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Toward a World without Nuclear Weapons

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Disarmament and arms control is not new. In 1139 at the Second Lateran Council Pope Innocent II outlawed the crossbow, declared it to be “hateful to God and unfit for Christians.” The crossbow was later overtaken in effectiveness by the English longbow. The crossbow and the longbow were then eclipsed by the destructive firepower of the cannon. The Catholic Church also banned the rifle when it appeared, but military technology continued to develop over the centuries, and diplomacy and arms-control efforts could not keep pace.

This changed with the advent of the atomic bomb in 1945. For the first time, a weapon existed with which humanity could destroy itself. Disarmament efforts gradually gained momentum, and over time a web of international treaties and agreements were constructed that have inhibited the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and limited their deployment. There is no question but that these efforts have changed the course of history and made the world safer.

And soon after the end of World War II, as a central symptom of the Cold War, a vast nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union came into being. The United States conducted its first atomic weapon test in July, 1945 and a few weeks later used nuclear weapons against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Soviet Union carried out its first nuclear test in 1949. The bomb used against Hiroshima had an explosive yield of 12.5 kilotons, the equivalent of 12,500 tons of TNT. This weapon completely devastated the city of Hiroshima, killing some 200,000 people out of a total population of approximately 330,000. But with the first thermonuclear weapon tests by the United States and the Soviet Union just a few years later in the early 1950's, nuclear test explosions were in the megaton range- one million tons or more TNT equivalent- roughly 1000 times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

During the Cold War and thereafter, the United States built some 70,000 nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union around 55,000, and at the peak the United States had approximately 32,500 weapons in its stockpile, the Soviet Union some 45,000. And there was a perceived risk that these weapons might simply spread all over the world. During the Kennedy Administration there were predictions that there could be in the range of two dozen nuclear weapon states, with nuclear weapons integrated into their national arsenals by the end of the 1970's. President Kennedy in response to a reporter's question in March of 1963 said "...personally I am haunted by the feeling that by 1970...there may be 10 nuclear powers instead of 4, and by 1975, 15 or 20... I regard that as the greatest possible danger and hazard."

If such anticipated proliferation had in fact happened, there could indeed be significantly more than two dozen nuclear weapon states in the world today. Mohamed El Baradei, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, expressed this concern in 2004 when in a speech in Washington DC, he said, "The danger is so imminent...not only with regard to countries acquiring nuclear weapons but also terrorists getting their hands on some of these nuclear materials- uranium or plutonium." Director General El Baradei said in another speech around the same time that more than 40 countries now had the capability to build nuclear weapons. Thus, under such circumstances with this many nuclear weapon states, potentially every significant conflict could have brought with it the risk of going nuclear, and it might have become extremely difficult to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorist organizations, they would have been so widespread. Illustrating this danger of nuclear weapon proliferation and the threat of terrorist acquisition, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, a scientist not given to exaggeration, has often said that in his judgment nuclear terrorism which could involve a nuclear detonation on U.S. soil is the gravest security threat that the United States faces and this is the case for other developed countries as well.

When President Kennedy became so concerned about nuclear weapon proliferation, the United States had in the range of 22,000 nuclear weapons in its arsenal, the Soviet Union nearly 2,500 and the United Kingdom 50. This total is a smaller number of nuclear weapons than exist in the world today. While from the earliest of days in the nuclear era it had been clear that it was necessary to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, early attempts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons did not succeed. However, after some years the Nuclear Nonproliferation

Treaty, the NPT, was signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. It came to be recognized as the principal reason- along with the parallel extended deterrence policies of the United States and the Soviet Union- that President Kennedy's darkest fears were not realized during the Cold War. Indeed since 1970, at least until now, there has been very little nuclear weapon proliferation. In addition to the five nuclear weapon states recognized by the NPT- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China, three states, India, Pakistan and Israel and perhaps North Korea have built nuclear weapon arsenals- but India and Israel were already well along in 1970. This is far from what had been foreseen in the early 1960's.

But the success of the NPT was no accident. It was rooted in a carefully crafted basic bargain. In exchange for a commitment from the non nuclear weapon states (today more than 180 nations, most of the world) not to acquire nuclear weapons and to submit to international safeguards to verify compliance with this commitment, the NPT nuclear weapon states pledged unfettered access to peaceful nuclear technologies and undertook to engage in nuclear disarmament negotiations aimed at the ultimate elimination of their nuclear arsenals. It is this basic bargain that for the last three decades has formed the central underpinnings of the international non proliferation regime.

