

Back to square zero

Miriam Struyk, Jan Gruiters and Jan Pronk

Nuclear disarmament is finally back on the agenda. The international political will to create a world free of nuclear weapons is becoming more pronounced. While some critics view President Barack Obama's call for a nuclear-free world as illusory, analysts, proliferation experts and former statesmen all consider the elimination of nuclear weapons a practical and crucial security requirement.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin wall, nuclear proliferation continues to threaten world peace. Yet the nature of the threat has radically changed. The world has seen the number of nuclear powers expand from five to eight – and with Iran and North Korea's ambitions there may soon be ten.

The *have nots* are becoming impatient with the *haves* not living up to their obligation to disarm. Meanwhile, terrorism has gone global and terrorists are now fiercer in their determination to obtain nuclear weapons. 'Indeed, the more nuclear weapons there are in the world, the more likely it is that the terrorists will get their hands on one', Ivo Daalder, now the US Permanent Representative to NATO, and Jan Lodol stated in their article 'The logic of zero' in *Foreign Affairs*.

In 2009, we witnessed a remarkable resurgence of the will to disarm. Obama's call for a nuclear weapons-free future was followed by similar statements by many of his colleagues. But politicians must turn those pledges into action now. The coming months will define the future of nuclear disarmament in a series of conferences. Negotiations for a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), the Global Summit on Nuclear Security, the US Nuclear Posture Review, the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference and discussion on NATO's Strategic Concept offer major opportunities for concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament.

A relic of the past

New plans for disarmament are emerging at an almost dizzying pace. What, or who pushed the agenda? It began with an op-ed article in the *Wall Street Journal* on 4 January 2007 by four high-level US security veterans – George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn – who became known as the Gang of Four.

Their statement was important because they are no longer advocating drastic reductions alone or minimum deterrence, but instead regard zero nuclear weapons as the only solution. In fact, two-thirds of all living former US secretaries of state and defence and national security advisors now support this proposal. This call for zero sparked off new initiatives and alliances around the world.

In the Netherlands, the IKV Pax Christi peace movement reiterated its call for nuclear disarmament. Statements by other

gangs of four in Western Europe have globalized this call meanwhile. Around 200 US tactical nuclear weapons are still deployed across Europe. But experts and politicians increasingly agree that their deterrence value is a relic of the Cold War past, and not a viable means of ensuring peace in the future. Therefore, the recent German move to eliminate nuclear weapons needs international support. The timing of these kinds of initiatives is crucial. A thorough discussion on the role of nuclear deterrence within the new NATO Strategic Concept is key at this point.

Calls for an end to NATO's nuclear sharing programme illustrate the need for a shift in thinking about the role of deterrence. NATO partners, whether they host nuclear weapons or not, must demonstrate the political determination to choose for a nuclear weapons-free world and re-examine their threat perceptions. Terrorism, fragile states, climate change, access to energy – these are the problems facing NATO countries, and nuclear deterrence does nothing to solve them.

Make me do it

It is thanks to former politicians such as Henry Kissinger that disarmament is back on the table and that the global zero initiative has attained mainstream recognition. All the more reason for the peace movement to support the call for disarmament. Whether we can agree on how to *go zero* remains to be seen, but it is important that activists, academics and others actively support the call itself so we can sustain the new momentum for total disarmament.

The current process may have started from the top down, but we need a vocal, bottom-up process to make a real impact. We need to be active when progress is slow. We need to analyze and if necessary criticize developments and proposals. It is up to global civil society to assume the role of watchdog now. We need to provoke reactions from our leaders similar to that of President Roosevelt, who replied when urged by activists to implement major changes, 'I agree with you, I want to do it, now make me do it'. ■

A longer version of this article can be found at www.thebrokeronline.eu

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