last week, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev called on all countries to adopt a comprehensive declaration for a nuclear-free world. "This declaration would reflect the determination of all countries to move step-by-step toward the ideals of a nuclear-free world," he said in a message to participants at a conference on International Day against Nuclear Tests.

Pavel Andreyev, RIA Novosti political commentator, observes in his comments that there is every reason to believe that a significant reduction – let alone abolition – of the Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals would not serve as a positive example for other countries to follow. The idea of a non-nuclear world with today's unstable security conditions is a non-starter.

The Russian elite's lack of trust in the U.S. undermines the idea that Washington is ready to abandon its nuclear weapons. On the other hand, if Russia and the U.S. write off their nuclear warheads, it could provide additional impetus for the more threatening elements in the international community to further develop their own nuclear capabilities, Andreyev added.

For Russia, there is an additional stimulus to avoid a reduction of its nuclear capability. It is the long overdue military reform which would cut back on conventional forces, increasing the role of the nuclear deterrent. [IPS | September 2010]

"Russia is increasingly authoritarian and relies heavily on official anti-U.S. rhetoric to boost its legitimacy. Through the election of Obama, the U.S. recently proved that change is possible through a peaceful political process. This is the kind of message that the Russian leadership does not want to hear or transmit on to the rest of the population." - Robert Orttung, a senior fellow at the Jefferson Institute in Washington DC

GERMAN ANTI-NUKE MOVEMENT WITHERS AWAY

By Julio Godoy

BERLIN – They have long disappeared from the scene, those hundreds of thousands of peace activists who call for the removal of atomic arsenal from German territory. They dominated the political landscape when NATO, the western military alliance, officially installed nuclear weapons in Germany at the height of the Cold War nearly 30 years ago. Today, those participating in peace demonstrations can be counted by the dozens.

And yet, the German activists who continue to call for nuclear disarmament are as persistent as ever. Take Elke Koller, a doctor in natural sciences and pharmacist from Leienkaul, a village in Rhineland Palatinate, the south-western federal state home of the last NATO nuclear weapons located in Germany. Among her many activities for nuclear disarmament juts a recent lawsuit she filed against the German minister of defence, Karl Theodor zu Guttenberg, for his failure in actively pursuing the removal of the nuclear weapons from the country.

Koller's court case is based on the fact that the nuclear weapons based in Germany violate several international treaties, of which the country is signatory, from the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to the The Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany.

Koller says: "Our legal counsellors, members of the International Association Of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms, have found out that article 2 of the NPT prohibits Germany to host nuclear weapons, even from other countries," Koller told IDN.

Additionally, Koller said, "In our interpretation, the German constitution gives every citizen the right and the obligation to call for the government's compliance of international law."

As remarkable as Koller's lawsuit against minister Guttenberg might appear, and regardless of its chances to succeed, it has gone nearly unnoticed in Germany. This is a good indicator of the indifference with which German public now deals with the issue of nuclear disarmament.

"People do not any longer fear nuclear weapons as much as they did 30 years ago," says Jens-Peter Steffen, a member of the German office of the International physicians for the prevention of nuclear war (IPPNW) group.

"Young people in particular have no idea of the power of destruction of the nuclear bomb. They often think the nuclear bomb is just another traditional weapon, only with a bigger detonation power. They are unaware of the obliteration a nuclear bomb provokes. The issue attracts attention only on the anniversary of nuclear catastrophes, such as the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," Steffen told IDN, or when charismatic world leaders, such as U.S. President Barack Obama, publicly call for nuclear disarmament.

After Obama's landmark speech in Prague in April 2009, when he called the nuclear weapons spread across the world "the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War", German political leaders suddenly discovered that nuclear disarmament could be a popular issue, and joined the ranks of the peace movement. ➡

Then foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), urged the U.S. government and NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) to include the nuclear weapons deployed in Germany in their disarmament plans. These nuclear weapons "are obsolete," Steinmeier rightly told the German weekly Der Spiegel at the time. Though, he had seldom before pleaded against nuclear weapons.

Guido Westerwelle too, then opposition leader and now foreign minister, and so far unsuspected of anti-militarism or opposition to Western military plans, immediately called for a removal of the nuclear weapons. On May 15, 2009, six weeks after Obama's speech in Prague, Westerwelle stressed that "the time has come for nuclear disarmament."

As late as January 2010, Westerwelle, already serving as German foreign minister, repeated his call and claimed he was "holding negotiations with our (NATO) partners" to withdraw the nuclear weapons from Germany. "Since Obama's inauguration, there is a new dynamics on the issue," Westerwelle said.

Germany continues to be home to numerous nuclear warheads. Although the exact dimension of the nuclear arsenal deployed in Germany remains classified, IPPNW estimates that some 20 nuclear bombs of the type B61 are still stored in Buechel, a military base located in Rhine Palatinate, some 500 kilometres southwest of Berlin, near the border with Belgium and Luxembourg. Buechel has the capacity to store up to 44 nuclear warheads.

Some 1,700 German soldiers learn there the handling of this arsenal, in the framework of the so-called nuclear sharing policy, the NATO's policy of nuclear deterrence, which lets European member countries without nuclear weapons of their own participate in the planning for the use of nuclear weapons by the NATO. Other than Germany, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands host U.S. nuclear weapons.

According to IPPNW, all in all, some 300 U.S. nuclear bombs are spread across European NATO members. Each of these bombs have a detonation power of up to 170 kilotons -- in comparison, the bomb that destroyed the Japanese city of Hiroshima in August 1945, and killed at least 200,000 people, had a detonation power of 12.5 kilotons.

The new dynamics in nuclear disarmament in the aftermath of Obama's speech in Prague was so tempting, that even the German conservative-liberal coalition formed by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), which took office in Berlin in October 2009, included the issue in its government programme.

"We strongly support the proposals made by U.S. President Obama regarding comprehensive new disarmament initiatives -- including the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons," the CDU-FDP coalition government agreement of October 2009 says.

"In this context," the agreement goes on, "as well as in the course of the drafting of a strategic concept for NATO, we will advocate within the Alliance and with our (U.S.) American allies for the removal of the remaining nuclear weapons from Germany." ➡

THE REALITY GAP

However, the new German government's position on nuclear weapons contradicted its factual policy, which revealed that the sudden political actionism against nuclear weapons was simply driven by political opportunism and not by disarmament convictions. Until the very eve of the Oct 2009 declaration, the leading ruling party, the conservative CDU headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel, did repeatedly express it wants to hold to the bomb.

"We should be careful and avoid mixing up the goals with the ways leading to them," Merkel said in March 2009, just some days before Obama's speech in Prague. "The German government has fixed the nuclear sharing policy ... to secure our influence within NATO in this highly sensitive area." In other words: For Merkel the nuclear weapons are indispensable, not for military reasons, but to give Germany a greater political clout within the NATO. Some months later, however, Merkel signed the call to remove the nuclear weapons from Germany.

But in the one year gone by, and as if to confirm Merkel's initial caution, the machinery of world bureaucracy has slowed down the new dynamics of nuclear disarmament. As a result, the issue has all but disappeared from the German daily public agenda.

To be sure, the not so numerous members of the peace movement, as represented by Elke Koller, continue to advocate for disarmament and for the withdrawal of the "obsolete nuclear weapons", but they do not enjoy attention from the society at large.

Only the initiated are aware that in November, NATO might discuss the removal of some or all nuclear weapons from German territory. According to analysts, "it is likely that the NATO deals with the issue. Less certain is the outcome of the debates."

IPPNW's Steffen says that both the NATO and the German government want to retain the weapons in Germany, albeit not on strictly military considerations.

"The nuclear weapons stationed in Germany have no military purpose," Steffen told IDN. "They are obsolete: In case of a nuclear war, the likelihood that the NATO fights a nuclear battle within Europe is rather marginal; these weapons are useless, for you have to mount them into military airplanes and fly them over quite long distances."

Steffen said that the German government's position on nuclear disarmament is contradictory. "In public, the government claims it advocates a nuclear free world. But in reality it wants to maintain the nuclear weapons in Germany, allegedly to safeguard its influence within the NATO, and also as a bargaining material vis-à-vis Russia." Therefore, he said, the nuclear weapons stationed in Germany have "at best a political value. Militarily, they are useless."

According to foreign minister Westerwelle, "the NATO will during its next summit in (the Portuguese capital) Lisbon approve its new strategy, which will deal with the question of what role are nuclear weapons supposed to play in the defence and security policies of the alliance under the present geopolitical circumstances."

In an interview, Westerwelle claimed that during the NATO meeting of foreign and defence ministers in April 2010 in Tallinn, Estonia, he had initiated a debate on the meaning of nuclear weapons in the present-day world -- as if Obama's speech in Prague and subsequent measures have never happened. ➡

But Westerwelle admitted that the U.S. has already downgraded, at least in its rhetoric, the importance of the bomb in its own military policy. "In this context," he said, "it is the German government's objective that the nuclear weapons stationed in our territory be removed, in agreement with our (NATO) military partners."

But for Steffen, and despite the nuclear weapons' evident military uselessness, the likelihood that the NATO decides to remove them from Germany is all but marginal.

OBSOLETE BUT . . .

Most likely then, the nuclear weapons will remain stationed in Germany, even though also the U.S. military admits that they are obsolete. In December 2008, in a report for the U.S. defence ministry, a U.S. expert commission concluded that the B61 nuclear bombs deployed across Europe are "useless, military speaking".

The commission also underlined the disproportionate costs associated with maintaining this nuclear arsenal ready for use.

In addition, Germany does not have sovereign access to them. In the framework of its "nuclear sharing" strategy, the NATO has deployed nuclear weapons in its European member countries officially known as non nuclear powers, such as Germany. But these nuclear weapons are managed and secured by U.S. soldiers; the codes required for their detonation are also under the control of the U.S. military.

Despite such violations of the German sovereignty, the nuclear weapons do not longer constitute a popular theme among German political leaders or civil society at large. It is quite telling that the one senior official who talks the least about the issue is the minister of defence, Karl-Theodor Guttenberg. It is his indifference that led Elke Koller to sue him on behalf of the German government for violating international treaties.

But also among opposition leaders the theme has long lost attraction. While during the months that followed Obama's speech in April 2009, practically the leaders of all parties were scrambling to discuss the issue publicly, now they leave it to their youth organisations and other low-ranking groups.

This is the case of the SPD. While former foreign minister Steinmeier has lost interest in the issue, the party's youth officials, known as Jusos (for Jung Sozialisten, Young Socialists) have inherited the task of demonstrating for nuclear disarmament.

In a recent statement, the Juso leader Franziska Drohse complained: "20 years after the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons are still deployed in Germany. Every one of these bombs has the destructive potential of several of the bombs" that wiped out the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Drohse recalled that the NATO leadership puts countries such as Pakistan and North Korea "to the pillories" for their nuclear weapons, while holding to its own nuclear arsenal. "We cannot plea convincingly for other countries' nuclear disarmament while we keep our arsenal," Drohse said.

Yet another symbolic campaign for the removal of the nuclear weapons from Germany is an electronic mail action addressed to the minister of defence Guttenberg. In a letter, signed and sent per e-mail by hundreds of activists to Guttenberg's headquarters, the peace activists urge the minister during NATO's November summit at Lisbon to "strongly argue (before the military alliance) in favour of the removal of the nuclear weapons still deployed in Germany."

[IDN-InDepthNews | September 2010]

MOVING TO A SAFER WORLD WITH A MILLION PLEAS CAMPAIGN

By Neena Bhandari

SYDNEY – As the threat of nuclear annihilation becomes more real than ever before, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) Australia has launched a 'Million Pleas' campaign, emphasising the urgency to rid the world of these weapons.



"The Million Pleas campaign gives a face and a voice to the issue of Nuclear weapons and the urgency for total disarmament and abolition of these weapons. People do want to see a complete abolition of N-weapons, but they don't necessarily have a way of getting the message across to world leaders. Through this initiative, they can," says ICAN Australia's Campaign Director and Executive Officer, Dimity Hawkins.

A 45-second film clip, featuring Japanese school children and an 80-year-old survivor of the atomic blast, Nakanishi Iwao, calling on each of the nine nuclear states to free the world of N-weapons, has triggered the world's longest video chain letter appeal to world leaders to abolish nuclear weapons, setting a new global milestone in online interactive campaigning.

Developed by ICAN Australia in partnership with Melbourne-based advertising agency Whybin TBWA, it gives people around the world a chance to voice their support for nuclear disarmament by uploading their image and personal plea via popular social networking tools -- YouTube, Facebook or twitter.

The campaign, with Ambassadors including Nobel Peace laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, founding coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines Jody Williams and former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, was launched in Hiroshima on August 6, 2010 to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and three days later of Nagasaki, which killed over hundreds of thousands of people, mostly within minutes.

In a message of hope and peace at the launch, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the first UN chief to attend the Peace Memorial ceremony in Hiroshima said: "Together, we are on a journey from ground zero to Global Zero -- a world free of weapons of mass destruction. That is the only sane path to a safer world...We must teach an elemental truth: that status and prestige belong not to those who possess nuclear weapons, but to those who reject them."

Ban Ki-moon is convening a high-level meeting at the UN on September 24 to push for a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, and disarmament education in schools -- including translating the testimonies of the survivors in the world's major languages. Despite 153 countries having ratified the CTBT, it has yet to come into force due to the failure of nine 'nuclear capable' nations, the U.S., China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, North Korea, India and Pakistan, to join the treaty. ➡

Image: ICAN

ICAN Australia Board member, Tim Wright, who was in Hiroshima for the launch told IDN, "The children and NGOs were very keen to get this message across of 'Never Again'. People have found the humanitarian-based Million Pleas campaign incredibly compelling and moving. A lot of material against nuclear weapons we see today is based on a fear kind of campaigning about nuclear terrorism whereas we have always focused on these being immoral weapons and no country can be trusted with them."

"I think one of the things that Ban Ki-moon has brought to the debate is the sense of urgency. He said in Hiroshima that he wanted CTBT entered into force by 2012 and he described the vision of abolition by 2020 as perfect vision. So this is significantly different from what the nuclear weapons states are saying," says Wright.

Since the 1945 bombing of the two Japanese cities, thousands of nuclear tests have been conducted around the world. Seven nations, the U.S., Russia (and former USSR), France, UK, China, India and Pakistan, have acknowledged to testing weapons between 1945 and 1998, and North Korea tested nuclear devices in 2006 and 2009. On August 29, the first UN Day against Nuclear Tests was held to mark the closure of the former Soviet Union's main nuclear test site, Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan in 1991.

There are currently an estimated 22,600 N-weapons around the world. "It is an extraordinary number when you think how few it would take really to create utter devastation of the entire environments, to kill millions of people and displace many more, to create a famine and radical climate change. People do understand that nuclear weapons do not add to their security," Hawkins told IDN.

At the 19th world congress of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) in Basel (Switzerland) August 25-30, ICAN encouraged European and the over 50 participating countries to translate and adapt the Million Pleas campaign to their domestic issues. The film clip, currently in English and English-Japanese, has been on community service announcements on a range of commercial and mainstream radio and television channels in Australia.

ICAN, a global grassroots movement, is calling for disarmament through a legally binding, verifiable and time-bound Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) to prohibit the development, testing, production, use and threat of use of N-weapons.

Recently, there have been some positive moves demonstrating that disarmament is possible if there is political will and cooperation. The U.S. President Barack Obama has spoken strongly about the need to get to zero N-weapons and signed the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in April 2010. The treaty includes a 30 percent reduction in the number of strategic nuclear warheads deployed by the two countries, which together hold more than 90 percent of the world's N-weapons.

Earlier in June 2008, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was the first sitting prime minister to visit Hiroshima, where Australia along with Japan formed the Independent Commission for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND). The ICNND report makes a case for specific reductions in numbers to be achieved by certain times, including the 'minimisation point' of a global maximum of 2000 N-weapons by 2025.

But as ICAN Australia Board member, Tim Wright told IDN, "Setting up a commission is one thing, but taking the hard decisions that would advance disarmament is quite another. The Labor Government hasn't been willing to take any serious steps, for example, banning uranium sales to nuclear weapons states, advocating for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and rejecting the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella." ↻

"We are very much part of the problem so I think the perception of Australia as the 'good guy' on these issues needs to be set straight. Australia is one of those countries who rely on the U.S. nuclear weapons for security and by doing so we give legitimacy to nuclear weapons, we send a message to other countries that they are useful weapons for providing security and that is an impediment to disarmament. Last year's defence white paper even affirmed the importance of nuclear deterrents in Australia's defence." says Wright.

Australia is definitely vital in the discussion around disarmament because it is a major exporter of uranium and exports uranium to nuclear states, who have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In April 2010 the Government approved uranium exports to Russia, which not been visited by the International Atomic Energy Agency since 2001. A survey by a Sydney-based independent think-tank, the Lowy Institute for International policy, found 84 percent of Australians were against Australia developing N-weapons, but if some of Australia's near neighbours began to develop them, opposition fell to 57 percent and 42 percent in favour of Australia doing the same.

As Hawkins says, "It requires efforts from all nations, who have the weapons and all those who do not, to get rid of them and make the world free of nukes a reality. One nuclear weapon in any country is one too many. There is always a risk of accident, of use whether intentional or by accident, there is also the risk of terrorism associated with these weapons wherever they are. That is why Million Pleas is exciting as it gives voice to people and organisations that for 65 years have been making calls to put these weapons to bed and delegitimise their use."

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One of the major difficulties has been one set of rules for countries that already have N-weapons and another set of rules for those that don't. It is also noticeable that some countries, for example the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, keep N-weapons but are also most vocal about calling for other nations not to acquire them. While NPT remains the only legally binding multilateral instrument recognising the importance of nuclear disarmament through Article 6, a NWC will help enhance Article 6 obligations by putting together a road map to get to zero N-weapons, currently missing in the NPT. Also, there is the risk of proliferation of nuclear technology, even if it is ostensibly for civilian nuclear power use as they call it in the NPT that will lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons capability.