However, one of the principal problems with all this has been that the NPT nuclear weapon states have never truly delivered on the disarmament part of this bargain and in recent years it appears to have been largely abandoned. The essence of the disarmament commitment in 1968 and thereafter was that pending the eventual elimination of nuclear weapon arsenals the nuclear weapon states would: agree to a treaty prohibiting all nuclear weapon tests, that is a comprehensive nuclear test ban, a CTBT; negotiate an agreement prohibiting the further production of nuclear bomb explosive, or fissile, material; undertake obligations to drastically reduce their nuclear arsenals; and give legally binding commitments that they would never use nuclear weapons against NPT non-nuclear weapon states. The CTBT is of special importance. There was one specific measure that many non nuclear weapon delegations negotiating the NPT wanted included in the treaty as an objective above all others, a comprehensive nuclear test ban; the idea was that if the nuclear weapon states could not significantly reduce their nuclear weapon stockpiles in the near future, at least they could stop conducting explosive tests of nuclear weapons. Thus, reference to seeking the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons

was included in the treaty text as preambular paragraph 10. Ever since, progress toward the Test Ban has been the litmus test of NPT nuclear weapon state willingness to meet their NPT nuclear disarmament obligations, in the eyes of the non-nuclear weapon states. However, to a large degree, none of these disarmament elements of the basic bargain have been actually accomplished nearly 40 years later. As for the CTBT, it was negotiated and signed in 1996 but a U.S. Senate, in part concerned about security but in part motivated by anti-Clinton sentiments, rejected it in 1999, thereby greatly damaging the NPT and putting aside a treaty overwhelmingly in the security interest of the United States and the world community.

And now the other side of the bargain has begun to fall apart. India and Pakistan eroded the NPT from the outside by each conducting a series of nuclear weapon tests in 1998 and declaring themselves to be nuclear weapon states. India, Pakistan and Israel maintain sizable unregulated nuclear weapon arsenals outside the NPT. North Korea withdrew from the Treaty in 2003, may have produced enough fissile material for eight to ten nuclear weapons and has conducted a nuclear weapon test, which was not, however, successful. Iran is suspected of having a nuclear weapon program and admitted in late 2003 that contrary to its IAEA safeguards agreement it failed to report its acquisition of uranium enrichment technology.

And why might Iran want the nuclear fuel cycle and the attendant option to construct nuclear weapons? The nuclear program is very popular in Iran. It appears that some countries believe that ultimately the only way that they can gain respect in this world, as President Lula of Brazil declared during his first election campaign, is to acquire nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, nuclear weapons distinguished Great Powers from other countries. The permanent members of the Security Council are the five NPT recognized nuclear weapon states. Forty years ago Prime Minister McMillan and President De Gaulle both asserted that great power status was the real reason that Great Britain and France were building nuclear weapons. India declared in 1998 that it was now a big country; it had nuclear weapons. This high political value of nuclear weapons which it was a primary purpose of the NPT to change has in fact not changed since the days of the Cold War.

The NPT is a strategic international political bargain, it is not a gift from the non-nuclear weapon states. It is also, after the United Nations Charter, the centerpiece agreement of

international security. While the Obama Administration nuclear policy must await the December outcome of the Pentagon Nuclear Posture Review, the basic grounding of the Administration was made clear by President Obama in Prague. He said "...together we will strengthen the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as a basis for cooperation. The basic bargain is sound; countries with nuclear weapons will move toward disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them, and all other countries can access peaceful nuclear energy." He also most importantly said "To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same." This is crucial if we are to have progress toward a more secure world.

But few deny that the NPT is in crisis. The question is how long can it remain viable as an unbalanced treaty with one-half of its basic strategic bargain unrealized and the other half unraveling. It is true that the norm of nonproliferation runs deep after forty years. It may be that the NPT can limp along for some years with only limited further proliferation or maybe not. But it could be the case that the world community is on the verge of a new wave of proliferation there are a number of experts who think so, and it will take a strong NPT regime to prevent such a development. It will also take close U.S.-Russian cooperation to prevent further nuclear weapon proliferation.

The United States now has a new Administration committed to negotiated international security arrangements in the nuclear weapon field. For example, the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense are all on record as favoring U.S. ratification of the CTBT. In addition, for the first time senior national security statesmen are advocating the complete worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons. The idea of serious movement toward the elimination of nuclear weapons was eloquently advanced by former Secretaries of State George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry and former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn in their two op-ed articles in the Wall Street Journal in 2007 and 2008, as well as other supporters of the so-called Hoover Institution Process. The two articles evoke President Reagan's view that nuclear weapons are possibly destructive of life on earth and must be abandoned, and note that this objective is even more important in a world where classical nuclear deterrence no longer works and in which international terrorism and rogue states pursuing nuclear weapons are real threats.

