

## SPECIAL COMMENT

Must it get worse before it gets better?

The prospects for nuclear disarmament, which looked promising only a few years ago, seem to be declining today. The START process is almost standing still. India and Pakistan have rejected the strong international norm against nuclear testing. The Conference on Disarmament is deadlocked. The Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty negotiations have not started. The fate of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty is unclear after the surprisingly short-sighted decision of the United States Senate. The serious disagreement between the United States and the Russian Federation on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty also adds an element of risk and uncertainty.

These and other recent developments make the outlook for the approaching Review Conference of the NPT very bad. Many states feel that the agreements made at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, in order to secure the indefinite extension of the NPT, have to a large part not been honoured.

The fact that almost all states are party to the NPT means that they concluded that the best way to attain the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world is to work within the NPT framework. But that conclusion is now being questioned in some capitals. Not much has been delivered since 1995, and the goal is not closer.

It is becoming increasingly clear that shoring up the authority of the non-proliferation regime will be very difficult unless there are steady and progressive reductions of nuclear arsenals. This is not surprising; it follows directly from the 1995 agreements. But it is also clear that in the short time available before the Review Conference, no fundamental change regarding such reductions can be expected.

Yet the seriousness of the situation might create conditions for a reversal. When states are actually staring at the possibility of a slow breakdown of the non-proliferation regime, that in itself might make room for bolder decisions, or even innovative thinking.

In the New Agenda Coalition, we do not pretend to be innovative. There is nothing really new in what we have proposed since our Joint Ministerial Declaration in June 1998, when foreign ministers from eight states (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden) called for a new agenda to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The New Agenda Coalition has tried to move the nuclear disarmament debate towards middle ground. The New Agenda is a call for implementation of a number of measures, some of which can be taken immediately, and some of which can be taken in the near or medium-term future. It is a step-by-step approach, where the steps will reinforce one another. Our resolution contained no deadlines or time-bound frameworks, but proposals that are achievable. The 1999 General Assembly

vote confirmed that the support for those measures is strong — co-sponsorship grew sharply from the 1998 resolution and negative votes decreased.

The members of the New Agenda Coalition naturally respect that some governments may have doubts about one or more of the proposals contained in the New Agenda. We regret that a few governments — very few — believe that the New Agenda is unnecessary (because of the presumed “agreed agenda”), unrealistic, counterproductive, premature or even undermining the NPT.

But those who believe so are fewer than one year ago and it has been clearly demonstrated that there really is a need for a new agenda. It might not have to look exactly as in the General Assembly resolution — but it will not be unnecessary for the simple reason that the “agreed agenda” does not work.

The deadlock must be broken. The bad news is that this is difficult, of course, but the good news is that there are lots of good ideas floating around. Some start from the belief that the abolition of nuclear weapons is currently not a realistic goal. Others are more radical. All deserve close scrutiny.

*The Nuclear Turning Point*, an excellent publication from the Brookings Institution, puts forward a detailed political and technical blueprint for very deep nuclear reductions. Those reductions fall short of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, but they would nevertheless reduce their dangers dramatically and constitute enormous steps in the right direction. The Committee on Nuclear Policy’s *Jump-START: Retaking the Initiative to Reduce Post-Cold War Nuclear Dangers*, published in early 1999, outlines clear and incremental steps to be taken to reduce nuclear dangers. From the 1996 Canberra Commission to the 1998/99 Tokyo Forum, experts from around the globe are actively thinking about how we can achieve a safer world.

There is a whole range of other and earlier studies — *Reducing Nuclear Danger* by then Admiral Crowe and others, and *The Future of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy* by the National Academy of Sciences are two pragmatic American examples that come to mind — that in various ways reflect sincerely upon how the process shall be started. The proposals are often modest, but in this journey the first step is the most important.

It seems almost inconceivable that nuclear weapons can be used — at least as a means of “rational” warfare. Their military value may be smaller than ever since it has been shown so clearly that they present no solution to the conflicts of today. But on the other hand, the actual risk of their use, by miscalculation, accident or desperation in a regional conflict, is probably greater today than in quite some time.

So we must take the first step now. And after that, the challenge is to reach the same political insight regarding nuclear weapons as the one we once reached regarding both chemical and biological weapons — namely that a world without such weapons is a more secure world.

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