As Hawkins says, "It is widely recognised that the technology needed for nuclear power is not dissimilar to that needed for nuclear weapons production." Traditionally, Australia has taken a leading role in the negotiation of major international arms control instruments, most recently, the Cluster Munitions Convention. But Hawkins says, "Lately, I have been very disappointed, especially by the lacklustre approach from the Australian government at the UN Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference in May 2010 when Australia was conspicuously absent from the discussion on a Nuclear Weapons Convention."

"However, the election of the Australian Greens in a sweeping balance of power in the Senate in the August 2010 elections is good news for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as they have a strong history and a solid visionary platform on the issues around nuclear weapons." [IDN-InDepthNews | August 2010]

THE ARABS AND THE RACE TO NUCLEAR HELL

By Fareed Mahdy

ISTANBUL - UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sounds rather optimistic -- or has chosen to do so: "Recently, we have seen signs of progress on nuclear non-proliferation talks," he said some two weeks ahead of announcing on August 3 that ministerial-level discussions on eliminating the world's nuclear weapons will take place in New York in September. But signals from both the Arab region and the U.S. induce a dramatically different conclusion.

In fact, indications from the Middle East point to an on-going nuclear race in the region -- the world's most conflictive and the only one not to have a nuclear free zone treaty. Indeed, Latin America and the Caribbean are nuclear free, as is Africa, while sub-regional treaties have also been sealed among Central Asian countries and South-eastern Asian states.

The Middle East is therefore a striking exception in a world willing to head for eliminating atomic weapons, at least according to big nuclear powers' political statements.

In fact, Jordan and Sudan have openly joined other 10 Arab countries willing to exercise their legitimate right to produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

These are: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates.

Together these 12 countries represent over 50 percent of the 22 members of the League of Arab States, and an even higher percentage (over two-thirds) considering that at least five of them -- Somalia, Yemen, Comoros Islands, Djibouti and Mauritania -- appear to be far away from caressing nuclear dreams for now.

DANGEROUS RACE

Such an Arab nuclear race is to be clearly considered extremely dangerous should Western powers' arguments against Iranian nuclear programme hold ground. According to these arguments, the very fact that Tehran pursues atomic energy for civilian purposes implies an evident risk that it may militarize it and start producing atomic weapons.

The logical corollary of Western arguments therefore is that the Arab countries willing to go nuclear would eventually end up developing nuclear weapons.

Three key questions arise:

-- Why do the Arabs want to turn nuclear?

-- Why Europe, the U.S. and its allies in Asia, are pushing the Arabs into such a nuclear race?

-- Has the Iranian nuclear programme been used as an alibi by Arab regimes to run in the atomic race and by the West to encourage them to do so?

Arab states would have at least four good arguments -- or justifications -- to want to develop their own nuclear capacities. On the one hand, the sole nuclear power in the Middle East, Israel -- which reportedly possesses over 200 nuclear warheads (equivalent to more than three-folds of Indian or Pakistani atomic arsenals) -- continues to frustrate the international community's efforts to make it join the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). ➡

In fact, Israel categorically rejects all demands to lay bare its atomic programme; submit its nuclear facilities to the mandatory inspection of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); join international nuclear disarmament negotiations and accords, and participate in any attempt to declare the Middle East a nuclear free zone.

On the other hand, Arab regimes are under increasing pressure from the U.S. and Europe through their consistent campaign to terrorise the region over alleged Iranian intentions to become a nuclear power.

A third argument is the failure to declare the Middle East a nuclear free zone. In fact, all their demands to liberate the region from these and all other weapons of mass destruction have been systematically falling on deaf ears.

The fourth reason is the big nuclear powers' insistence on offering assistance to whoever wants to go atomic in the region.

In fact, Western nuclear powers, led by France, and closely followed by the U.S. and the United Kingdom, have been systematically casting their "nuclear assistance charm" on all Arab regimes. In this, they have simply prioritised their commercial interests and power game over their declared good intentions of freeing the world from nuclear threats. Such Western pressure has led Russia to compete with them due to both political and commercial reasons.

GOING NUCLEAR, ALREADY

Consequently, the United Arab Emirates has joined Saudi Arabia on the nuclear road through the Gulf region, with other runners, such as Kuwait and Qatar, already warming their muscles. At the same time, the uranium-rich Jordan has been involved in discussions with French giant Areva and Japanese firm Mitsubishi to acquire technology to enable it build its first nuclear power plant. Furthermore, the Jordanian government announced in late July 2010 an agreement with South Korea to launch its first nuclear research reactor.

The Jordanian nuclear plan embodies a first sign of 'rebellion' against U.S. and European policies, as Amman has shown great reluctance to accept Western moves to prevent Jordan from exercising its sovereign right to enrich uranium.

At the same time, France promised assistance to Qatar and Morocco to launch their own nuclear programmes, and Cairo signed last year with Moscow an agreement ensuring Russian enrolment in the setting up of nuclear plants in Egypt. Now Sudan has also decided to join the nuclear race by announcing on August 22 a plan to build its own reactor.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has shown no real signs of willingness to eliminate the danger of atomic weapons from the face of the Earth, in spite of Barack Obama administration's declared good will of achieving a nuclear free world. Far from that, U.S. nuclear plans imply that despite its decision to reduce its atomic arsenals, it will keep a minimum of 3,000 nuclear weapons for over a decade, while continuing to modernise its atomic arsenals and aiming at producing a so-called "super nuclear bomb".

In a further step, the U.S. has made it loud and clear that anybody who wants to go nuclear in the Arab region will have to choose between three specific options, which Secretary of State Hilary Clinton has spelt out during one of her frequent visits to the region: "They can just give in to the threat (from Iran). Or they can seek their own capabilities, including nuclear; or they ally themselves with a country like the United States that is willing to help defend them . . . I think the third is by far the preferable option." ☺

Be it on purpose to reaffirm Clinton's "options" and make it clear how the U.S. is keen about further aligning the Arabs behind its interests, or to just strengthen its role in the region, the fact is that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has decided to open a counter-proliferation centre to combat the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Its director, Leon Edward Panetta, said on August 18 that the new centre would place CIA operators side by side with the agency's analysts to brainstorm plans to "confront the threat of weapons of mass destruction -- nuclear, chemical and biological".

There is another key factor in such a nuclear race in the Arab region, and that is the consistent campaign by the U.S. and Europe to persuade the world and their own public, that Iranian nuclear programme represents a major threat to their national security and that of the whole planet.

Such insistence in arguing that Iran could well transform its civilian programme into a military to develop atomic weapons -- and use them -- has targeted the Gulf region in particular.

No wonder. It is the single richest oil producing region in the world; its regimes are close "allies" of the U.S. and Europe, and its countries have enough financial resources.

These resources, which have been disproportionately used to fulfil an induced -- if not imposed -- need to regularly purchase Western conventional weapons, are now seen as a great business opportunity to move the 'simple' arms race to a nuclear race.

Paradoxically enough, Tehran has contributed significantly to this game, by reiterating swollen patriotic proclamations.

NUCLEAR TURKEY?

An additional side-effect to the Middle East atomic race induced by the biggest nuclear powers is Ankara's decision to install its own nuclear facilities.

In fact, the Turkish parliament approved on July 13 a bill on an agreement between Russia and Turkey for the construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant in the coastal town of Akkuyu, in Mersin province.

According to the agreement, which was signed during Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's official visit to Turkey in May 2010, the two countries will cooperate in the construction and operation of the power plant.

A consortium led by state-controlled Russian builder AtomStroyExport will construct the plant in Akkuyu, which is estimated to cost around 20 billion US dollars. The construction is due to start later this year, and it will generate 4,800 megawatts in four units.

This Turkish nuclear plan gains special relevance in view of the country's doubly important role – as a key, full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and as a new, strong player in the Middle East.

All these developments point to a bleak proliferation scenario. Does the UN Secretary-General nevertheless wish to hold on to his optimism?
[IDN-InDepthNews | August 2010]

PEACE SIGNALS FROM U.S. NUCLEAR FOOTPRINT SITES

By Ramesh Jaura



BERLIN - History is in the making with two sites where the United States left its indelible nuclear footprints -- the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall archipelago and Japan's legendary city of Hiroshima -- sending new signals.

The World Heritage Committee meeting in Brasilia from July 25 to August 3 placed the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall archipelago on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, the United Nations agency mandated to conserve the humankind's legacy.

The rationale behind the decision of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee is that in the wake of World War II, in a move closely related to the beginnings of the Cold War, the United States decided to resume nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, on Bikini Atoll. After the displacement of the local inhabitants, 67 nuclear tests were carried out from 1946 to 1958, including the explosion of the first H-bomb (1952).

Bikini Atoll has conserved direct tangible evidence that is highly significant in conveying the power of the nuclear tests, that is, the sunken ships sent to the bottom of the lagoon by the tests in 1946 and the gigantic Bravo crater, according to UNESCO.

Equivalent to 7,000 times the force of the Hiroshima bomb, the tests had major consequences on the geology and natural environment of Bikini Atoll and on the health of those who were exposed to radiation. "Through its history, the atoll symbolises the dawn of the nuclear age, despite its paradoxical image of peace and of earthly paradise. This is the first site from the Marshall Islands to be inscribed on the World Heritage List," UNESCO states.

A glimpse of history shows that Bikini was visited by only a dozen or so ships before the establishment of the German colony of the Marshall Islands in 1885. Along with the rest of the Marshalls, Bikini was captured by the Imperial Japanese Navy in 1914 during World War I (1914-1918) and mandated to the Empire of Japan by the League of Nations in 1920. ➡

Picture: The "Baker" explosion, part of Operation Crossroads, a nuclear weapon test by the United States military at Bikini Atoll, Micronesia, on July 25th 1946.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons

The Japanese administered in the island under the South Pacific Mandate, but mostly left local affairs in hands of traditional local leaders until the start of World War II in 1939. Following the end of World War II (1945), Bikini came under the control of the United States as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands until the independence of the Marshall Islands in 1986. Unlike the Bikini Atoll, Hiroshima did not have to wait that long to be placed on the World Heritage List. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) was inscribed 1996 on the List "to symbolize the tragedy brought about by the world's first atomic bomb".

An atomic bomb exploded directly above a building called the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall on August 6, 1945, with the pressure created by the bomb being 35 tons per square meter and the blast speed emitted reaching 440 meters per second. The building was destroyed and only a few walls and the steel framework were left standing.

After the war it was given the name of 'Genbaku Dome' (Atomic Bomb Dome) by locals and in 1966 Hiroshima City Government decided to preserve the Genbaku Dome permanently, restoring the building regularly thereafter. What sets apart the 2010 Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony -- held every year on August 6 at Hiroshima Peace Park -- is that for the first time officials from 74 countries attended the ceremony.

Also the attendance of U.S. Ambassador to Japan John Roos, who presented a floral wreath, marks the first time an American diplomat attended the Peace Ceremony. This is viewed by many Japanese as a good sign. Representatives from nuclear weapon states France and Great Britain as well made their first appearance.

It was besides the first time that United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon not only attended the ceremony but also addressed Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony. Ban, who hails from Korea, was a child when the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, resulting in the deaths of more than 200,000 people. More than 400,000 have died -- and are continuing to die -- since the end of World War II from the impacts of those bombs. "Only later in life could I begin to understand the full dimension of all that happened here," he said.

It is against the backdrop of this realization that he has made nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation a top priority, and put forward a five-point plan in 2008 that includes recommendations on increasing security, verification, establishing a legal framework for nuclear disarmament, transparency and conventional weapons. "Our moment has come," an upbeat Secretary-General said, noting recent progress on the issue, including new leadership from the most powerful nations, new engagement in the Security Council, and new energy from civil society.

At the same time, it is vital to keep up the momentum, he said, adding that he will convene a Conference on Disarmament in New York in September, where he will push for negotiations towards nuclear disarmament. In a significant move, Ban also highlighted the need for disarmament education in schools, including translating the testimonies of the survivors in the world's major languages, as well as teaching that "status and prestige belong not to those who possess nuclear weapons, but to those who reject them".

Ban came to Hiroshima after spending what he described "a profoundly moving day" in Nagasaki, where he toured the Atomic Bomb Museum and met with a number of survivors. He also laid a wreath at the monument located at ground zero, and visited a separate memorial for Korean victims. He said his visit to Nagasaki had strengthened his conviction that nuclear weapons must be outlawed, and he urged all nations to support his five-point action plan and agree to negotiate a nuclear weapons convention at the earliest possible date. ➡

"Together, we are on a journey from ground zero to Global Zero -- a world free of weapons of mass destruction. That is the only sane path to a safer world. Let us realize our dream of a world free of nuclear weapons so that our children and all succeeding generations can live in freedom, security and peace," Ban stated.

In both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he met with hibakusha, or victims of the bombings. The Secretary-General told reporters in Hiroshima that those meetings "have strengthened my determination to work even harder" to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. "The suffering was unimaginable and the courage and fortitude had been extraordinary," he said, describing their devotion to ridding the world of the weapons as inspirational. Ban also stressed in remarks at a welcome ceremony in Hiroshima that abolishing nuclear weapons is "more than our common dream; it is common sense policy".

There have been some encouraging new commitments made by the world's nuclear powers, including the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) reached by the United States and Russia, under which they pledged to cut back on their stockpiles by a third. Progress was also made at both the high-level Washington Summit on Nuclear Security and the May 2010 review conference of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) held at the United Nations.

"Above all," he said, there has been a "rising chorus of conscience from civil society", such as the Mayors for Peace movement, bringing together more than 4,000 mayors from around the world, as well as representatives of the world's religions, lawyers, doctors, environmentalists, labour leaders, women, human rights activists, parliamentarians and others.

A company's investment and employment decisions, its relations with communities, and its actions on the environment and security "can create or exacerbate the tensions that fuel conflict... or they can help a country remain at peace," he emphasized. Ban's remarks show that the UN not only shares the aspirations of the youth but also supports their campaign to create a nuclear-weapon-free world. This was indicated in run-up to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony at the Youth Peace General Assembly and Asia Youth Peace Music Festival held on August 1 in Hiroshima.

In response to the call by Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), for nuclear abolition, the youth wing of the organization from all over Japan -- including Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa -- have undertaken a petition drive calling for the enactment of Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC).

Through this campaign, they collected a total of 2,276,167 signatures which were submitted to the United Nations and the NPT review conference which unanimously adopted its final document stressing the need to pay adequate attention to the NWC.

Kenji Shiratsuchi, chair of the Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference who has led a youth campaign for nuclear abolition while collecting people's voices, told the Hiroshima-Nagasaki-Okinawa youth summit that a six-nation survey conducted by the organisation had concluded that most people believe the world would be safer without the destructive weapons.

The survey involved interviews with 4,362 people, ranging from teens to those in their thirties, in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, New Zealand, the United States and Britain. According to the findings, over 67 percent said the use of nuclear weapons was not acceptable under any circumstances, with only 17.5 percent seeing it as acceptable as a last resort if a country's survival was threatened, and 6.1 percent saying they could be used to prevent international terrorism or genocide. [IDN-InDepthNews | August 2010]

DESPITE CUTS, NUKES STILL INTEGRAL TO U.S. SECURITY STRATEGY

By Haider Rizvi

UNITED NATIONS - The new U.S. plan to maintain and improve its nuclear weapons complex is likely to hinder international efforts to halt the spread of weapons of mass destruction, say independent analysts who have watched a series of UN-led talks on nuclear proliferation and disarmament for years.

"So long as the U.S. continues to rely upon its nuclear arsenal for security, it is hard to make the argument that other states should refrain from following this course," said David Krieger, president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, who has attended scores of UN-led talks on the nuclear issue.

Krieger's remarks came after the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), a Washington-based independent organisation, released an unclassified document last week revealing the Barack Obama administration's plan to reduce the U.S. nuclear stockpile by about 40 percent by the end of 2020.

Like other disarmament advocates, Krieger welcomed the planned cuts, but said he was unsure if they would help pave the way for total elimination of nuclear weapons, a task that a vast majority of UN member states, as well as the world body's secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, want to be taken seriously.

"I see all plans to reduce nuclear arsenals as being beneficial," he told IPS. "What I find missing, however, in the Department of Defense's plan is a sense of urgency and a negotiated plan to go to zero."

The new plan suggests that, despite significant reduction of the existing stockpile, the U.S. must remain in possession of at least 3,000 to 3,500 nuclear weapons after the end of the next decade. Currently, the U.S. has 5,113 declared nuclear weapons, of which about 2,700 are operational warheads.

The U.S. would not only continue to maintain and modernise its nuclear weapons complex after reduction of the existing stockpiles, it would also spend more money to do so ever than before.

According to the National Nuclear Security Administration, the annual costs for the weapons complex would increase from about seven billion dollars in fiscal year 2011 to more than eight billion dollars in 2017 and more than nine billion dollars in 2030.

The plan indicates that the nuclear establishment's infrastructure will support "active, logistic spare and reserve warheads", which will not be designed to have the "capacity to return to historical cold war stockpiles, or rapidly respond to large production spikes".

Does this mean the U.S. is getting serious about fulfilling its obligations to the international community under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which requires all declared nuclear weapon states to take "significant steps" towards the abolition of nuclear weapons?

Independent observers have their doubts. ➡

"[it's] contrary to the international law requirement that the United States act in 'good faith' to meet the NPT Article VI obligation of negotiating for nuclear disarmament," said John Burroughs, president of the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, about the new plan.

The Nuclear Posture Review prepared by the Obama administration contends that "reducing the role and number of nuclear weapons" will demonstrate U.S. compliance with the NPT disarmament compliance obligation. But some legal experts are not convinced.

