

Disarmament Times

By Douglas Roche

With the first preparatory meeting for the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty about to begin in Vienna April 30, a new cycle starts in the long struggle to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

A new U.N. Secretary-General has taken office. A new High Representative for disarmament matters is to be named. Four of the five Nuclear Weapon States are undergoing changes in leadership, not least the United States, where a new President will take office in January, 2009.

The complex matters of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are clearly entering a new moment.

Because of the failure of the 2005 NPT Review Conference and the subsequent inability of the U.N. 60th Anniversary Summit to say anything about nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, a sense of despair swept over international gatherings. Pessimism, if not cynicism, became fashionable.

I contend, however, that as we look to the 2010 NPT Review there are grounds for optimism for three reasons: the historical tide, an existing near consensus on key points, and political developments.

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In historical terms, the tide is turning against nuclear weapons. The moral, legal and military case against them is now better understood than ever before. The intellectual argument – that nuclear weapons are needed for security – is now largely rejected as baseless. Only a small coterie of defenders of nuclear weapons can be found today. We know that this coterie still possess immense political power, as the fight over the retention of the Trident in the U.K. revealed. But the U.K. government's determination to modernize its nuclear arsenal ran up against unprecedented opposition. The opponents of nuclear weapons are gathering strength. That itself is a new reason for hope.

A roadmap to the future has been superbly drawn by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, headed by the Swedish diplomat Hans Blix. The Commission's 60 recommendations provide the architecture for global security without nuclear weapons. Proposals have been made to resolve thorny questions of the fuel cycle and proliferation challenges, advance implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution, and suggest steps both nuclear and non-nuclear countries can take.

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Though it failed because of the recalcitrance of a small number of states, the 2005 NPT Review identified a near consensus on key elements.

In fact, the Working Paper of the Chairman of Main Committee I and the Working Paper of the subsidiary body on nuclear disarmament and assurances were supported by strong majorities. These documents said that Nuclear Weapons States must stop nuclear sharing for military purposes; the most effective way to prevent nuclear terrorism is the total elimination of nuclear weapons; international action to stop proliferation is essential; building upon the decisions taken at the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences, including the “equivocal undertaking” for total nuclear disarmament, no new nuclear weapons should be developed. The fact that these elements did not command complete consensus was a reflection of the obstinacy of the few, not the fissures of the many.

In 2006, all but four states in the U.N. voted for the holdout states to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, negotiate a ban on the production of fissile materials, diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security policies, reduce the operational status of nuclear forces, and take other practical steps. This is a significant expression of a world view.

On January 4, 2007, four distinguished American figures – two Republicans and two Democrats – who had never before been identified with nuclear weapons abolition, called for action to reduce nuclear dangers. In a remarkable op-ed article published by the *Wall Street Journal*, George

Shultz and Henry Kissinger, both former Secretaries of State under Republican Presidents, and former Democratic Senator Sam Nunn and William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration, warned, “The world is now on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era.” They set out a number of urgent steps to achieve “the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.” Initiating a bipartisan process with the U.S. Senate, they said, could achieve, among other gains, U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Their article lays the groundwork for new efforts in the U.S. to have the American government become a participant in, not an obstacle to, concrete nuclear disarmament steps.

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In the list of political developments that could put nuclear disarmament on a new trajectory, one would have to point immediately to the statements made by the new Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. He received generally a bad press for his perceived downgrading of the Department of Disarmament Affairs. But a close reading of his lengthy letter and annexes of February 15, 2007 to General Assembly President Al Khalifa reveals a determination to strengthen the work of the Organization in

arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation and related security matters and “advance the disarmament agenda.”

Ban Ki-moon intends to constitute the Department of Disarmament Affairs as a separate office in the Secretariat, with a separate budget section, headed by a High Representative. The Secretary-General sees this new structure as re-energizing simultaneous action on both disarmament and non-proliferation. “The two objectives are inextricably linked,” he said, “and neither can advance without the other.”

The High Representative is mandated to advocate disarmament and non-proliferation issues with both member states and civil society. The U.N.’s new disarmament boss “will actively seek to engage the international community ...” and act “as a catalyst with civil society organizations, which play a vital role in building and activating public opinion.” Further, the new official will “undertake appropriate advocacy work/initiatives in partnership with the relevant parts of the United Nations as well as with civil society, the media, academia and foundations.”

All of this is strong rhetoric and I see no reason to doubt the Secretary-General’s intentions. He explicitly addressed the charge that he was weakening support for disarmament by stating, “The new Office will

have a stronger impact.” Ban Ki-moon foresees that his moves will strengthen “existing synergies across the field of peace and security.”

The Secretary-General has a key motivation in ensuring that his intentions become reality. The success of his tenure will be measured, about four years from now, on how he has helped to resolve the two great issues of paramount importance to the future of humanity: nuclear dangers and climate change. It will not be enough for him to merely manage the United Nations and show that it is capable of implementing the reforms long sought by Kofi Annan, the previous Secretary-General. Substantive action to resolve nuclear and climate super-problems is essential.

Coming from South Korea and understanding well that the proliferation of nuclear weapons in his part of the world can only be stopped by unified world action, Ban Ki-moon is well placed to lead. He needs to set out an agenda for nuclear disarmament in the same way that Boutros Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace* and *An Agenda for Development* 15 years ago. Hans Blix has called for a World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction; Ban Ki-moon should make such a summit happen, perhaps in 2009, to boost the prospects for a successful 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Above all, Ban Ki-moon must use his access to heads of governments to get nuclear disarmament a higher political priority.

The new leaders of the U.S., Russia, the U.K. and France can all be influenced by Ban Ki-moon. He is excellently placed to also influence China. If the Big 5 can agree on concrete steps, India, Pakistan and Israel will not be far behind. The political prospects for action on nuclear disarmament may well improve in the immediate future.

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