

## Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

by Bill Frilay\*

Two related initiatives are coming together to bring about the opportunity for real action for nuclear weapons non-proliferation and disarmament. This is an opportunity we cannot afford to squander as the consequences of nuclear warfare are simply too horrific. The nuclear threat has not gone away with the end of the Cold War.

The first initiative is a longstanding one. The year 2010 will see the 5-yearly review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which is the cornerstone of an array of treaties about nuclear weapons. The UN Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the NPT review meets this coming May with many major issues to address.



Titan 2 Missile in Museum in Arizona. Photo Kingdafy, flickr

There are still 27,000 nuclear weapons worldwide, and the past 10 years have, if anything, seen a worsening of the problems. For example,

- India and Pakistan have developed as nuclear-armed states outside the NPT;
- serious problems with North Korea and Iran point up the weaknesses of the NPT;
- recent inaction on bilateral treaties between USA and Russia, despite good progress in the 1990s;
- the 9/11 attacks on the United States and the potential for terrorist involvement with nuclear weapons; and
- the continuing risk of nuclear accidents.

There are many difficulties and it will take great diplomacy coupled with goodwill and perseverance to overcome these.

One major problem is the general, simplistic nature of the NPT provisions. For example, these require nuclear weapon states to pursue disarmament but with no time-frame. They have allowed several states to circumvent the Treaty, and have seen some countries violate or withdraw from the Treaty.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) bans all nuclear explosions but it has not been ratified even though it was agreed over a decade ago. India, Pakistan and

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\* Bill Frilay is a member of Social Policy Connections and prepared its submission in February to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. He was also part of the NGO delegation which met with the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament and with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 2 April.

Israel have all defied international pressure to sign the NPT. It is now particularly urgent to establish a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, and strictly to ensure that nuclear material is only used for peaceful purposes.

Australia is preparing for these negotiations, along with 180 states with their many varied and at times competing interests. Fortunately, the United States is at last giving a hopeful lead.

On 5 April, Palm Sunday, President Barack Obama made a momentous speech in Prague. He declared America's commitment to seek peace and security without nuclear weapons. His key points were these:

- America will negotiate a new strategic arms-reduction treaty with Russia this year. President Medvedev and he already had begun the process in London.
- He will 'immediately and aggressively' pursue US ratification of the CTBT to ban the testing of nuclear weapons.
- The US will seek a new treaty with strong verification procedures to end the production of fissile materials intended for use in nuclear weapons.

Hiroshima, Japan, after nuclear attack. Photo monkeyc.net. flickr



Obama continued that 'together, we will strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a basis for cooperation. We need more resources and authority to strengthen international inspections.'

We need real and immediate consequences for countries caught breaking the rules or trying to leave the Treaty without cause. And we should build a new framework for civil nuclear cooperation, including an international fuel bank, so that countries can access peaceful power without increasing the risks of proliferation... Rules must be binding. Violations must be punished.

Obama added that 'we must ensure that terrorists never acquire a nuclear weapon... [and to this end] today, I am announcing a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years.'

Moreover, he said the US will host within the next year a Global Summit on Nuclear Security to break up any illegal trade in nuclear commodities.

President Obama is therefore seeking to address the key weaknesses of the current treaties. His approach is far more active than that of the Bush administration. There will

be many difficulties and, as he readily admits, the process will be long. But the importance of his open declaration of policy and broad agenda, along with his vigorous leadership, is hard to downplay, and will give a huge boost to the negotiations. In effect he is saying to the rest of the world: ‘this is what I am prepared to do, what about you?’

It was an inspiring speech demonstrating leadership and setting a clear policy direction. One day we may look back and say this was a landmark when world leaders got serious about nuclear disarmament. (The speech can be found at <http://i.usatoday.net/news/TheOval/Obama-in-Prague-4-5-2009.pdf>).

But the magnitude of the task and the weaknesses of the present system are illustrated by the UN Security Council still being deadlocked at the time of writing on what sanctions if any would be imposed on North Korea for its recent missile tests.

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