"While welcome," says Burroughs, "such reductions do not suffice." In order to make his point, he cites the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, concluding that Article VI of the NPT requires states to "pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control."

A UN General Assembly resolution welcomes the court's decision, and calls for negotiations to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons globally as the means of meeting the NPT obligation. In recent statements, Ban has also voiced his support for this call.

In Burroughs's view, the U.S. unilateral cuts are on an alternative path, and are encouraged by NPT obligations. But, he notes, "unfortunately, the Nuclear Posture Review report ties U.S. reductions to the need to avoid the large disparities in nuclear capabilities with Russia."

He thinks the U.S. could reduce its nuclear stockpiles to much lower levels "on its own" - in the tens of low hundreds of nuclear weapons - without putting in question the option of making a nuclear response to a nuclear attack.

In 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara proposed the U.S. arsenal be sized so as to achieve the "assured destruction" of the Soviet Union and argued that "the destruction of, say, 25 percent of its population (55 million people) and more than two-thirds of industrial capacity would mean the destruction of the Soviet Union as a national society."

McNamara estimated that it would require about 400 nuclear weapons of the kind the U.S. then had in its arsenal to wreak this level of devastation. He calculated that "the proportion of the total population destroyed would be increased by only about 100 percentage points" if the U.S. were to use 800 nuclear weapons. "The McNamara criterion (the death of 25 percent of the population) could be met on July 23 for Russia with only 51 modern U.S. nuclear weapons," Zia Mian of the Programme on Science and Global Security at Princeton University told IPS, citing a 2001 study by the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"It would take less than 400 weapons to meet that goal for China," he said. For his part, Krieger holds that a "commitment to zero nuclear weapons within a reasonable timeframe" is a must by opening negotiations for a new treaty, a Nuclear Weapons Convention, "for the phased, verifiable, irreversible and transparent elimination of all nuclear weapons".

"Within this framework, weapons reductions could be measured against the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons from the arsenals of all states. In the meantime, large expenditures on maintaining and improving the nuclear arsenal would seem to point in the wrong direction and will likely lead other states to doubt U.S. sincerity in seeking a world without nuclear weapons," he said. [IPS | July 2010]

PREPARATIONS AFOOT TO COMMEMORATE HIROSHIMA ATOM BOMBING

By Taro Ichikawa

TOKYO - Nuclear abolition is not yet around the corner. But the United States, Britain and France have apparently come round to the view that the 65th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is an appropriate opportunity to underline a paradigm shift under way.

Reliable reports say that senior officials of the three nuclear powers will for the first time attend the annual ceremony in Hiroshima on Aug. 6 to commemorate the atomic bombing of the city in 1945.

Also UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is scheduled to pay visits to memorials dedicated to Korean atomic bomb victims in two Japanese cities. He will visit the memorial for Korean atomic bomb victims in Nagasaki on August 5 and another memorial in Hiroshima the following day.

Ban is set to attend Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony and visit Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum on August 6. He will be the first UN chief to do so.

"These moves are encouraging and we welcome the representatives' decisions," writes the Mainichi Daily News in its online edition on July 30, reflecting the widespread feeling in Japan.

In the past the United States, Britain and France, which despite being on good terms with Japan, refrained from participating in ceremonies to commemorate the atomic bombings on account of their position as Allies during World War II.

Attitudes including the stance that dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the war forced Japan to surrender and "saved 1 million lives" remain deeply rooted within the U.S. government.

There is also anger in U.S. society over the attack on Pearl Harbour, which is described as "dirty". Furthermore, as nuclear powers, the three countries differ from Japan in their stance on nuclear weapons, states the Mainichi Daily News.

However, the speech in April 2009 in Prague in which President Barack Obama referred to a world without nuclear weapons turned the tide. Obama stated that the U.S., as the only nuclear power to have used an atomic weapon, had a "moral responsibility" to act.

His speech turned people's eyes toward an ultimate goal for the future, and, in particular, eased emotional discord between Japan and the United States. This probably paved the way for the U.S., Britain and France to participate in the ceremony, the newspaper states.

An early step was seen from John Roos, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, in October 2009, when he placed flowers at a memorial to commemorate the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, writes the Mainichi Daily News. ➡

This year's landmark August 6 ceremony has been preceded by the 'Hiroshima Conference for the Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons by 2020', held in Hiroshima from July 27 to 29.

The three-day conference was organized by 'Mayors for Peace' -- which unites more than 4,000 mayors and other city officials with the common goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world -- and includes representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), cities and national governments, as well as concerned citizens.

In a message to the participants, Ban Ki-moon called for further progress on the global disarmament agenda, stressing that getting rid of nuclear weapons is the best way to ensure security for all. "Let us be clear: the only guarantee of safety, and the only sure protection against the use of such weapons, is their elimination," he said.

"Nuclear disarmament is often dismissed as a dream, when the real fantasies are the claims that nuclear weapons guarantee security or increase a country's status and prestige," he noted.

"The more often countries make such claims, the more likely it will be that others will adopt the same approach. The result will be insecurity for all."

Ban noted that the timeline in the 2020 Vision Campaign initiated by the Mayors for Peace to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons is particularly important.

He also voiced deep admiration for the survivors of the atomic bomb attacks on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who are known as hibakusha, and their determination to tell the world about their experience of the horrors of nuclear weapons.

The Secretary-General urged all leaders, especially those of nuclear-weapon States, to visit both cities -- which were reduced to rubble in the August 1945 attacks that also claimed hundreds of thousands of lives -- to see first-hand the impact of nuclear weapons.

FIVE-POINT PLAN

He recalled his own five-point plan, which was first put forward in October 2008 and offers a practical approach to eliminating nuclear weapons. It begins with a call for the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament, either through a new convention or through a series of mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a credible system of verification.

The plan also urges the Security Council to consider other ways to strengthen security in the disarmament process; measures to strengthen rule of law, accountability and transparency; and progress in eliminating other weapons of mass destruction and limiting missiles, space weapons and conventional arms -- all of which are needed for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The Hiroshima Conference organised by the Mayors for Peace supports the UN Secretary-General's five-point plan, and calls upon all governments to immediately start negotiations toward the conclusion of an international treaty banning nuclear weapons in time to eliminate those weapons by 2020. ➡

"To this end, governments that have expressed their desire for a comprehensive legal process, in partnership with like-minded NGOs, should convene a special disarmament conference in 2011 to facilitate the start of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention," the Conference appeals.

The Mayors demand that all countries promptly cease all activities related to the development, testing, production, modernization, deployment, and use of nuclear weapons and allied infrastructure. "In this regard, we demand that countries redouble their efforts to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear test Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force urgently and without conditions. Special responsibility lies with the nine remaining countries which must sign and ratify the Treaty for it to come into force."

Effort must also go toward bringing the Protocols to the Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zones treaties into force, responsibility for which lies with the nuclear-weapon states, the Mayors say. They call on governments to drastically reduce nuclear weapon and related military spending and to redirect those funds to meet human needs and restore the environment.

"We commend the U.S. Conference of Mayors for calling on the U.S. Congress to 'terminate funding for modernization of the nuclear weapons complex and nuclear weapon systems, to reduce spending on nuclear weapons programs well below Cold War levels, and to redirect funds to meet the urgent needs of cities'. To this end, local and national governments and private citizens could consider divesting funds from entities that support or benefit from nuclear weapons."

The Hiroshima conference demands that governments that are party to nuclear sharing agreements or that hide under nuclear umbrellas reject nuclear weapons as part of their military and security doctrines, concepts and policies.

The Mayors demand that governments uphold their non-proliferation commitments under the NPT by ensuring that their nuclear related exports do not directly or indirectly assist the development of nuclear weapons. They call on the Japanese government, which has declared that as the only A-bombed country, it will lead the way to a nuclear-weapon-free world, to take proactive measures to this end.

"For example, it could invite heads of state, especially of the nuclear-armed states, to a conference in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, where governments and NGOs will confront the future nuclear weapons hold in store for humankind, recognize the urgent need to eliminate these weapons, and work together toward a nuclear weapons convention."

The Conference also calls on national governments and the UN to implement broad programmes of nuclear disarmament education as stipulated in the NPT Review Conference final document.

"In doing so, we urge them to communicate fully the facts about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the message of the hibakusha, with the goal of promoting critical thinking, developing leadership and fostering in young people the determination to abolish nuclear weapons."

This education also needs to take place at the local level, in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities, says the conference. It also urges the need to "develop innovative methods of communicating information about nuclear weapons to new generations". [IDN-InDepthNews | July 2010]

WHITE HOUSE LOW-KEY ON CHINA-PAKISTAN NUKE DEAL

By Eli Clifton

WASHINGTON - The meeting of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) June 21-25 in New Zealand brought statements of concern over China's planned nuclear deal with Pakistan, but U.S. State Department officials avoided taking a strong position on the deal when pressed by reporters.

China's proposed sale of two nuclear reactors to Pakistan would, in theory, stand in violation of the Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT) - of which China is a signatory - but the Barack Obama administration's finalisation in March of an agreement to reprocess spent nuclear fuel from India could face similar criticism.

Critics charge that both the China-Pakistan and U.S.-India deals violate the NPT by facilitating nuclear programmes in states which are not parties to the NPT.

U.S. State Department officials avoided questions from reporters about the China-Pakistan deal during the NSG meeting. When questioned on June 28, State Department spokesperson PJ Crowley said that issues surrounding China's nuclear deal had been brought up at the NSG June 21-25 meeting but that the U.S. "[continues] to seek information from China regarding its future plans".

On June 28, Crowley told reporters, "We're looking for more information from China as to what it is potentially proposing. We have a view that this initiative, as it goes forward, would need the agreement of the Nuclear Suppliers Group."

Other members of the NSG were not as restrained in their response to the possible transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan.

The British government expressed the opinion that "the time is not yet right for a civil nuclear deal with Pakistan".

The Obama administration has numerous reasons to abstain from joining the condemnation of the Chinese plan to sell nuclear reactors to Pakistan.

The White House has worked hard in recent months to improve relations after a difficult winter in which pressures grew on the administration to declare China a currency manipulator and the announcement of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan provoked angry statements from Beijing. The ongoing war against the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan necessitates good U.S. relations with Pakistan in order to maintain supply routes into Afghanistan and assure cooperation in facilitating operations against Taliban havens in Pakistan.

Experts in Washington have concluded it to be unlikely that the White House will offer any public opposition to the China-Pakistan nuclear deal.

"The United States and other NSG states may object to the pending transaction but they cannot prevent China from exporting the reactors," Mark Hibbs, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment's Nuclear Policy Programme, wrote in April. ↻

"Senior officials in NSG states friendly to the United States said this month they expect that President Barack Obama will not openly criticise the Chinese export because Washington, in the context of a bilateral security dialogue with Islamabad, may be sensitive to Pakistan's desire for civilian nuclear cooperation in the wake of the sweeping U.S.-India nuclear deal which entered into force in 2008 after considerable arm-twisting of NSG states by the United States, France, and Russia," he wrote.

When the U.S. announced in 2008 its intention to push through an exemption in the NPT to permit the sale of civilian nuclear technology to India, arms control advocates widely condemned the agreement as weakening the NPT, while others charged that the NPT maintained a double-standard for close allies of the U.S.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has complained of the hypocrisy in the restrictions put on the export of civilian nuclear technology while the U.S. pushed for a loophole for India, a country which has not signed the NPT and has developed nuclear weapons.

The Obama administration has repeatedly made clear that the challenges surrounding nuclear non-proliferation and the reduction of nuclear weapons stockpiles are one of the top international initiatives that the White House is seeking to address.

Obama has spoken about his goal of a world "without nuclear weapons" and has emphasised the three pillars - disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear technology - which form the framework for a global reduction in the threat from nuclear weapons.

The NPT has been seen as the most effective avenue to channel U.S. efforts to reduce the risk of proliferation but some experts are concerned that the U.S. and China's attempts to sidestep the NPT and engage in nuclear deals with non-NPT signing countries will weaken the treaty.

While the Chinese attempts to seek an exemption for their nuclear deal with Pakistan may garner some criticism, it seems unlikely that the White House will risk a public spat with China over the proposed sale. Earlier this month, experts warned that the China-Pakistan nuclear deal could be a difficult issue at the NSG meeting but that a pre-2004 Sino-Pakistan nuclear cooperation agreement, signed before China joined the NSG, could be used by Beijing to allow the nuclear reactors sale to be "grandfathered" in.

"In the aftermath of the U.S.-India deal and the group's decision to accommodate it, the NSG will have to perform a delicate balancing act to find the least unsatisfactory solution to China's challenge," Hibbs said on June 17.

"In the view of some NSG states, an agreement permitting China to grandfather the exports under the 2004 nuclear cooperation agreement with Pakistan would be the least damaging outcome, but it may not be credible," he said. "If China seeks an exemption, NSG countries could urge Beijing to provide nuclear security and non-proliferation benefits in exchange for limited commerce with Pakistan." [IPS | June 2010]

BUDDHIST LEADER PUSHES FOR NUCLEAR ABOLITION TREATY

Interview of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda



An eminent Buddhist thinker, Daisaku Ikeda, has called for an early start of negotiations for a global treaty to abolish nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, to coincide -- ideally -- with the 70th anniversary of the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

An international treaty in the form of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) would prohibit the development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as provide for their elimination. It would be similar in form to existing conventions outlawing other categories of weapons, such as biological weapons, chemical weapons and anti-personnel mines.

Proposals for a Nuclear Weapons Convention are being discussed since 1996. For the first time now NWC has found a reference in the final document emerging from the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that convened from May 3 to 28 at the UN headquarters in New York.

"We need to build on this momentum," says Ikeda, president of the Buddhist association Soka Gakkai International (SGI), who has for years been campaigning for elimination of atomic arsenal. He formulated a five-point plan early September 2009 aimed at nuclear abolition.

Following is full text of an email interview of the SGI president by Ramesh Jaura for IDN-InDepthNews in partnership with Inter Press Service news agency.

Q: Dr Ikeda, what do you think of the outcome of the NPT Review Conference? Does it really pave the path for the world to move toward nuclear abolition? Or is it just plenty of promises and platitudes, as some observers maintain?

A: As you mention, people are now trying to assess the outcome of the Review Conference, and there are a wide range of views on this. It was regrettable, for example, that key differences between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states could not be overcome. As a result, the proposal in the draft report that would have required the start of negotiations on nuclear disarmament within a time-bound framework didn't find its way into the final document. Beyond this, many other issues were left unresolved.

Still, however, the kinds of divisions that paralyzed the 2005 NPT Review Conference were avoided, and the final document includes specific action plans. To me this is clear evidence of the growing awareness among governments that we cannot waste the opportunity to renew progress toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

I am very fond of the words of the Chinese literary giant Lu Xun (1881-1936), who said that hope is like a path in the countryside: originally there was no path – yet, as people continue walking over the same spot, a way appears. I think this very much applies to the process going forward. The key will be for all governments to come together, making the final document the basis for their endeavours, forging ahead, one step at a time, on this untrodden path. ☞

At the same time, it is crucial to build international opinion calling for the prompt implementation of all agreements. One key here will be to secure on-going venues for dialogue between civil society and policymakers.

Q: What would you describe as significant achievements?

A: I think the conference had three particularly noteworthy achievements. First, after affirming that all states need to make special efforts to establish the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, the final document refers, for the first time ever, to proposals for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC).

Second, the conference acknowledged that the only real assurance against the threat posed by nuclear weapons is their abolition. And third, the conference called for countries to observe International Humanitarian Law in light of the catastrophic effects of any use of nuclear weapons.

Calls from non-nuclear-weapon states and NGOs for a Nuclear Weapons Convention that would comprehensively ban these weapons of mass destruction have until now been rejected on grounds that this was premature, or that an NWC was ill-matched to the realities of international relations.

As a result, it was never directly taken up in international negotiations, and this makes the reference to an NWC in the final document of the NPT Review Conference all the more significant.

I believe this was realized by the coming together of a range of actors, starting with the President of the Review Conference, relevant UN agencies such as the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and governments committed to nuclear abolition, and also the passionate, determined efforts of many civil society organizations. The youth members of the Soka Gakkai in Japan, for example, collected more than 2.2 million signatures in support of an NWC, presenting these to the President of the Conference and the UN Secretary-General.

Q: Where do we go from here?

A: We need to build on this momentum. I urge the early start of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention, with an eye on the next Review Conference in 2015, which will mark the 70th anniversary of the use of atomic weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There are many obstacles to be overcome, but I am convinced that the time is ripe for the comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Two principles given voice by statements in the final document make this perfectly clear. The first is: "The Conference reaffirms and recognizes that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons...."

The second is: "The Conference expresses its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and reaffirms the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law." ↻

Whereas intergovernmental debate on the nuclear issue has often been framed in terms of political or military logic, this gives clear priority to humanitarian values and the imperative to respect the inherent dignity of life.

Q: In what particular ways are nuclear weapons a humanitarian issue?

A: Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki shared their experiences at the Review Conference, urging nuclear abolition. The suffering wrought by the use of nuclear weapons is not limited to the immediate aftermath. Nuclear weapons are the ultimate inhumane weapon, whose impacts continue to cause pain and undermine the foundations of human dignity for generations.

It was for this reason that my mentor Josei Toda (1900-58), the second president of the Soka Gakkai, denounced them as an absolute evil. He was convinced that we could not leave any room for considering them in the same context as conventional weapons, as a necessary evil to be used if conditions require.

Nuclear weapons are entirely impermissible -- both in terms of the grave threat they pose to peace and for their profoundly inhumane nature as an assault on human dignity. This understanding should undergird efforts to establish a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The work of applying the spirit and principles of International Humanitarian Law to nuclear weapons is crucial in bringing down the curtain on the nuclear age.

