

PEACE THROUGH NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

by Douglas Roche

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What are the real obstacles to global peace? One essential fact we must face is the present impasse on negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons, between the nuclear-weapons states and their allies and the non-nuclear weapons states centered in the non-aligned movement.

The nuclear weapons situation in the world is at a critical stage. Nearly a decade after the end of the cold war, more than 30,000 nuclear weapons remain in the world. No new nuclear negotiations are taking place; the Conference on Disarmament is paralyzed. The Russian Duma, fearing NATO's expansion, has not ratified START II; START III is immobilized. In a recent visit to Moscow, I learned that some politicians and militarists, concerned about Russia's crumbling conventional force structure, are once again talking of nuclear weapons as a vital line of defense for Russia. Even if START II were ratified, at least 17,000 nuclear weapons would still remain in 2007.

Despite the indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a new technology race in the quest for more innovative and lethal nuclear weapons has broken out. William Arkin, a contributing editor of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, writes, "Despite pledges to the contrary, a wide variety of nuclear weapons are under development in the United States." The Natural Resources Defense Council states: "The US government clearly intends to maintain under the CTBT, and indeed significantly enhance, its scientific and technical capabilities for undertaking development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons."

Under the designation "Stockpile Stewardship Program," the US has begun "sub-critical" nuclear weapons tests to improve the reliability and efficiency of nuclear weapons. New nuclear weapons projects include: an Earth-penetrating bomb, B61-11, capable of ultra-low yields; a replacement for current Trident submarine-launched warheads, the Trident missile itself, plus the development of a new submarine; a high-powered radio-frequency warhead to be used to take out a nation's electronic systems; a nuclear warhead for theater defense missiles, designed to intercept and incinerate biological and chemical warheads.

The nuclear weapons laboratory programs are being funded by a dramatic expansion in annual US weapons budgets, which after their initial post-cold war decline are now expected to rise by 33 percent; the program will cost \$60 billion over a 13-year period. In addition, the US has tested a new superlaser weapon capable of destroying satellites in space as well as incoming missiles. It has also launched into outer space the Cassini rocket, carrying 72.3 pounds of plutonium-235 fuel, the largest amount of plutonium ever used in space. The plutonium is intended to be used to generate electricity to run instruments on satellites. But these new technologies are also developing immensely powerful space weapons to disable targets in space or on the ground. France is now preparing "sub-critical" tests. Iran is

gathering the materials for a nuclear weapon. Only a special enforcement unit of the Security Council prevents Iraq, at this time, from developing a nuclear weapon. All this activity is clearly against the spirit, if not the letter, of the CTBT and is undermining the NPT.

Since the US so clearly intends to keep producing better-designed nuclear weapons and weapons for future space warfare, there is virtually no hope that other nations will forgo seeking the technology to allow them to keep up with this race. The world is poised to enter the 21st century in a "cold peace" atmosphere in which the CTBT will go unratified by some of the required states and the NPT will begin to unravel. A growing number of non-nuclear states (e.g. Mexico, Malaysia, Egypt) are resentful at the nuclear powers' flouting of their obligations to the NPT. This will result in a weakening of the international commitment to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. India recently complained in the UN First Committee: "Mere non-proliferation treaties have been promoted as disarmament measures to serve this nuclear monopoly and perpetuate inequality."

The continued retention of nuclear weapons by the five permanent members of the Security Council, who insist they are essential to their security and that of their allies, while denying the same right to others, is inherently unstable. This is an essential point made by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), whose unanimous call for successful nuclear weapons negotiations continues to be ignored by the Western nuclear weapons states and the bulk of NATO. The ICJ delegitimized nuclear weapons as a war-fighting strategy; a majority of states in the UN have called for negotiations to begin on a Nuclear Weapons Convention. These calls, abetted by the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and the statement by former generals and admirals, go unheeded.

Those nuclear weapons states resisting such negotiations must now be challenged, for in clinging to their outmoded rationales for nuclear deterrence, they are flying in the face of the most ardent aspirations of humanity as well as the opinion of the highest legal authority in the world. The gravest consequences for humankind lie ahead if the world is to be ruled by the militarism represented by nuclear weapons rather than the humanitarian law espoused by the ICJ. Nuclear weapons are incompatible with the peace we seek for the 21st century. The rationale for their maintenance has evaporated; there is not a single legal, military or moral argument left to justify their retention. There is only the political argument: nuclear weapons confer power. Power is needed to dominate the international political, economic and military agendas. Ask Boutros Boutros-Ghali if this is not so.

The undermining of the NPT does not mean nothing can be done. Indeed, the net is closing on the unrestricted escalation of nuclear weapons. The Abolition 2000 campaign reflects the pressure mounted by growing numbers of people in civil society. But it will take respected nations, standing up in the international community for what they believe in, to influence the agenda of the nuclear weapons states.