The Administration is moving forward with vigor to seek a better relationship with the Russian Federation. Also, the Obama Administration is committed to attempting to achieve a new strategic arms treaty to replace the START I Treaty which expires by its terms- unless renewed- by December of this year. The recent conversation between Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov was encouraging, as was the President's meeting with President Medvedev in London and his statement in Prague. The START I Treaty places a limit on strategic nuclear weapons of 6,000 and the 2002 Agreement lowers by 2012 the operational number of such weapons to between 1700 and 2200. There likely will be an objective in this new round of negotiations of lowering the limit to 1000 weapons overall and perhaps also a restructuring of the START Treaty; for example by changing the counting rules and some of the verification provisions. However, to have a chance of U.S. ratification of a new Treaty by the START I expiration date it must be signed and sent to the Senate by August. Thus there may not be time to do much. Also to achieve ratification all 59 Democrats plus eight Republicans have to support the new treaty. The Republicans in the Congress these days have been opposing everything with unanimity. This may mean that a ceiling of 1500 is as far as the process can go this year, or it may mean that the Administration will try to get the Treaty next year, have a simple extension of the START I Treaty in December and hold to the goal of 1000. This first new step in strategic arms limitation is a highly important goal, but even the number 1000 will still be sizable. Such a numerical level certainly would not imply that nuclear weapons will no longer have a significant role in the security policies of the United States and Russia-which is what is necessary to really help the NPT. Once this new Treaty is concluded, as the President indicated, there will be an effort to engage the other three NPT nuclear weapon states; the United Kingdom, France and China and over time to reach lower levels. The objective of this next phase should be to go levels low enough to make it clear that nuclear weapons truly have been devalued as contemplated by the NPT, thereby significantly strengthening the Treaty regime and hastening the process of moving the world community toward ultimate nuclear weapon elimination. This phase, if it is to be meaningful, may require that the three longtime non NPT states, India, Pakistan and Israel, be somehow brought into the negotiations. It is of course obvious that agreement to very low numbers of nuclear weapons will take a long time but that is where the process should try to go.

However, if the United States could ratify the CTBT, the most important NPT

disarmament obligation by far, which has languished in disarmament obligation of the nuclear weapon states by far, which has languished in the hands of the Senate for over a decade, this would open the door to its subsequent entry into force and reinvigorate the NPT community. President Obama in Prague said that his “Administration will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.” This should be the highest priority of U.S. nuclear policy this year, on this may hang the future viability of the most important international security treaty on the books. A first stage 1000 nuclear weapon level replacement treaty for START will help the NPT, but the second stage is likely years away. If Senate consent to CTBT ratification can be achieved this year, or early next, then ratification by the remaining necessary states permitting CTBT entry into force, in the wake of the U.S. ratification, with some vigorous diplomacy added, perhaps would not take too long. A possible exception would be North Korea but surely creative diplomacy could resolve this issue. China will be important to this process. Unfortunately, the new Administration may be reluctant to even proceed to hearings on the CTBT until “we know we can win,” in view of the defeat in 1999. Senator Kyl of Arizona, one of the two architects of defeat in 1999 remains very active in opposition. And those eight votes have to be found. But success in such a matter is often not knowable in advance, the case will be made in the hearings and the vote taken when the Senate is ready. The case is a strong one, effective verification-the most significant problem in 1999- is without question possible, let us hope the first step, asking for Senate hearings will be taken soon.

Overwhelmingly the best course is to seek ratification of the CTBT soon, before the 2010 elections are too close to have a chance to gain the requisite Republican votes. And while the U.S. National Laboratories likely may have objections as in the past, after 10 years the answers are available. CTBT ratification is very broadly supported by the international community. Over the last six years in the annual votes at the United Nations in favor of world-wide CTBT entry into force, member states have cast 1045 votes in favor of the CTBT and eight against. Of the eight against, six were cast by the United States, one by the tiny Pacific island state of Palau and one by North Korea. That is not a place the United States should want to remain. Vice President Biden, who was Senator Biden in 1999, will contribute greatly through his leadership of the CTBT ratification process.

And one should not overlook the President's emphasis on achieving a fissile material cut off treaty in the near future. This is an original part of the basic NPT bargain dating to 1968. It has been stymied for years by India and Pakistan and lately by U.S. insistence that it is not verifiable. The latter issue will disappear, hopefully the former can be overcome. And the new recognition of securing all at-risk, nuclear material in four years is important to accomplish as well.

But what are the chances of the CTBT or any major nuclear initiative succeeding in the Senate during this time of economic crisis? In being honest one has to admit not good. Economic policy, because the stakes are so high, and because it will be so difficult to return the world community to prosperity after all the damage that has been done, is likely to take all the oxygen out of everything else. However, it is possible for this Administration to do more than one thing at once; it is capable of doing economic policy, strengthening the environment, seeking a national health care system, and addressing the security challenges in Afghanistan/Pakistan and elsewhere as well as pursuing a START Treaty and pressing for CTBT ratification all in the same time frame. The U.S. has a big government. Indeed with its friends and allies it must do these things. History will not stand still in certain areas while other areas are addressed. And in any case many of these issues are fundamentally related.

To remain credible as strongly supporting the NPT in its entirety, not just one side of the basic bargain, it is most important that the United States at a minimum take the first steps toward CTBT ratification before the NPT Review Conference next spring. This Administration should not want to take a chance on "losing" the NPT, and there is a lot of water under this bridge already. As said, the CTBT has been the "litmus test" for the NPT non nuclear weapon states.

No international security treaty exists or is ever likely to exist that is as important to our security as the NPT. The CTBT is essential to its long term viability and extremely valuable in its own right. As President Obama underscored in Prague, both a new START Treaty and CTBT ratification must be promptly and urgently pursued in the interest of peace and security in the 21st century. They are both important first steps on the long road to Global Zero.