Q: Dr Jayantha Dhanapala, president of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, has described the conference agreement on implementing the 1995 resolution on the Middle East as "the most significant achievement" of the conference. But whether this agreement will lead to a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East zone is doubted by experts. Isn't this scepticism justified in view of the U.S. and Israeli reservations on some crucial points?

A: The treaties establishing Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZ) in Central Asia and Africa that entered into force last year are an important source of hope. These regions join Latin America, the South Pacific and Southeast Asia in establishing NWFZs. This is especially significant because the two new NWFZs include countries that either developed or possessed nuclear weapons in the past.

The next challenge is to promote denuclearization in other regions of the globe. As is the case in Northeast Asia and South Asia, the path toward this goal in the Middle East is strewn with difficult challenges.

This was the background against which the NPT Review Conference called for a conference in 2012 to establish a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Needless to say, the issues in the Middle East are complex and not likely to be resolved through the convening of a single conference. In fact, given the history of conflict and violence and the deep-seated animosities in the region, it will be anything but easy even to bring the conference together.

But the current situation is clearly intolerable and could dramatically worsen at any moment. For these reasons, there is a need to develop avenues of dialogue and to find ways to start defusing tensions. ➡

Regarding the perils of the nuclear age, the British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) called this a "Gordian knot that has to be untied by patient fingers instead of being cut by the sword." Resolving the long-standing stalemate in the Middle East and dismantling the structures of confrontation will require a persistent effort at dialogue, undoing the tangled threads of fear, suspicion and mistrust. The most basic point to keep in mind, however, is that conflict does not make dialogue impossible, it makes it necessary.

Q: What does that concretely involve?

A: In the search for a world free from nuclear weapons, we need to move away from stances of mutual threat, toward shared efforts to reduce threat and threat perception. Trust needs to be restored and confidence fostered. All actors need to work to create expanding circles of physical and psychological security. I believe this formula applies equally to Northeast and South Asia as to the Middle East. By engaging in future-oriented dialogue, we can bring into view the next step toward peaceful coexistence.

The difficulties facing a Middle East conference underline the need for international society as a whole, including global civil society, to offer its support. The Review Conference final document calls for the conference to be convened "with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon States." In addition to the support of the nuclear-weapon states, I hope that Japan, as a country with direct experience of nuclear war, will work with other non-nuclear-weapon states to create the conditions for sustained and fruitful dialogue in the Middle East.

Q: What would you advise civil society to do so that promises become a reality and platitudes, binding commitments -- particularly as far as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and a Nuclear Weapons Convention are concerned?

A: Despite repeated calls, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), adopted in 1996, has yet to enter into force. In the case of the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT), negotiations have not yet even begun. I don't, however, consider the situation devoid of hope.

Even given the non-binding status of the CTBT, since it was signed the five recognized nuclear-weapon states have observed a moratorium on further nuclear weapons tests, as have India and Pakistan since 1998. Further, the CTBTO Preparatory Commission has continued to develop the verification regime needed to ensure no country conducts tests.

At the NPT Review Conference, Indonesia expressed its intention to ratify the CTBT. If the United States also ratifies, this will leave only seven states that are required to ratify for the treaty to enter into force. With regard to the FMCT, the five nuclear-weapon states have agreed to suspend the production of fissile materials pending the start of negotiations.

Q: What is required to move these important treaties toward implementation?

A: More than anything, we need to bring together the force of popular will and international public opinion. These alone can create the conditions in which government leaders feel genuinely compelled to make progress. ➡

At this point, however, real passion and interest in civil society is confined mostly to people involved with NGOs directly engaged with the issue. But this is a matter of far too much importance – the fate of humankind literally hangs in the balance – to be left up to a handful of government policymakers.

The movements for treaties banning landmines and cluster munitions were driven by ordinary people, people whose sense of humanity was outraged by the horrific nature of these weapons, whose sense of urgency was propelled by the need to prevent further suffering. In the same way, when people understand how important the CTBT and FMCT are for reducing the threat of nuclear weapons, we will see a powerful groundswell in international public opinion.

From January to March of this year, youth and student members of the SGI in eight countries surveyed their peers regarding attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Many interviewees at first wondered about the reason for this activity, suggesting the degree to which people feel that nuclear weapons are essentially unrelated to their lives.

Still, nearly 70 percent of respondents said that the use of nuclear weapons was unacceptable under any circumstance. More than half expressed the view that renewed debate on the nuclear issue could spur progress toward nuclear abolition.

The key, therefore, is persistent efforts within civil society to raise awareness and interest in nuclear issues, including stressing the importance of these treaties. Such efforts can break down the obstacles to progress and transform the most stubborn realities. This is what the SGI has been aiming to do through our People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition, launched in 2007.

Q: What role would you assign to education?

A: At the NPT Review Conference, 42 countries, including Japan, issued a joint statement on the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education. It is our intention to continue to collaborate with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, treaty organizations such as the CTBTO Preparatory Commission as well as NGOs such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

Together, we can lay the foundations within international society for a world without nuclear weapons. Young people are already taking the lead. When ordinary people join together in solidarity, they have the power to close the gap between reality and ideals. This is our determination as we work for the realization of these treaties and, even more, for a Nuclear Weapons Convention that will comprehensively and effectively ban all nuclear weapons. [IDN-InDepthNews | June 2010]

"The difficulties facing a Middle East conference underline the need for international society as a whole, including global civil society, to offer its support. The Review Conference final document calls for the conference to be convened "with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon States." In addition to the support of the nuclear-weapon states, I hope that Japan, as a country with direct experience of nuclear war, will work with other non-nuclear-weapon states to create the conditions for sustained and fruitful dialogue in the Middle East."

UN NUKE MEET ENDS WITH GOOD INTENTIONS AND EMPTY PROMISES

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The road to a nuclear weapons-free world is apparently paved with good intentions - but littered with plenty of platitudes and empty promises.

A month-long nuclear non-proliferation review conference concluded late May 28 "with more of a whimper than a bang", said John Burroughs, executive director of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy. "The result was disappointing without being surprising," he said. However, said Burroughs, one concrete achievement was on a make-or-break issue: a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East.

The final document, he pointed out, calls for a conference on this controversial subject in 2012, and the appointment of a facilitator to make it happen. The next nuclear review conference is due three years later, in 2015. "The road ahead is not easy," said Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz of Egypt, speaking on behalf of the 118-nation Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), "but it's the only way forward."

He singled out the reaffirmation by the conference of the importance of Israel's accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. But whether Israel - a country pursuing a "don't ask, don't tell" policy on its nuclear weapons - will accede to these requests remains to be seen.

Ambassador Abdelaziz said that NAM, the largest single political coalition at the United Nations, is aiming at the total elimination of nuclear weapons by 2025.

After four weeks of intense debate, the review conference adopted a 28-page document spelling out three "forward-looking action plans" on the most politically divisive issues: nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the right to nuclear energy. But the conference's best efforts were still not good enough - judging by the mixed and negative reactions to the outcome.

"This is an action plan for treading water," said Jackie Cabasso, executive director of the Western States Legal Foundation, which monitors U.S. nuclear weapons programmes and policies. Rather than being held to time-bound or otherwise measurable commitments, the nuclear-armed states are encouraged or called upon to take action on items such as security assurances and nuclear weapon-free zones, she said.

The final document that was adopted on May 28 was progressively watered down in order to achieve consensus, according to several NGOs.

The United States, Russia, Britain and France, four of the five declared nuclear weapons states, were largely successful in removing from the document anything requiring them to take meaningful short-term steps to advance disarmament.

Many of the disarmament actions were eventually phrased as vague aspirations.

On nuclear testing, a reference to closing the test sites was removed from an earlier version of the document, Cabasso told IPS. Similarly, a call for cessation of development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons was removed. Curiously, said Cabasso, new language was added to include the use of new nuclear weapons technologies in the action item calling on all states to refrain from nuclear weapon test explosions pending entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). ➔

This would appear to refer to the laboratory-based testing programmes underway in the U.S. and other nuclear-armed states, she added.

Jonathan Granoff, president of the Global Security Institute, told IPS the nuclear weapon states failed to make tangible and specific commitments in the final document. However, he noted, they clearly legitimised the principle that the world will be more secure and better off with the abolition of nuclear weapons. Moreover, they set forth principles and policies to which they have unanimously committed themselves that will help us get to a nuclear weapons-free world, he said.

"The significance of this achievement must not be underestimated," said Granoff, pointing out that naysayers will try to undermine this achievement, claiming the final document "is just words". This would be akin to claiming that a blueprint for a building is "just lines" on a page, he said.

First, the image and goal must be stated. Second, the principle for policies must be articulated, and third, the political forces mobilised to achieve them. "It is the responsibility of all of us to mobilise those political forces," he added.

Dr Rebecca Johnson, vice-chair of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), told IPS the process and outcome of the NPT Review Conference have made two things very clear: reaffirmations of commitments made 10 or 15 years ago are not enough, especially as these undertakings were not honoured and implemented.

And as the final document underlines, getting rid of nuclear threats requires not only concrete disarmament steps but the establishment of the necessary framework to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons.

"The action plan on nuclear disarmament as well as the inability of the NPT machinery to deal with non-compliance and to strengthen its own safeguards agreements, as illustrated in what was left out of the final document, make it now clear to everyone the need to initiate a process leading to negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention," she said.

Such a convention will also do away with the NPT distinction between nuclear haves and have-nots and comprehensively ban nuclear weapons for all, she added.

Cabasso said the review exercise revealed the huge gulf between the determination of the vast majority of non-nuclear weapon states to accomplish the disarmament objectives of the treaty and the intransigence of the nuclear weapon states.

The disarmament action plan clarified the differences among states parties once again and reaffirmed past though still unfulfilled commitments to the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency.

"There is nothing really significant or new here, but the process also clarified the need for new approaches to nuclear disarmament, such as a Nuclear Weapons Convention," she noted.

Granoff said Academy Awards are given for excellence in acting. The world recognises athletic talent at the Olympics. Too little credit, however, is given to diplomats who were able to forge common ground for a passage to a safer, more secure future where countries with divergent interests and attitudes, such as the U.S. and Iran, could find common ground and commit themselves.

In no small measure, success was achieved at the NPT review conference because of the uplifting inspiration provided by Russia and the United States in their collective efforts to advance disarmament, he declared. [IPS | May 2010]

NUKES-FREE FUTURE MAY DEPEND ON CITIZEN CAMPAIGNS

By Thalif Deen

SGI representatives submit anti-nukes signatures at the United Nations. Credit: Courtesy of SGI >

UNITED NATIONS - Ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, a former UN under-secretary-general, offered a piece of advice to anti-nuclear activists campaigning for the abolition of nuclear weapons: "Don't depend on governments - and don't depend on the United Nations."

Chowdhury's scepticism of the world body was implicitly aimed at the five veto-wielding big powers in the Security Council - the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia - who are also the world's five declared nuclear powers.



Speaking at a seminar on the side-lines of the month-long Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) talks here, the former Bangladeshi envoy urged non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to emulate the monumental success of the global campaign to ban anti-personnel landmines.

"I am confident civil society can bring a sea change in the minds of people (as it did in the campaign to ban landmines) in its current efforts to abolish nuclear weapons," he told a gathering of NGOs, including youth members of the Japan-based Soka Gakkai International (SGI), last week.

Kenji Shiratsuchi, chair of the Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference who is leading a youth movement actively involved in a global campaign to ban nuclear weapons by 2020, told IPS that a six-nation survey conducted by his organisation concluded most people believe the world would be safer without the destructive weapons.

The survey involved interviews with 4,362 people, ranging from teens to those in their thirties, in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, New Zealand, the United States and Britain,

According to the findings, over 67 percent said the use of nuclear weapons was not acceptable under any circumstances, with only 17.5 percent seeing it as acceptable as a last resort if a country's survival was threatened, and 6.1 percent saying they could be used to prevent international terrorism or genocide.

Between January and March 2010, Soka Gakkai youth members collected over 2.3 million signatures in Japan alone for a petition calling for the adoption of an international convention banning the development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of nuclear weapons.

Asked what role the Japanese government is playing at the current NPT talks, Shiratsuchi told IPS: "As a nation, Japan has a special responsibility to universalise the experience of nuclear devastation, elevating it into the shared commitment of all humankind to assure that this tragedy is never repeated." The Japanese government, he said, should be keenly aware of this responsibility and should be guided by it in its actions. "It is clear that Japan can play an important and proactive role in the debate at the NPT Review Conference in order to open the way to nuclear abolition," Shiratsuchi said. ☺

One important way it can do this is by clearly expressing support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), as endorsed in 2008 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his five-point plan for nuclear disarmament.

The NPT Review Conference, which is expected to conclude May 28, is being attended by more than 1,500 representatives from 121 NGOs, besides government delegates. When the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was formally launched in October 1992, it was dismissed as "utopian" by most of the world's governments and militaries. But there was such an overwhelming groundswell of support for the campaign that within five years, the international community began negotiating a treaty banning antipersonnel landmines.

"The process that brought about the Mine Ban Treaty has added a new dimension to diplomacy and hope for its wider applicability," says Jody Williams, one of the leaders of that highly successful campaign. When ICBL was awarded the 1997 Nobel Prize for Peace, the Nobel Committee recognised not only the achievement of the ban, but also the promise of the model created with the ban movement, she said.

Chowdhury told IPS: "I continue to strongly believe that nuclear weapons can be totally abolished only through a global movement of NGOs and civil society." He said people of the world, by raising their voices and by pressuring their governments to support the abolition, can achieve the results that are otherwise not possible in an intergovernmental forum.

There is a need, he pointed out, to create a sustainable foundation for a peaceful and secure world by building a "culture of peace", as called for by the United Nations.

Japan, as the only country which experienced a nuclear holocaust, has the real moral authority to lead the campaign.

"I am encouraged by the fervent calls for nuclear abolition made by the Hibakusha (surviving victims of nuclear bombings in Japan) at the UN's current NPT review conference, as well as by many Japanese civil society and spiritual leaders, like President Daisaku Ikeda (of SGI), who have energised millions around the world," Chowdhury said.

Of course, the Japanese government needs to come out more categorically in support of the abolition to establish its leadership of the global movement, as the Canadian government did in support of banning landmines, along with civil society, Chowdhury added.

SGI, which has been leading a major anti-nuclear campaign in Japan, initiating the 2007 launch of the People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition, is a Buddhist association with over 12 million members in 192 countries.

Asked about the influence of the youth movement, Shiratsuchi said that young people have a special responsibility in this regard, "if for no other reason than that we will have to live with the consequences of any further failure or delay in abolishing nuclear weapons".

"It has always been young people who have driven efforts for change. We want to awaken our friends and peers not only to their responsibility in this regard, but also to the positive potential they possess to transform the world," he declared. [IPS | May 2010]

TREATY AIMED AT BANNING NUKES REMAINS GROUNDED

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - The world's anti-war activists, including parliamentarians, civil society groups and diplomats, have succeeded in creating international treaties to ban a wide array of deadly weapons: anti-personnel landmines, blinding laser weapons, cluster munitions, dum-dum bullets and chemical and biological weapons.

But "the most iniquitous weapon of all" - the nuclear weapon - has continued to escape a treaty aimed at eliminating its use, spread and production.

Asked why a proposed nuclear weapons convention (NWC) has failed to get off the ground, Alyn Ware, global coordinator for Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND), told IPS: "The nuclear weapon is both a military and a political weapon."

"It projects power," he said, singling out the world's five most powerful, and by definition, permanent members of the Security Council - the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China - who are also the five declared nuclear powers.

Ware says it is also one of the primary reasons why the four undeclared nuclear powers - India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea - are holding onto their weapons of mass destruction.

Still, the longstanding proposal for a convention to ban nuclear weapons has gathered increased momentum at the current month-long Review Conference on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which concludes May 28.

Jayantha Dhanapala, a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, told delegates last week: "We do need a radical change."

"In the same manner as we have outlawed biological and chemical weapons among weapons of mass destruction, and anti-personnel landmines and cluster weapons as inhumane conventional weapons, we need to begin the process of outlawing nuclear weapons," said Dhanapala, president of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

The negotiations for a nuclear weapons convention, he said, "must begin immediately".

The abolitionists, led largely by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), also include scores of anti-war and anti-nuclear activists worldwide: the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, Nobel Women's Initiative, Federation of American Scientists, Mayors for Peace and Soka Gakkai International of Japan.

A Model NWC, drafted by an international consortium of lawyers, scientists and disarmament experts, has been in circulation since 1997 as a United Nations document, and subsequently revised in 2007. ↻

The proposed Convention calls for "the adoption of legally binding, verifiable and enforceable instruments, culminating in a comprehensive prohibition and destruction of all nuclear weapons under effective controls."



Dr Rebecca Johnson (see picture), vice chair of ICAN, told IPS the model NWC is valid as a resource, with many useful ideas for how the technical and legal challenges might be addressed in a nuclear abolition treaty.

She said it was offered as a collection of ideas to demonstrate that a comprehensive treaty is feasible, not a "take-it-or-leave-it" draft for immediate adoption.

"When negotiations begin, they will start on their own terms, but we are confident the diplomats will find our discussions, and even some of our draft text, useful as they seek their own negotiated solutions," Johnson added.

Asked if the proposal will come up before the current session of the NPT, she said the 118-member group of Non-Aligned States, who are parties to the NPT, and several individual European countries, as well as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, have openly called for some kind of comprehensive treaty.

The call is for a treaty or framework for the total prohibition of the use and deployment of nuclear weapons and to provide for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons - in other words, a Nuclear Weapons Convention, she added. "This is most heavily supported by a new call from the non-nuclear countries at this 2010 NPT Conference," she said.

Because of opposition from some, if not all the nuclear-weapon states, it will be a tough challenge to get this support for negotiating a nuclear weapons convention into the final document, Johnson declared.

Still, she noted, there will be some commitment to pursue a comprehensive, treaty-based approach, which is feasible and clearly complements calls for reaffirming the 13 practical disarmament steps adopted by the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Ware said a majority of governments have supported UN resolutions calling for the immediate commencement of NWC negotiations. These include some of the countries that possess nuclear weapons - China, India, Pakistan and North Korea.

On the other hand, he pointed out, there are key countries - most notably the other nuclear weapons states and many of the countries in extended nuclear deterrence relationships with the United States - that express opposition to such negotiations.

They claim there are initial steps and fundamental security issues that must be addressed before such negotiations could start, Ware said.

Still, many analysts argue that these initial steps and security issues would be best dealt with in the context of comprehensive negotiations. ➡



A more feasible aim for the NPT Review Conference is to persuade states parties to agree to a preparatory process of a NWC, Ware added.

A working paper submitted to the 2005 NPT Review Conference by Costa Rica and Malaysia calls for the exploration of legal, technical, institutional and political elements required to achieve and maintain a nuclear weapons-free world.

Dr Natalie J. Goldring, senior fellow at the Centre for Peace and Security Studies at Georgetown University, told IPS: "A nuclear weapons convention is an ambitious goal." But with U.S. President Barack Obama's leadership, it could become a reality, she added.

Goldring pointed out that a nuclear weapons convention is a logical means of implementing President Obama's commitment to nuclear disarmament. "The Obama administration is moving in the right direction, but needs a greater sense of urgency on these issues," she said.

She said the NPT Review Conference, currently underway, is a chance to reinforce the interlocking commitments of disarmament and non-proliferation. A Nuclear Weapons Convention would help establish the path toward nuclear disarmament.

"It would break the cycle of governments making rhetorical commitments to nuclear disarmament while continuing to develop new nuclear weapons," she said, noting that said even committing to negotiation of a convention would be a significant step forward.

Goldring said that important components of a nuclear weapons convention would include bans on the development, testing, production, stockpiling, transfer, and use of nuclear weapons.

The staged approach included in model nuclear weapons conventions makes sense, as does the focus on U.S. and Russian arsenals in the early stages, Goldring said. U.S. and Russian arsenals are by far the largest. Until the U.S. and Russia make significant cuts in their nuclear weapons, there is little incentive for other countries to follow suit, she added. [IPS | May 2010]

"I FEEL DUTY-BOUND TO PUSH FOR A NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD"

Anna Shen interviews Tadatoshi Akiba, Mayor of Hiroshima



◀ Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba | Credit: Courtesy of Mayor's Office

UNITED NATIONS - Emerging from a UN conference addressing the role that the world's mayors can play on nuclear issues, Hiroshima's Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba continues to call for a rapid end to nuclear weapons.

He juggles his roles running a city 65 years after nuclear holocaust, and another as president of Mayors for Peace, which counts almost 4,000 cities around the world.

Akiba spoke to IPS correspondent Anna Shen about Hiroshima's development, his personal duty on the nuclear issue, and the on-going Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review taking place this month at the UN

Q: Hiroshima is completely modern and rebuilt. Can you tell me how the city was formed after the bombing?

A: Those who came as part of the occupation army were really good city planners. And the city plan reflects the frontier at the time of urban planning, and for instance they brought Kenzo Tange to create the Peace Park.

But there were historical factors, because the destruction was so complete and many citizens had to continue living, and burial rituals were not followed. So all over the city there were people in a sense walking over corpses and that kind of consideration made city planning more delicate.

For example, there was a flower shop and many people died near there. So there is a memorial there. There are thousands of memorials all over the city. For people to build a beautiful city is to create sacredness.

Q: Can you tell us about the Hibakusha, the surviving victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

A: The Hibakusha have to live their pain and suffering when they tell their stories to the outside world. And there are many who cannot tell their stories, as so many who are victims of war and tragedies cannot, and many are lucky enough to have told their stories.

There was one man, Mar. Tanabe, who never told his stories until he became 60 years old, which is the time of renewal of a cycle in Japan. His parents died and his aunt and uncle brought him up. He did not want to cause any emotional trouble to them. How could he bear to go through all those years and have no feelings of retaliation or remorse? ➡

All he wanted to do was create a film of the stories of those who used to live in that area and show them what the atom bomb destroyed and how precious those lives were and that it should never happen again.

Q: How do you see your role as a mayor?

A: As mayors we have to be the (people's) voices wherever we can and talk to the government so that they will listen to the voices and when we come to the UN to talk so others can understand the experiences.

One thing that proved the point was that two weeks ago, we had the 28th plenary meeting of the InterAction Council, which consists of former heads of states and government. Members came to Hiroshima, including Malcolm Fraser, former prime minister of Australia.

After seeing the museum and talking to survivors, they really understood what it means to suffer from nuclear weapons and there was a sense of urgency gained there that compelled them to recommend that all heads of states should come to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They were so moved by their visits. These are not ordinary people, these are those who are sympathetic and humanitarian statesmen, and coming to Hiroshima gave them this great impact.

I really invite all the heads of nuclear weapons states to come to Hiroshima this year on the 65th anniversary of the bombing.

The role of the mayor is to represent the Hibakusha and to have a nuclear-free world and they would like to see it with their own eyes, so that they can tell the deceased when they get there that, "Your death was not in vain. There is a nuclear-free world." I feel duty-bound to make their wish come true.

Q: What do you want to see come out of this Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review?

A: This is a great opportunity to mobilise world public opinion and to use it for humanity. Several of the opening statements reflected much of what Mayors for Peace has been trying to accomplish. [IPS | May 2010]

WILL MIDEAST TUG-OF-WAR WRECK ANTI-NUKE MEET?

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - When the last review conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) ended inconclusively - after four long weeks of protracted negotiations - the meeting was described as having accomplished "very little" with no substantive agreement.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last week described the beleaguered 2005 Review Conference as "an acknowledged failure". But will the 2010 Review Conference, which opened on May 3 and runs through May 28, follow the same beaten track? Perhaps one of the most controversial issues jeopardising the conference is a longstanding proposal for the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the militarily-volatile Middle East.

Asked whether this is a possibility, Joseph Gerson, disarmament director at the American Friends Service Committee, told IPS: "The struggle for a NWFZ in the Middle East could derail the NPT Review Conference."

In an article published last week in the International Herald Tribune, Ban reiterated the call for a NWFZ, Gerson noted. "Egypt will be making it a major issue, as will Iran," he added. "But in crisis, there is always opportunity, so let's see what we can do in this regard," said Gerson, author of the 'Empire and the Bomb: How the U.S. Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World'.

Anne Penketh, programme director of the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) in Washington DC, told IPS: "There are some fears this issue could wreck the conference, but I think that Egypt is more flexible than might be apparent, and that serious negotiations are now under way between the United States and Egypt." A good faith attempt to agree on practical steps could produce a breakthrough, but at this point it's too early to say which way things will go, she added.

The United States, which has been supportive of Israel, the only Middle Eastern country with nuclear weapons, has continued to link the creation of a NWFZ with progress on Middle East talks.

But as Penketh points out in a paper titled 'Peeling the Onion: Towards a Middle East NWFZ', "If this Catch-22 situation is allowed to continue at the Review Conference, it would be tantamount to handing Israel, a non-NPT member, a veto over the future of the entire NPT treaty." She said the main obstacle to negotiations stems from the lack of political will.

But there is concern over the officially unacknowledged Israeli nuclear weapons and the deep sense of injustice among Arab states, which accuse the nuclear weapons states of "double standards", she noted. "They are accused of shielding Israel while sanctioning states like Iran, which continues to insist on its treaty right to pursue civilian nuclear energy," Penketh added.

Asked about double standards, Gerson told IPS that "in terms of Iran, double standards have always applied in what is termed 'realpolitik'.

Ever since the first world war - a war fought for control of the dying Ottoman Empire and what Churchill understood to be "the prize" of Middle East oil - the great powers of the West have done what they have thought necessary to control what Eqbal Ahmad (author and anti-war activist) once termed the "geopolitical centre of the struggle for world power", he pointed out. ➡

Gerson said Iran is seen as a threat to U.S. domination of the oil-rich Middle East, and thus when it seems to be challenging the order, efforts are made to keep it in its place. "To be clear, I believe that no nation should have nuclear weapons or even nuclear power plants," he stressed.

"The use of nuclear weapons is genocidal or omnicidal, and nuclear power plants are inherently dangerous, not only because of the possibility of meltdowns, but because humans have yet to learn how to safely dispose of their radioactive waste, which poisons the earth and threatens life for tens of thousands of years," he declared.

Regarding the double standard versus India, Pakistan and Israel, Gerson pointed out the U.S. is in a tacit alliance with India as it attempts to encircle China, and Pakistan is a key ally for the U.S. in its Central Asian war. "So, they won't be challenged, as we saw" in President Barack Obama's nuclear security summit last month.

Regarding Israel, it was long seen as the hammer for the U.S. in the Middle East, helping to reinforce U.S. hegemony, and there is the political power of the Zionist lobby in Washington, he said. "This might get a little more interesting in the coming days, given current U.S.-Israeli tensions and the fact that Egypt plans to make Israel's nuclear weapons a major issue in the NPT Review."

Gerson also said that little noticed was the recent denial of visas to enter the U.S. to several Israeli nuclear scientists and engineers, who wanted to come to the U.S. for further studies.

Addressing the Review Conference on May 3, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton showed some flexibility when she said: "We support efforts to realise the goal of a weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the Middle East, in accordance with the 1995 Middle East resolution." She said the Middle East may present the greatest threat of nuclear proliferation in the world today.

"But in spite of these difficulties, we want to reaffirm our commitment to the objective of a Middle East free of these weapons of mass destruction, and we are prepared to support practical measures that will move us toward achieving that objective."

Currently, there are several treaties establishing NWFZs in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Mongolia.

These include the Treaty of Tlatelolco for Latin America and the Caribbean; the Treaty of Rarotonga for the South Pacific; the Treaty of Bangkok for South East Asia; the Treaty of Pelindaba for Africa; the Treaty of Semipalatinsk for Central Asia; and the Antarctic treaty which covers the uninhabited area of Antarctica.

But two of the regions not covered so far include the Middle East (Israel being the nuclear power) and South Asia (India and Pakistan being nuclear powers).

Clinton also announced that the Obama administration will submit protocols to the U.S. Senate to ratify participation in the nuclear-weapon-free zones that have been established in Africa and the South Pacific.

Upon ratification, parties to those agreements will have a legally binding assurance that the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against them, and will fully respect the nuclear-weapons-free status of the zones, she declared.

"And we are prepared to consult with the parties to the nuclear-weapons-free zones in Central and Southeast Asia, in an effort to reach agreement that would allow us to sign those protocols as well," Clinton said. [IPS | May 2010]

ISRAEL, IRAN TARGETED AT NUKE NON-PROLIFERATION MEET

By Thalif Deen



◀ Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad addresses the 2010 NPT Review Conference.
Credit: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

UNITED NATIONS - A month-long Review Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) began May 3 with a predictable target: Israel.

As the only Middle Eastern country armed with nuclear weapons, Israel has been treated as a political sacred cow, one whose weapons programmes have not been publicly challenged either by the United States or Western powers.

But on the opening day an overwhelming majority of UN member states - 118 out of 192 - wanted the defiant Jewish state to come clean with its nuclear weapons programme and sign the NPT, which is aimed at halting the spread of these devastating armaments.

Speaking on behalf of the 118-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said the fact that Israel has refused to sign and ratify the NPT has resulted in the continued exposure of non-nuclear weapon states of the region to nuclear threats by the only country possessing these weapons of mass destruction.

Israel, he warned, has also unleashed risks associated with the operation of "unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and activities of unknown safety standards".

Worse still, Israel has also implicitly triggered the threat of a nuclear arms race of "a catastrophic regional and international potential" thereby jeopardising the NPT regime in its entirety, said Natalegawa, echoing the views of the largest single political coalition at the United Nations.

"This situation is unsustainable," as it also jeopardises the implementation of the 1995 resolution calling for the creation of a nuclear-weapons-free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East, Natalegawa warned.

The month-long conference, which runs through May 28, will take stock of the successes and failures of an international treaty aimed at halting the spread of nuclear weapons - and perhaps ultimately eliminating all nuclear weapons from the world's military arsenals.

The treaty, which was opened for signature back in July 1968, has come under review every five years.

Today, 189 countries have acceded to the treaty, including the five declared nuclear powers, which are also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council: the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia.

The three undeclared nuclear powers are India, Pakistan and Israel, which are not parties to the NPT. North Korea acceded to the treaty, violated it, and later withdrew. The 2000 NPT Review Conference reaffirmed the necessity of Israel's accession to the NPT, and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive safeguards by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). ➡

But so far, Israel has refused to accede to that request.

Speaking at the opening session, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who declared that disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are among his "top priorities", singled out only two countries by name: Iran and North Korea.

He urged Tehran "to comply fully with Security Council resolutions and cooperate fully with the IAEA" and called upon North Korea to help achieve a "verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula". But he stopped short of making any references to Israel, India or Pakistan. Still, he said, "I urge those countries that are currently outside the treaty regime to accede to it as soon as possible," without identifying the three countries by name.

Taking a righteous stand on nuclear weapons, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the only head of state at the conference, said the sole function of the nuclear weapon is to annihilate all living beings and destroy the environment. The resulting radiation, he pointed out, would affect the coming generations and its negative impacts would continue for centuries. "The nuclear bomb is a fire against humanity rather than a weapon for defence," he said.

"The possession of nuclear bombs is not a source of pride; it is rather disgusting and shameful," said Ahmadinejad, whose country is accused of trying to develop nuclear weapons: a charge he has flatly denied.

"And even more shameful is the threat to use or to use such weapons, which is not even comparable to any crime committed throughout the history," he declared.

Ahmadinejad did not spare Israel, accusing it of stockpiling hundreds of nuclear warheads. He accused the Jewish state of having waged many wars in the region and continuing to threaten the people and nations of the region "with terror and invasion".

But he also pointed out that Israel "enjoys the unconditional support of the U.S. government and its allies, and receives, as well, the necessary assistance to develop its nuclear weapons programme". He criticised the IAEA because it has failed both on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

In response, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton charged that Iran was "do[ing] whatever it can to divert attention away from its own record and to attempt to evade accountability".

Tehran "has defied the Security Council and the IAEA and placed the future of the non-proliferation regime in jeopardy," Clinton said.

Meanwhile, at last month's nuclear security summit in Washington DC, U.S. President Barack Obama was asked about Israel's nuclear weapons programme.

But he diplomatically sidestepped the question when he pointedly told reporters: "As far as Israel goes, I'm not going to comment on their (nuclear weapons) programme".

"What I'm going to point to is the fact that consistently we have urged all countries to become members of the NPT. So there's no contradiction there," he said. "And so whether we're talking about Israel or any other country, we think that becoming part of the NPT is important."

"And that, by the way, is not a new position. That's been a consistent position of the United States government even prior to my administration," Obama added.
[IPS | May 2010]

NPT MEET DRAWS THOUSANDS OF ANTI-NUKES ACTIVISTS

By Anna Shen

UNITED NATIONS - Japanese women in kimonos carrying signs urging "No More Hiroshima", an 80-year-old grandmother, and 18 mayors from around the world were just some of the almost 15,000 people who marched in New York City May 2 to rally for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The hot, humid weather did not deter the protesters, who walked from Times Square, passing the United Nations on their way to Dag Hammarskjold Plaza for a peace festival with music and heated discussion over the month-long review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which begins on May 3 at the UN

The crowd viewed the issue from different angles, but they were firmly united on one thing: the urgent need to end the nuclear arms race.

"It is now time to rid the world of all weapons of mass destruction. No more nukes, no more wars. Yes we can, yes we must," said Judith Le Blanc, an organiser with the group Peace Action.

Aug. 9 will mark the 65th anniversary of the atomic bombing of the Japanese city of Nagasaki, said its current mayor, Tomihisa Taue.

"We are all connected and must share the faith that we must protect citizens from nuclear weapons. If we are united we can make governments move forward and make the world change. Let's make Nagasaki the last city to have a nuclear attack," he said.

Isao Yoshida, who came from Nagasaki, was only four years old when he lost his grandmother and friends when the U.S. bombed the city in 1945. Coming to New York for the NPT review was a deeply personal visit for him.

"I hope this year's conference will be successful because a lot of people feel a longing. Last April, [U.S.] President [Barack] Obama said he looked forward to a world without nukes. I hope for success, for the world and for all the Hibakusha, which are survivors of the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima," he said.

The human costs of nuclear weapons are not limited to their deployment, but also include the environmental and health impacts of their production, noted Nadine Padilla, a community organiser from the Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment.

She called for the shutdown of uranium mines and an end to radioactive waste, which causes cancer and miscarriages, among other problems. "We must fight to protect our lands," she said.

Stopping uranium mining in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo was also a high priority for Yaa-Lengi Ngemi, a Congolese professor based in New York. ➔

"Uranium was used in Hiroshima. Now the Congolese president is selling it to Iran. I am marching because the president is supporting terrorists and he needs to be removed. He is killing the Congolese," Ngemi told IPS.

Others said that as world leaders come here for the review, the U.S. should come clean on its own record.

Tennessee has one of the three remaining nuclear weapons plants in the U.S., said Ralph Hutchinson from the Oakridge Peace Alliance, urging that the plant be shuttered.

"We have the most nuclear weapons and we are still building more. We have 1,500 in our active stockpile and have several more in reserve. Until we get honest, we won't rid the world of nukes," Hutchinson told IPS. "Why is it okay for the U.S. to have them but not others? What justifies that morally?" he asked. He added that the UN would have leverage this time around because there were hints that the General Assembly would take the U.S. and Russia to task over their nuclear weapons arsenals.

Dan Lombardo, a member of Peace Action of Detroit, agreed. He said he wanted to see the U.S. abide by the disarmament vision set out when the NPT was created in 1970.

"The NPT is low hanging fruit," he told IPS. "In addition, I'm here to support the NPT from a religious perspective, because war and the preparations of war are against the will of God."

Aaron Tovish, international director of the Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision Campaign, said it is time to complete the promise of the eliminating nuclear weapons - one that has been embraced, at least in theory, by President Obama.

"The facilities to assemble nuclear weapons are the same to disassemble them. By 2019, all of them could be dismantled. It is a political challenge and it is time to do so. Within 10 years, we could have verification and monitoring system to oversee the elimination of weapons," he said, adding that the question remained whether this conference would bring about a more comprehensive approach to the nuclear threat.

Erika Bagnarello, a Costa Rican filmmaker who screened her film "Flashes of Hope: Hibakusha Traveling the World", at the UN, noted that there are currently enough nuclear weapons to destroy every city in the world seven times over.

She hoped the conference would produce a specific document to advance the issue, one that was stronger than the last NPT review in 2005.

"There is awareness worldwide of the 23,000 weapons, mostly in the U.S. and Russia, and we need to decrease that number," she said. [IPS | May 2010]

THE CHALLENGE OF MOVING FAST TOWARD A NUKE-FREE WORLD

By Ernest Corea

WASHINGTON DC – Gloom-and-doom headlines in the waning days of the 2010 review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) caused many observers to assume that negotiations would collapse in deadlock, but the Final Declaration of the conference was adopted without dissent. Consensus on potentially contentious issues was a significant milestone on the path toward nuclear disarmament.

A NPT review conference is held every five years and the previous conference ended in deadlock. At the time, many delegates blamed the collapse of the conference on the previous U.S. administration.

“The NPT could not have suffered another failed review conference after 2005 and it is a tribute to the 172 states parties present (out of a total of 190) that they agreed on a document strengthening all three pillars of the treaty – non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy,” said Dr Jayantha Dhanapala, president of the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs and formerly president of the 1995 NPT review and extension conference.

Dhanapala added that “the newly adopted separation of the Final Declaration into a Review section which was ‘noted’ and a Conclusion and Recommendations part – including a 64-point Action Plan – which was adopted by consensus, augurs well for the future.”

The encouraging outcome of the conference, he said, “is a result of new political leadership in the world and a strong current of global public opinion channelled by civil society organisations. This synergy must grow despite obstacles that may arise so that the goal of a nuclear weapon free world is reached sooner rather than later.”

In Dhanapala’s assessment – an assessment shared by several delegates and observers – “the most significant achievement” of the conference “was the agreement on implementing the 1995 resolution on the Middle East – 15 years later – for which the Pugwash Conference had worked hard, convening a specially focused side event during the conference and lobbying many governments on this.

“The convening of a conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and the appointment of a facilitator to consult and prepare the conference with responsibilities after the conference are major steps forward.

The acknowledgement in the document of ‘the important role played by civil society in contributing to the implementation of the resolution’ is an encouragement to Pugwash to continue its efforts.”

Dhanapala, who is a former UN Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament, pointed out that “while an optimum result on nuclear disarmament was diluted by resistance from nuclear weapon states the action plan is, by common consent, an advance over the 2000 Review Conference document. ➡

“All state parties are committed to pursue irreversible, verifiable and transparent policies with the objectives of achieving a world without nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon states will implement their unequivocal undertaking to eliminate their nuclear weapons totally.

“The conference noted the UN Secretary-General’s Five-Point Proposal for Nuclear Disarmament, which includes negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention while the nuclear weapon states committed themselves to accelerate nuclear disarmament engaging promptly on a number of specific issues.”

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In agreement on other key issues:

- the importance of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was reaffirmed and the conference recognised that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;
- Russia and the U.S. were encouraged to implement the nuclear weapons reduction treaty they signed earlier this year;
- all states were reminded of the need to prevent nuclear proliferation, and “to detect, deter and disrupt trafficking.”
- states which have not yet signed a number of existing agreements that serve as a deterrent against trafficking that includes nuclear terrorism were urged to sign such agreements;
- the importance of Israel joining the NPT regime and placing all its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards was reaffirmed.
- NPT member states were reminded of the obligation to resolve all unresolved issues in their dealing with the IAEA.

The eighth NPT review conference has ended and in whatever way the clean sheet of success might get ruffled in the future, there is no doubt that the outcome of the meeting was, as Dhanapala has pointed out, a tribute to the current political leadership.

Conference President Ambassador Libran Cabactulan (Philippines) worked indefatigably to craft reasonably robust documents on which consensus could be reached, without the sacrifice of guiding principles. Also hard at work was the current leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the UN, Egyptian Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz who provided his NAM colleagues with enlightened leadership.

Perhaps the strongest influence, however, was that of a leader who was not even present: President Barack Obama. His ground-breaking speech in Prague over a year ago when he shared with his audience a vision of a nuclear weapons free world has created a trend of public opinion that continues to influence public policy at international gatherings.

This might not last long. Indeed, in nut country there is already a backlash developing. Speed is vital, therefore, in following up the good intentions expressed at what was certainly a positive, even historic, meeting in New York. [IDN-InDepthNews | May 2010]

YOUTH WANT NUKES ABOLISHED – PUSH FOR NEW CONVENTION

By Jamshed Baruah



BERLIN/TOKYO – As senior officials from around the world negotiate in New York an agreement aimed at curbing the spread of nuclear weapons, a close look at the attitudes of the youth in six countries offers a critical insight into the need for spreading word about the culture of peace.

Youth members of Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist association with 12 million members around the world, asked their peers what they think about nuclear weapons and their abolition.

The survey was conducted between January and March 2010 in advance of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference. It involved 4,362 youth in Japan, Korea, the Philippines, New Zealand, the USA and the UK.

A perplexing aspect of the survey is that within the nuclear states, only 59.2 percent of the American youth – in their teens and up to 30s – were aware that the United States possesses atomic arsenals. And only 43.2 percent of the young people in Britain identified their country as a nuclear power state.

However, the survey also revealed an encouraging facet. Asked whether the presence of nuclear weapons contributes to global peace and stability, 59.6 percent of the youth interviewed, including those from the nuclear states, said 'no'. Also, 67.3 percent said the use of nuclear weapons was not acceptable under any circumstances.

Only 17.5 percent regarded deployment of atomic arsenals as acceptable as a last resort if a country's survival was threatened and 6.1 percent to prevent international terrorism or genocide. A total of 59.1 percent said they would feel safer if nuclear weapons were abolished.

Asked which countries possess nuclear weapons, 66.9 percent of those interviewed identified the USA, 48.7 percent Russia, 30 percent China, 19.8 percent the UK and 19.8 percent France. Fewer respondents were aware of the nuclear weapons possessed by India, Pakistan and Israel, while 40.7 percent thought North Korea had them.

Soka Gakkai student group leader Takahisa Miyao, who organised the survey, pointed out: "Almost 70 percent of respondents said the use of nuclear weapons was not acceptable under any circumstances. This is encouraging for us. Building on the widespread rejection of nuclear weapons by youth is the key to efforts toward their abolition."

In an E-Mail interview with IDN-InDepthNews, Takahisa Miyao commented on issues related to the survey: ➔

Q: What in your view is the most significant aspect emerging from the survey?

Takahisa Miyao (TM): For us the most important result was the fact that on the whole some 60 to 70 percent of respondents have a negative attitude toward nuclear weapons. It was also clear that more the people have a concrete and detailed awareness of the threat posed by nuclear weapons, the more strongly do they reject them. This speaks of the importance of informing people about the nature of nuclear weapons as a key to strengthening public opinion for their abolition.

At the same time, there is a segment of respondents who don't have a strong opinion one way or the other regarding nuclear weapons. Even then, however, if you look at the conditions under which people think nuclear weapons could be used, it is clear that a majority consider them to be in a class of their own, essentially different from conventional weapons.

On the other hand, around 10 percent of respondents expressed unease at the prospect of eliminating nuclear weapons and about 30 percent of respondents didn't know if the abolition of nuclear weapons would be a good or a bad thing.

The results of this survey have deepened our confidence that, by working to raise awareness among the members of our own generation about the horrors of nuclear weapons deployment, we can build robust public support for their abolition.

Q: What do you think should be done to sensitize youth about the need for abolition of nuclear weapons – in countries that have these and others which don't have these on their territories?

TM: Again, one key is to inform people about the real nature of nuclear weapons and the horrific consequences of their use. It is an undeniable fact that, with the passage of time, the collective memory of what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki has begun to fade. We have responded by creating a five-language DVD recording the testimonies of nuclear survivors as well as an exhibition on nuclear disarmament and human security, 'From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit' which has been viewed in over 170 cities in 23 countries and territories.

The responses have been very encouraging. People who have seen the exhibition have expressed a new awareness of the threat of nuclear weapons and a determination to see them eliminated. People have also expressed a sense of empowerment, confidence that a change in people's outlook will make nuclear abolition possible. Among the younger members of the Soka Gakkai in Japan are many descendants of hibakusha, nuclear survivors. We want to continue to convey these experiences into the future, building global solidarity among the world's youth.

Concrete goals are crucial, and we support calls for a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC), comprehensively banning all phases of nuclear weapons. Among other things, this is an effective vehicle for getting people to engage with the issue.

In parallel with the opinion survey, the Soka Gakkai youth members in Japan held a petition drive calling for the adoption of an NWC. There are precedents of the treaties banning landmines and cluster munitions, and this helps people develop clear goals and a shared vision of a path to nuclear abolition. ☺

In calling for a similar treaty banning nuclear weapons, we are building the awareness that nuclear weapons should not exist and must be eliminated. Fostering this consciousness in individuals ultimately creates a strong normative consciousness against nuclear weapons in international society as a whole. In this regard, we are greatly encouraged by the statement made by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon just prior to the opening of the NPT Review Conference expressing his support for a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

We feel strongly that young people have a key role to play in shaping history. The second president of our organization, Josei Toda (1900-58), said that the future is created by the power and passion of youth. As early as 1957 he called for the abolition of nuclear weapons, urging young people to take that as their special mission.

For most people, but again, perhaps especially for youth, nuclear weapons seem very distant, unrelated to their daily lives. We want to counter that through our efforts, working with fellow NGOs and relevant UN agencies, to promote a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

Q: What have the youth leaders planned for the NPT Review Conference?

TM: As you know, nuclear disarmament is, along with non-proliferation, one of the pillars of the NPT. The nuclear-weapon states have an obligation to pursue good-faith negotiations toward that end. Encouraging this is, of course, one of the motivations behind our drive to collect signatures for an NWC, which we will be presenting to representatives of the NPT Review Conference and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs.

We hope that the Review Conference will mark the start of negotiations toward an NWC. To clear the way, we want to see the negative security assurances – the promise of nuclear-weapon states not to use these weapons against states that don't possess them – formalized into legally binding commitments.

We also urge the declaration of nuclear non-use regions where nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ) have yet to be established. We will be carefully following the progress of the conference, together with interested young people around the world.

The NPT Review Conference this year is just one milestone on the path to a world free of nuclear weapons. The threat of nuclear weapons proliferation will not be uprooted until the people of each society clearly and unequivocally voice their rejection of nuclear weapons.

As Buddhists, we will continue to focus on the importance of people's attitudes and awareness. Whatever the specific outcome of the NPT Review Conference, we will continue our efforts, through dialogue and education, to effect a positive change in people's consciousness, to spark the inner flame of hope.

[IDN-InDepthNews | May 2010]

EGYPT ESCALATES 'WAR ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS'

By Fareed Mahdy

ISTANBUL – Strongly backed by Arab countries and Turkey, Egypt has escalated its intensive diplomatic offensive for freeing the Middle East of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, starting with nuclear arms.

Only few days ahead of the May 3-28 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review conference in New York, Egyptian diplomacy has reiterated in different fora its nearly 40-year old claim that the long-troubled Middle East region must be free of atomic arsenal.



In a latest development, Egypt has submitted to all parties involved in the New York meeting, a working paper through which it calls on the conference to “regret that no progress has been achieved for the implementation of the 1995 (UN) resolution” that confirmed previous resolutions to free the region from nuclear weapons. The Egyptian document also calls for a conference to be held by 2011 with the participation of all countries in the region to work out a formal accord ensuring their effective commitment to free the Middle East from nuclear arms.

Israel is the sole Middle East country that reportedly possesses nuclear weapons, with over 200 warheads, equivalent to more than double of the atomic arsenals in India and Pakistan.

Israel insists on keeping its military nuclear programme under strict secretiveness, while systematically refusing to join the NPT.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to participate in the Nuclear Security Summit organized by President Barack Obama in Washington on April 13-14. Netanyahu is also expected to desert the NPT Review conference.

The Egyptian paper to the delegations to the New York conference is reported to have the firm support of all Arab countries, a number of African, Asian and Latin American countries as well as Turkey and possibly also France and Scandinavian states.

While the U.S. may not support the Egyptian proposal for the immediate liberation of the Middle East from all weapons of mass destruction, it would not “veto” it.

As the NPT Review conference approached, the Egyptian Foreign Affairs ministry launched on April 26 a call on “all States to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

A Foreign ministry spokesperson said in a statement that, through its participation in the Review conference, “Egypt wants to ensure the accession of all States to this NPT. The spokesperson underscored that the non-accession by Israel to the NPT not only jeopardizes security and peace in the region, but also makes them unviable. ➡

The spokesperson stressed that the objective of freeing the Middle East from all weapons of mass destruction is not new, and that his country has been working for achieving it through international fora and groups of countries that “share our thinking, in particular Arab and African countries and also some European states.”

Commenting on the on-going developments regarding the Iranian nuclear programme, the official spokesman said, “The Egyptian stance is that the Iranian nuclear dossier needs to be dealt out politically, not through military actions”.

“We reject the military option; we encourage Western countries concerned with this issue to act politically. We reject any military action because of the consequences it may bring to security and stability in the region.”

The Egyptian spokesperson underscored that “certainly all states have the right to benefit from the advantages that the NPT offers regarding the peaceful use of nuclear power. But, at the same time, NPT member states must stick to the Treaty's provisions.”

Meanwhile, another Egyptian official source -- the Egypt State Information Service (SIS) has disseminated one week ahead of the NPT Review conference, an official document briefing on Cairo's position.

In its introduction, it says that the “Egyptian vision for achieving peace and stability in the (Middle East) region is based on fundamentals and principals such as the fair, just solution of the Palestinian cause and the integral implementation of all resolutions based on international legitimacy.” It also stresses the principle of “respect of states' independence and sovereignty, including keeping the region far away from arms races, in particular those of mass destruction, and liberating the region from all kinds of them.”

The Egyptian stance in the New York conference will stress that, since 1961, all Egyptian governments have followed a “clear and totally transparent position” vis-à-vis nuclear weapons and in general all weapons of mass destruction (atomic, biological and chemicals).

It will insist on its plan “to free the Middle East of these weapons, starting with nuclear arms, and that all countries in the region join all international agreements that ban the possession, proliferation, production and use of these arms, as well as all related testing”.

Cairo will also demand that all Middle East countries “be submitted to all international control and inspection systems, with no exception for any state or any weapon of mass destruction, under any circumstance.”

KEY POINTS

The Egyptian position is based on the following key points:

-- The possession of weapons of mass destruction does not guarantee security to any (Middle East) country; this will be ensured only through a just, comprehensive peace; ☺

- The lack of "any positive step" from Israel regarding the nuclear weapons issue and the Middle East liberation of arms of mass destruction, as well as its position based on the 'military superiority doctrine', will only contribute to deepening regional security unbalance;
- In its call for the total elimination of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction in the region, Egypt rejects any sort of discrimination or 'partialization' that might be considered upon the will of any party in the Middle East;
- Egypt rejects any possible 'selectiveness' of any weapon or any country, and rejects any concession of any special status to any country in the region;
- The process of disarming the Middle East of all kind of weapons of mass destruction must be carried out under international-comprehensive supervision, in particular by the United Nations and its agencies.
- Egypt demands the implementation of the several UN resolutions calling for freeing the Middle East from nuclear weapons, in particular the UN Security Council resolution number 487 adopted in 1981.

'NO' TO U.S. NUCLEAR UMBRELLA

Cairo has rejected a U.S. offer last year to guarantee defence of the region against atomic weapons as part of a comprehensive Middle East peace plan.

Nuclear umbrella is usually used for the security alliances of the U.S. with non-nuclear states such as Japan, South Korea, much of Europe, Turkey, Canada, and Australia, originating with the Cold War with the then Soviet Union. For some countries it was an alternative to acquiring nuclear weapons themselves.

In fact, on August 18, 2009, during his first visit to Washington in five years, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak insisted with U.S. President Barack Obama that "what the Middle East needs is peace, security, stability and development", not nuclear weapons.

Mubarak reaffirmed Egypt's pledge underlying the country's commitment since 1974 for the establishment of a "nuclear free Middle East".

Pre-empting discussion on the issue, Mubarak said in an exclusive interview with the leading Egyptian daily Al Ahram on August 17, 2009: "Egypt will not be part of any American nuclear umbrella intended to protect the Gulf countries".

Such an umbrella, he said, "would imply accepting foreign troops and experts on our land -- and we do not accept that". Mubarak also emphasized that a U.S. nuclear umbrella "would imply an implicit acceptance that there is a regional nuclear power --we do not accept that either."

The Egyptian president asserted that "the Middle East does not need any nuclear powers, be they Iran or Israel -- what we need is peace, security, stability and development". In any case, "we have not received any official communication regarding such a proposal", he added. ☺

On the same day, Ambassador Suleiman Awad, spokesperson of the Egyptian Presidency, also commented on a U.S. nuclear umbrella in the region. "This is not the first time the issue is raised; it is part of the U.S. defence policy," the presidential spokesperson said. "What is new is that it is raised now for the Middle East."

Commenting alleged U.S. nuclear plans in the Middle East, Awad said: "It is absolutely rejectable both in form and contents. Instead of talking about a nuclear umbrella, the Iranian nuclear file should be dealt with (in a spirit of) dialogue and flexibility from both sides, the West and Iran." He added: "Iran has the right to benefit from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, like any other country signatory of the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty), provided that it proves that its programme is for peaceful uses."

Mubarak's spokesperson underlined: "At the same time, this must be accompanied, simultaneously, by a serious move vis-à-vis Israel's nuclear capacity, in order to avoid accusations of double standards."

These remarks are in continuity with Egypt's 36-year long campaign aiming at the establishment of a "nuclear free Middle East". In 1990, Mubarak revitalized the Egyptian initiative through a new, larger plan to declare the Middle East a "weapons of mass destruction free region", including nuclear weapons.

The Egyptian initiative has drawn support from Arab countries and has been recently reaffirmed by Amre Musa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, representing all the 22 Arab countries. Musa, who is member of the "Global Zero" world campaign that works for the elimination of all nuclear weapons from the face of Earth, has repeatedly declared: "It is a must to free the Middle East of nuclear weapons."

The Egyptian offensive relies on the support of Arab countries, 9 of which are located in Africa, a continent that was declared, also in 2009, a nuclear-free zone. Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Chad, Djibouti and Somalia are all full members of the League Of Arab States.

Turkey, a growing regional power with an increasing influence in the Middle East is expected to be among the key supporters to the Egyptian initiative to declare the region a nuclear-free zone.

In spite of massive regional and international support to freeing the Middle East from nuclear and other mass destruction weapons, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon expressed strong doubts about the chances to achieve that goal.

In fact, on April 12, on the very eve of the Washington Nuclear Security Summit, Ban said that the proposal of freeing the Middle East from nuclear weapons has not achieved any progress until now for various reasons, including the political situation on the Middle East peace process.

"We have achieved (progress) in many areas including in Central Asia, where they have agreed and established a nuclear weapons-free zone," but the Middle East nuclear-free zone remains stalled, he said.

Obviously, Ban did not spell out the key reasons preventing that longstanding objective from being achieved—after all Israel is a full UN member-state. [IDN-InDepthNews | April 2010]

NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION REGIME HAS TRIPLE STANDARDS

Thalif Deen interviews John Burroughs of the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy

John Burroughs ➤



UNITED NATIONS - The abolition of nuclear weapons - and a halt to the spread of the deadly armaments - will be a major talking point at the month-long Review Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), scheduled to take place at the United Nations beginning next week.

The conference, held every five years, comes at a time when the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged the near-impossible: ushering in a "world without nuclear weapons". The promise may fall short of reality since the world's declared and undeclared nuclear powers have given no indication of either abandoning their weapons or agreeing to jettison them - at least without any preconditions.

John Burroughs, executive director of the New York-based Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy, says civil society has mobilised on a scale not seen since the 1980s, gathering over 10 million signatures on petitions calling for negotiations on a global nuclear abolition agreement. But he warns that the NPT Review Conference, due to take place May 3 through May 28, "will not be the place where the confrontation over Iran's nuclear programme is resolved, or North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons is reversed".

In an interview with IPS UN Bureau Chief Thalif Deen, Burroughs said the ingredients for a good outcome at the Review Conference do exist. "There is determination on the part of most countries to reverse the decade-long slide toward disintegration of the NPT," he said.

He said President Obama has eloquently explained nuclear dangers, articulated a vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, and set in motion what he says are steps toward that goal. And most notably, the United States and Russia signed a treaty Apr. 8 that would again apply verification to reductions of long-range nuclear weapons, Burroughs pointed out, "although the reductions themselves are quite modest, leaving in place society-destroying capabilities, while the United States in the meantime is increasing spending on weapons production facilities".

Excerpts from the interview follow.

Q: What are your expectations of the month-long conference? And what would you consider the benchmark for measuring success?

A: I would consider the conference a success if the key past commitments were affirmed, concrete steps were agreed on multilateralisation of reduction and elimination of nuclear arsenals, and support was expressed for strengthening controls on non-proliferation like the Additional Protocol (where each non-weapons state would agree to provide more access and transparency of its nuclear activities).

But negotiations will be intense and difficult in three main contested areas. One concerns an action plan for nuclear disarmament. It probably won't be that hard to affirm updated versions of past commitments made at NPT conferences in 1995 and 2000, including bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force; starting negotiations to ban production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons; applying the principle of irreversibility to reductions of arsenals; and diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in security policies. ➡

Q: What are the other stumbling blocks to a successful conference?

A: A second contested area will concern strengthening of measures on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, including: enhancing the IAEA's (International Atomic Energy Agency) inspection powers through adoption of the Additional Protocol, multilateral controls on the production and supply of fuel for nuclear reactors, adding restrictions on withdrawal. Many non-nuclear weapon states resist such measures, contending that they have already paid for disarmament by joining and complying with the NPT. But it is possible that agreement could be reached on weaker commitments, for example encouraging states to adopt the Additional Protocol.

A third contested area will concern advancing the achievement of a zone free of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons in the Middle East, as promised by a resolution adopted by the 1995 NPT conference. This is vital to Arab states and it could also be helpful in resolving the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme. Here the signals are promising. It appears that agreement may be reached on convening an international conference in the next one or two years.

Q: Do you anticipate any other barriers during negotiations?

A: Also complicated will be negotiations concerning a commitment to multilateralisation of reductions of nuclear arsenals, bringing states with nuclear arsenals beyond the United States and Russia into the process. The Obama administration has endorsed this approach in principle, but offered no concrete near-term mechanisms. Something may be possible along these lines.

Q: Will the conference succeed in adopting a final document - considering the fact that the 2005 Review Conference ended without any substantive agreement?

A: Whether the Review Conference can adopt a final document by consensus will depend not only on reaching agreement in the contested areas, but also on whether certain states want to disrupt the outcome for their own purposes. If consensus is not possible, ways other than a final document could be found to signal broad agreement.

Q: Why is there a perception of hypocrisy and double standards by the United States and other Western powers trying to penalise Iran for nuclear weapons it does not possess when they have a different set of rules for the three undeclared nuclear states: India, Pakistan and Israel?

A: The non-proliferation regime has a fundamental problem of double, indeed, triple standards. The NPT itself is a two-tier system, with some states acknowledged to have nuclear weapons but obligated to negotiate their elimination, and others subject to a verified obligation of non-acquisition. Then there are the states with nuclear arsenals outside the NPT: India, Pakistan, and Israel, and recently North Korea.

This puts considerable strain on some states inside the NPT required not to obtain nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Suppliers Group exemption for India pushed by the United States exacerbates the uneven application of standards. It permits nuclear commerce with a state that has not even formally accepted the disarmament obligations and commitments undertaken by the nuclear weapon states within the NPT.

Meanwhile, a non-nuclear weapon state in the NPT, Iran, is scrutinised and penalised due to a programme suspected of aiming at making it capable of producing nuclear weapons. There is only one solution to the problem of triple standards: the creation of a global system with one rule applying to all states, non-possession of nuclear weapons.

While there are many different views on how and when to achieve this, the basic point is increasingly accepted in many quarters, elite and popular, North and South, peace activists and national security experts. [IPS | April 2010]

IS THE U.S. GOING SOFT ON ISRAELI, INDIAN & PAKISTANI NUKES?

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS - When a much-ballyhooed two-day nuclear security summit ended in Washington early this week, there were several lingering questions that remained unanswered - even by the host of the high-powered 47-nation gathering, U.S President Barack Obama.

Will the United States call on Israel to declare its nuclear weapons programme and will it push the Jewish state to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)? Will the Obama administration try to convince India and Pakistan to sign the NPT?

On all three counts, the United States made little or no progress at an unprecedented summit meeting where the primary focus was to prevent nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorist groups.

"The summit reached useful agreements on such matters as securing nuclear materials that could be used in nuclear explosives within four years; strengthening security at nuclear facilities; and reducing the amount of bomb-usable highly enriched uranium in use and circulation," said John Burroughs of the New York-based Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy.

"But, given the presence in Washington of 47 governments, most represented by heads of state, it missed a unique opportunity to make a start on ridding the world of nuclear weapons altogether," he added. As most news reports rightly pointed out, Obama "ducked" the questions on Israel, when he pointedly told reporters: "As far as Israel goes, I'm not going to comment on their (nuclear weapons) programme."

"What I'm going to point to is the fact that consistently we have urged all countries to become members of the NPT. So there's no contradiction there," Obama said. "And so whether we're talking about Israel or any other country, we think that becoming part of the NPT is important. And that, by the way, is not a new position. That's been a consistent position of the United States government even prior to my administration," he added.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself "ducked" the summit at the eleventh hour apparently due to concerns that his country's secretive nuclear weapons programme could be a subject of discussion at the meeting. But it wasn't.

The three undeclared nuclear powers - India, Pakistan and Israel - have all refused to sign the NPT, as against the five declared nuclear powers, the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia.

A month-long review conference of the NPT is scheduled to take place at the United Nations beginning May 3.

Burroughs told IPS: "As to Israel, President Obama, as is the usual U.S. position, did not comment on whether it has nuclear weapons." ↻

What did not come up is that progress on achieving a Middle East zone free of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons will be key to whether the NPT Review Conference in May yields an agreed final outcome, he pointed out.

One proposal now being seriously explored, Burroughs said, is that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would convene a conference to launch a process regarding such a zone.

"The decision to indefinitely extend the NPT in 1995 would not have taken place absent a resolution on a Middle East zone to be promoted by the three depository parties for the NPT, the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia," he added.

Asked about Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme, Obama went soft. "I don't think Pakistan is playing by a different set of rules," he said. "I think we've been very clear to Pakistan, as we have been to every country, that we think they should join the NPT."

But he pointed out that he has "actually seen progress over the last several years with respect to Pakistan's nuclear security issues".

"I want to lower tensions throughout South Asia when it comes to nuclear programmes," Obama said. "And I think that the fact that Prime Minister (Yousuf Raza) Gilani came here, signed on to a communiqué, and made a range of commitments that will make it more likely that we don't see proliferation activities or trafficking occurring out of Pakistan is a positive thing."

"Do we have a lot more work to do? Absolutely. But I think that Prime Minister Gilani's presence here was an important step in assuring that we do not see a nuclear crisis anywhere in South Asia," Obama added. In contrast, Obama took a relatively tough stand against North Korea (and its nuclear testing) and Iran (accused of trying to develop nuclear weapons). Burroughs told IPS that both India and Pakistan are producing fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

Pakistan is bringing two new weapons-grade plutonium production reactors online, and is blocking commencement of negotiations on a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

At the summit, President Obama reportedly talked with Gilani about the FMCT, but gained no commitment to allow negotiations to begin.

"Nor did the summit itself deal with production of fissile materials for weapons," Burroughs noted.

When asked at a press conference about Pakistan's expansion of its nuclear programme, Obama said only that Pakistan has made commitments regarding prevention of proliferation activities like smuggling and that the U.S. position is that Pakistan should join the NPT.

Meanwhile, the Lawyers' Committee on Nuclear Policy said civil society will use the NPT Review Conference next month to remind delegates that, since each nuclear weapon state, whether inside or outside the NPT, seems determined to maintain its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent against every other such state, the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world will remain a chimera.

This will remain so, as long as the elimination of all nuclear weapons is not approached in a universal mode, as required by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of 1996. [IPS | April 2010]

HOLLYWOOD DOCUMENTARY CALLS FOR ZERO NUCLEAR WEAPONS

By Pratap Chatterjee

WASHINGTON - Hollywood and Silicon Valley leaders have teamed up with Middle Eastern royalty and high-level U.S. diplomats to send a message to heads of state who are gathering here in Washington next week: the world needs to reduce its nuclear arsenal to zero as soon as possible.

Next week, U.S. President Barack Obama will host leaders of 47 countries in Washington - including Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, Chinese President Hu Jintao, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel - to discuss how to keep nuclear weapons out of terrorists' hands. India and Pakistan are expected to attend but Iran and North Korea have not been invited.

In advance of this "Nuclear Security Summit", the directors of a months-old campaign called "Global Zero" held a press conference in Washington on April 8. The centrepiece of the event was a new film "Countdown to Zero" directed by Lucy Walker, a British filmmaker, and produced by Lawrence Bender, who also produced the acclaimed climate change film "Inconvenient Truth" and several Quentin Tarantino films like "Inglorious Basterds."

The film was financed by Jeff Skoll, Canadian-born billionaire founder of EBay, the online auction site, who has funded a number of political films like "Food, Inc." as well as dramas like "Charlie Wilson's War".

Film publicists say that the documentary - which includes interviews with former heads of state Jimmy Carter, Mikhail Gorbachev, Tony Blair, and Pervez Musharraf - concludes that "our only option is to eradicate every-last nuclear missile".

"Nuclear weapons have lost their political and military utility," said Richard Burt, a former U.S. ambassador who was the chief negotiator in the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) with the former Soviet Union in 1991.

"The danger today is not nuclear conflict but the spread of nuclear materials," he added as he introduced a range of speakers like Queen Noor of Jordan and General John J. "Jack" Sheehan, former Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic for NATO.

At the peak of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the U.S. possessed 19,000 nuclear weapons, enough to destroy the world hundreds of times over. The two countries have reduced this number to a ceiling of 2,200 weapons each - but a new treaty signed in Prague today by Obama and Medvedev will cut the number of nuclear warheads to 1,550 over the next seven years.

President Obama also unveiled a new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) on April 6 that will significantly limit the circumstances under which Washington would use nuclear weapons. This new strategy forbids the use of nuclear weapons against signatories in good standing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), puts a stop to the testing of nuclear weapons and development of new nuclear warheads, and requires the White House to seek Senate ratification and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). ➡

At the signing ceremony in Prague, Obama and Medvedev ratcheted up the pressure on Iran and North Korea, neither of whom are signatories to the NPT, suggesting that they could face retaliation if they did not join the treaty. Obama called for "smart" and "strong" sanctions by the United Nations, while Medvedev said: "Unfortunately Tehran is not reacting to an array of constructive compromise proposals. We cannot close our eyes to this."

The two presidents did not agree on everything - they parted ways on U.S. plans to build an anti-missile shield in Europe to counter Iran.

Film producers Bender and Skoll say they would like to break through this global leadership stalemate by getting as many people to sign a statement calling for a complete elimination of nuclear weapons and a lockdown on loose nuclear materials.

In a teaser clip from their documentary film, which is scheduled to be released on Jul. 9, world leaders and ordinary citizens say one after the other: "Zero".

Asked if he would take the film to countries like Iran and North Korea, Bender said he would be more than willing to. Queen Noor of Jordan, who also spoke at the press conference, and who regularly visits Syria said she would be happy to try and encourage Middle Eastern leaders from throughout the region to view the film and sign the pledge for zero nuclear weapons.

Anti-nuclear activist groups say Obama himself could also do more. They say that while Obama is using the nuclear posture review, the START treaty and the nuclear security summit to paint himself as a nuclear dove, his actions on Iran and North Korea show that he could further reduce the threat of nuclear proliferation.

"It is, in other words, a very hawkish nuclear posture - a hawk dressed in dove's feathers," says Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group (named after one of the key sites at which the U.S. government first developed nuclear weapons). "This posture review attempts to reconcile liberal ideals with the hawkish realities of current U.S. nuclear policy. Those policies are to continue almost unchanged."

Mello put the Prague agreement in perspective by noting that to date - on a numerical and a percentage basis - Obama's stockpile cuts have been surpassed by the previous administration of George W. Bush. "This posture review aims for nuclear stability worldwide as a background for the continued application of U.S. 'hard power,'" Mello said. [IPS | April 2010]

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR SECURITY AFTER THE NUKE SUMMIT

By Ernest Corea

WASHINGTON DC - The Nuclear Security Summit convened by President Barack Obama attracted 47 high-level participants – over 30 of them heads of state or government – who collectively agreed on several small but important steps on the path towards global safety from a “rogue” nuclear attack. This could be mounted by “non-state” sources or by a state that does not observe the rules.

"The agreement of 47 nations to specific steps to safeguard nuclear materials and technology has to be welcomed especially in averting the dangers of nuclear weapon proliferation and non-state actors acquiring them," says Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, who presided over the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference. Formerly the UN Under-Secretary General for Disarmament (1998-2003), he is President of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, and Jennings Randolph Senior Visiting Scholar, U.S. Institute of Peace.

"Norms with regard to this had already been established by the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials and Nuclear Facilities and its Amendment. The problem of nuclear terrorism had also been addressed by the Security Council Resolution 1540 and the International Convention for the Suppression of Nuclear Terrorism," Dhanapala added.

"Unfortunately," he pointed out, "not all the 47 countries participating in the Washington Summit have signed and ratified the two conventions I have mentioned. We must also remember that the problem really lies with nuclear weapons for which there are neither wrong hands nor right hands".

The assessment that the real problem lies with the continued existence of nuclear arsenals is consistent with Obama's view, as stated in his speech of April 2009 in Prague where he articulated a commitment "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."

Security from the theft or loss and use of nuclear material is but one segment of the broader search for a nuclear weapons free world to which men and women of peace aspire.

The U.S. is considered a potential target of a “rogue” terrorist attack because Al Qaeda has openly said that it considers the acquisition of material for a nuclear weapon a prime obligation. Other countries are also vulnerable to such attacks. Imagine, for example, the extent of destruction that would have been caused had the Mumbai terrorists possessed a “suitcase nuclear bomb.”

More than 18 cases have already been recorded of highly enriched uranium or plutonium being lost or stolen. Over 2000 tons of plutonium and highly enriched uranium exist in several countries, some of which have no safeguards against theft. ➡

With those stark realities in mind, summit participants agreed that “nuclear terrorism is one of the most challenging threats to international security, and strong nuclear security measures are the most effective means to prevent terrorists, criminals, or other unauthorized actors from acquiring nuclear materials.”

So the goal of the nuclear security summit was to start moving towards a regime in which materials that can be used to manufacture a nuclear device are protected to the fullest extent possible.

Obama told a news conference at the conclusion of the summit: “I said this morning that today would be an opportunity for our nations, both individually and collectively, to make concrete commitments and take tangible steps to secure nuclear materials so they never fall into the hands of terrorists who would surely use them.

“This evening, I can report that we have seized this opportunity, and because of the steps we’ve taken -- as individual nations and as an international community -- the American people will be safer and the world will be more secure.”

An official summary of the summit communiqué sets out its highlights. The communiqué:

- Acknowledges the need for all vulnerable nuclear material to be secured in four years;
- Proposes that focused national efforts be made to improve security and accounting of nuclear materials and that regulations concerning plutonium and highly enriched uranium be strengthened;
- Seeks to consolidate stocks of highly enriched uranium and plutonium and to reduce the use of highly enriched uranium,
- Promotes universality of key international treaties on nuclear security and nuclear terrorism;
- Notes the positive contributions of mechanisms like the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism to build capacity among law enforcement, industry, and technical personnel,
- Calls for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to receive the resources it needs to develop nuclear security guidelines and provide advice to its members on how to implement them,
- Seeks to ensure that bilateral and multilateral security assistance would be applied where it can do the most good, and
- Encourages the nuclear industry to share best practices for nuclear security, at the same time making sure that security measures do not prevent countries from enjoying the benefits of peaceful nuclear energy. ➔

In addition to the communiqué, the summit produced a work plan, and a reference guide to the work plan.

INITIATIVES

The summit also provided participating governments with the opportunity to announce initiatives some of them had already taken, or would be taking. For instance:

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed an update to a 2000 agreement calling on each country to dispose of 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium by burning it as fuel in nuclear reactors. Additionally, Russian President Medvedev re-confirmed plans to close a plutonium production reactor.

Ukraine announced that it would give up its 90-kilogram stock of highly enriched uranium and convert its research reactors from highly enriched to low-enriched uranium. It intends to accomplish these goals by 2012.

Canada informed the meeting that it would be returning a large amount of spent highly enriched uranium fuel from its medical isotope production reactor to the U.S.; championing the extension of the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction; funding highly enriched uranium removals from Mexico and Vietnam; hosting and funding a World Institute of Nuclear Security best practices workshop in Ottawa; and providing \$100 million in new bilateral security cooperation with Russia.

India made known its decision to establish a Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership, to create and disseminate the knowledge required for nuclear security.

Chile, Kazakhstan, and Vietnam agreed to dispose of highly enriched uranium used in civilian facilities.

This is only a representative sampling. Taken together, undertakings of specific action by individual governments suggest that the momentum towards nuclear security has actually begun.

NON-BINDING

Critics will undoubtedly argue that the main outcome of the summit is merely a non-binding communiqué, and therefore hardly worth the drafting effort.

Others have already complained that the summit neither discussed nor agreed on action against Iran whose nuclear enrichment program they consider the greatest potential source of nuclear insecurity.

It could also be said that clandestine nuclear stockpiles, such as that said to be possessed by Israel, were not addressed and that Obama, in fact, glided away from the question when it was raised at his news conference. ➡

The fact that participation at the summit was selective – selected by the U.S. Government – and not universal, will also be seen as having weakened the event.

SUPPORTIVE



These are significant issues and will continue to be raised. The fact that a non-binding communiqué came out is not really a crippling infirmity, however, because even “binding” agreements are known to be broken. Moreover, a communiqué signed by over 30 heads of state and government cannot be easily shrugged off.

On the other side of public opinion, meanwhile, there have been a number of supportive assessments such as the comment from former Senator Sam Nunn, a genuine expert on nuclear matters and for many years a supporter of nuclear disarmament: “we are now closer to cooperation than catastrophe.”

Britain’s foreign secretary (minister) David Miliband, said that the summit had successfully broken “a culture of cynicism” about matters connected with nuclear issues. Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association, and Peter Crail, a Non-proliferation Analyst at the association, said “the summit was also able to point out that this risk of nuclear terrorism is a shared one and is not just a threat to the U.S.” They called on the “U.S. Congress to fully support programs aimed at enhancing nuclear security around the globe and combating illicit nuclear trafficking”.

For Obama, the nuclear security summit was one more action point to be marked off on an agenda leading towards the goal of total nuclear disarmament that he set out in his Prague speech of April 2009. He reaffirmed that goal during a visit to Japan in a “Joint Statement toward a world without nuclear weapons.”

A year after that initial exuberance of a Prague Spring, the U.S. Government has sought to nurture more of that spirit. The U.S. issued a redesigned “Nuclear Posture Review” that reduces dependence on nuclear weapons while committing itself to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; signed a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia that reduces the number of strategic arms on both sides; and convened the nuclear security summit. Next comes the NPT Conference in May 2010.

Two years from now, a nuclear security summit will be held in South Korea. The extent to which the promises and hopes of 2009 and 2010 – in their full dimensions -- have been fulfilled by all parties, or are approaching fulfilment by 2012, will show whether the world is ready for nuclear disarmament, including nuclear security, or whether the great hopes and initiatives of today are the great disappointments of tomorrow. [IDN-InDepthNews | April 2010]

Picture: British Foreign Secretary | Credit: Wikimedia Commons

TOWARD A MODERN NUCLEAR SECURITY ENTERPRISE

By Ramesh Jaura

BERLIN – Transformation of the U.S. atomic weapons complex into “a modern, sustainable 21st century nuclear security enterprise” forms the nucleus of President Barack Obama’s agenda manifested in the new START Treaty, he and Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev signed in Prague on April 8.

The new nuclear security enterprise will cost the taxpayer \$7.6 billion per year by fiscal year 2015. Additional \$9.9 billion are expected to be spent on missile defence in 2011, almost \$700 million more than in the fiscal year 2010. A twenty-first century nuclear security enterprise is regarded not only critical to maintaining the U.S. nuclear deterrent, but also essential to supporting a number of other nuclear security missions, including nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear counterterrorism, emergency response, and support to the intelligence agencies.

With this in view, the U.S. will invest in “revitalizing the intellectual infrastructure that serves as the foundation of our capabilities in addition to recapitalizing an out-dated physical infrastructure,” according to a 67-page official briefing book released to coincide with the ‘Prague spring’.

The task to “maintain and enhance the safety, reliability and performance of the United States nuclear weapons stockpile,” in addition to broader nuclear security missions, enjoins by law on the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

“The President’s budget request for NNSA for fiscal year 2011 reflects the Administration’s commitment to the Nation’s nuclear deterrent and the Nuclear Security Enterprise that enables it. The President’s budget includes more than \$7 billion for Weapons Activities and associated infrastructure, up 10 percent from fiscal year 2010,” the ‘New START Treaty U.S. Senate Briefing Book’ points out.

A joint product of the U.S. Departments of State and Defense, the publication spells out the budget request:

Increased funding for directed stockpile work by 25 percent to ensure the safety, security and effectiveness of the nuclear weapons stockpile, including:

- full production of the W76-1 to extend the life of the warhead for an additional 30 years;
- a life extension study for the B61 gravity bomb to extend its service life, enhance its safety and use control features, and ensure compatibility with modern aircraft;
- a study to explore future options to maintain the W78 warhead; and
- continued maintenance, surveillance and certification for all weapons systems. ➡

The budget request also envisages increased funding for science, technology and engineering by more than 10 percent to ensure the ability to assess and certify the stockpile without underground nuclear testing utilizing advanced scientific capabilities, including the world's fastest supercomputers, and stepwise development of the predictive framework capability.

The Obama administration plans to reinvest in the scientists, technicians and engineers "responsible for a successful stockpile stewardship and management program and recapitalization of the physical infrastructure, including major long-term construction projects to replace aging facilities that house essential capabilities for plutonium and uranium". Obama also plans to sustain and augment stockpile stewardship and management investments into the future, with funding for these programmes increasing steadily, to \$7.6 billion per year by fiscal year 2015.

"Through these investments, NNSA's Nuclear Security Enterprise will ensure a highly specialized and trained technical workforce, committed to maintaining the U.S. nuclear deterrent through safe and security operations and stewardship of the environment, while leveraging their capabilities to address cross-cutting national security mandates through scientific innovation," states the briefing book. The briefing book vigorously points out that the New START Treaty does not contain any constraints on testing, development or deployment of current or planned U.S. missile defense programmes or current or planned U.S. long-range conventional strike capabilities.

"The United States is developing and fielding missile defenses to defend the United States, our forces abroad, and our allies and partners against the threat of ballistic missile attack," the document informs and goes on to add: "The New START Treaty contains no limits on our ability to continue developing and fielding missile defenses. But the Treaty does contain a statement in the preamble acknowledging the interrelationship of missile offense and missile defense, as President Obama and President Medvedev agreed in their Joint Statement of July 2009. This provision is not a binding obligation."

The briefing book refers to an important point of disagreement between the U.S. and Russia that may at a later stage become a source of serious contention. As was done in the case of START, Russia has made a unilateral statement regarding missile defenses. "Its statement is not legally binding and therefore does not constrain U.S. missile defense programs. In fact, we have also made a unilateral statement, making clear that nothing in the Treaty will limit current or planned U.S. missile defense programs. Such unilateral statements are documents associated with the Treaty, but are not part of the Treaty. These statements will not be subject to Senate advice and consent, though they will be shared with the Senate," notes the briefing book.

The Treaty prohibits the conversion of ballistic missile defense interceptor launchers to intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) or submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers, and vice versa. However, according to the document, "this provision has no effect on our ability to develop and field missile defenses." The briefing book informs that the United States is currently building 14 Ground-Based Interceptor (GBI) silos at Ft. Greely, Alaska. New construction of silo launchers for missile defense purposes at Ft. Greely, Vandenberg Air Force Base, or anywhere else is not limited by the New START Treaty.

"The five existing GBI silos at Vandenberg Air Force Base, which were converted from ICBM silos prior to treaty signature, are grandfathered under the Treaty, and thus are not constrained by the Treaty." Undeterred by any criticism, the document vows that the United States will continue to invest in improvements to both strategic and theatre missile defences, both qualitatively and quantitatively, "as needed for our security and the security of our allies". ➡

The Administration's approach to sustaining and enhancing the ballistic missile defense programme is detailed in the February 2010 'Ballistic Missile Defence Review Report' and reflected in the FY 2011 \$9.9 billion request for missile defence, almost \$700 million more than FY 2010.

NUCLEAR FORCE STRUCTURE

The document further points out that the New START Treaty "ensures our own military the flexibility to deploy and maintain our forces – including bombers, submarines, and missiles – in ways that best meet U.S. national security interests". An early task for the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) was to develop U.S. positions for the New START negotiations. The Treaty's lower strategic force levels are based on analysis conducted in 2009, at the initial phase of the 2010 NPR process, which also considered how U.S. forces should be structured at the levels established by the new agreement. The NPR reached the following conclusions:

- Stable deterrence can be maintained while reducing U.S. strategic delivery vehicles by about 50 percent from the START I level and reducing deployed strategic warheads by about 30 percent from the 2002 Moscow Treaty level.
- Contributions by non-nuclear systems to U.S. deterrence and reassurance goals should be preserved by avoiding limitations on missile defences and preserving options for using heavy bombers or long-range missile systems in conventional roles.
- During the ten-year duration of New START, the triad of ICBMs, SLBMs, and nuclear-capable heavy bombers will be maintained, keeping all 14 Ohio-class strategic submarines (SSBNs) in the force at least for the near term and "de-MIRVing" all Minuteman III ICBMs to a single warhead each to increase stability in a crisis.

The FY 2011 budget request includes funds to sustain the Triad, including: continuing the Minuteman III life extension program; developing new technologies to replace the current fleet of Ohio-class SSBNs, which begin to retire in the 2027 timeframe; and investing over \$1 billion over the next five years to support upgrades to the B-2 stealth bomber.

The New START Treaty affirms the right of the United States to determine the composition and structure of its strategic offensive arms within the Treaty's overall limits. This will allow the U.S. to adjust its force structure over time as appropriate to the strategic circumstances. The Treaty limitations take effect seven years after the date the Treaty enters into force. [IDN-InDepthNews | April 2010]

DRAMATIC ARAB APPEAL FOR A NUCLEAR-FREE WORLD

By Fareed Mahdy

ISTANBUL - Call it perfect timing or a sheer historical coincidence; be it because they feel caught between the Israeli nuclear hammer and the Iranian might-be atomic anvil or just because they truly want it, the fact is that the leaders of 22 Arab countries have launched an unprecedented massive and pressing call to free the world from nuclear weapons.

During their summit in Sirt, Libya, Arab leaders had to deal with a heavy agenda centred on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, Tel Aviv's on-going challenges to the world community and its progressive violation of international law by further building colonies on occupied territories and East Jerusalem as well as the Darfur conflict, the threatening instability in Yemen, the Somali drama and, above all, the need for more coherent, collective Arab policies, among other key issues.

Nevertheless, they devoted an important chapter to nuclear concerns. In fact, the rulers of some 350 million people living in the oil wealthiest and most conflictive region on Earth have issued a clarion call at the end of their 22nd summit in Libya, for a nuclear free world.

Specifically, in their final declaration on March 28, 2010 following the two-day meeting, the Arab leaders “reaffirmed that all Arab countries that are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) demand the international community to undertake immediate actions to free the world from nuclear weapons.”

The summit declaration stressed the need “to translate international initiatives aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons from the world into concrete, binding and time-tabled programmes”.

The Arab leaders also underscored that progress towards achieving this goal “requires, as a first step, the 'universalization' of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty”.

This strong Arab stand was spelt out few days after the announcement of U.S.-Russia agreement to reduce their nuclear arsenal by 30 percent, which is due to be sealed on April 8 in Prague, and shortly ahead of the Nuclear Security Summit, scheduled on April 12-13 in Washington, as well as the NPT review conference May 3-28 in New York.

With an eye on the later, the Arab declaration reaffirms “the importance of respecting the rights of NPT member states to possess and develop nuclear technologies for peaceful use, rejecting any restrictions to these rights under any argument”.

This position is in line with that of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which in a nutshell tantamounts to: Nuclear Power ‘Yes’ – Nuclear Proliferation ‘No’.

It also fits in the growing interest shown by several Arab countries, including the oil-rich ones, in developing nuclear power for peaceful use. The U.S., UK, France, and Russia, among other industrialised countries, have been encouraging this trend in Arab countries and some of them have already signed substantial commercial deals to install nuclear plants in a number of Arab states. ➔

The oil-rich United Arab Emirates, for instance, announced in October 2009 its decision to build nuclear reactors on its soil. This unleashed a frenetic, politically backed competition between giant corporations from France, U.S., Japan and South Korea, to win the 40 billion dollar bid for this project

At the same time, the French government has reportedly promised assistance to Qatar and Morocco, to launch their own nuclear programmes. Egypt and Jordan were reported to be heading for building nuclear plants. Also Saudi Arabia announced plans to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

Back to the Arab declaration, the Arab leaders demanded that the NPT review conference “adopt clear decisions and build up practical measures to make the Middle East a nuclear-free region”. Israel, the sole nuclear power in the Middle East with reported 200 nuclear weapons, has systematically refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

On this issue, the Arab leaders warned that “Israel insistence on refusing to join non-proliferation treaty and submitting its nuclear facilities to the full guarantees system of the International Atomic Energy Agency, will lead the region to an arms race of dramatic consequences”. In this regard, and coinciding with the Arab declaration, the Jerusalem Post daily reported on the same day, March 28, that the Israeli government will present “no concessions” at the nuclear security summit in Washington in April regarding its policy of maintaining “ambiguity” around its nuclear weapons, according to an Israel military official.

The issue of achieving a nuclear-free Middle East is not new. In fact, Egypt launched 36 years ago an active campaign aiming at the establishment of a "nuclear free Middle East". In 1990, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak revitalised the Egyptian initiative through a new, larger plan to declare the Middle East a "weapons of mass destruction free region", including nuclear weapons.

The Egyptian initiative has drawn support from most Arab countries and has been reaffirmed by Amre Musa, Secretary General of the League of Arab States, representing all the 22 Arab countries, who continue to repeat: "It is a must to free the Middle East of nuclear weapons." The Arab support for the nuclear free Middle East initiative has gathered added strength particularly in the Gulf Arab countries in the wake of the U.S., Israel, and Europe alleging that Iran intends to build nuclear weapons.

Moreover, during a Washington summit between Mubarak and U.S. President Barack Obama in August 2009, Egypt categorically rejected a U.S. offer to guarantee defence of the region against atomic weapons through an extended 'nuclear umbrella' and as part of a comprehensive Middle East peace plan. The plan did not specify whether Israel would dismantle its nuclear arsenals. On the other hand, 10 Arab countries situated in Africa, who are members of both the League of Arab States and The African Union, are parties to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, which entered into force in July 2009. These are: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, and Tunisia.

In addition, some outstanding Arab personalities have joined the worldwide campaign launched by 100 international figures for the abolition of nuclear weapons, known as 'Global Zero, for a World Without Nuclear Weapons'. Queen Noor of Jordan, for instance, has been actively campaigning for the abolition of nuclear weapons, within the Global Zero initiative. In this regard, the Jordanian queen affirmed: "The sheer folly of trying to defend a nation by destroying all life on the planet must be apparent to anyone capable of rational thought. Nuclear capability must be reduced to zero, globally, permanently. There is no other option."

[IDN-InDepthNews | April 2010]

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Nuclear Non-Proliferation

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