

## **Thinking the Unthinkable on Nuclear Policy**

It's become commonplace to say we can't put the nuclear genie back in the bottle. There's a grain of truth to this, but it doesn't mean we can't still make complete nuclear disarmament a reality.

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In late September, President Obama chaired the UN Security Council as it adopted an unprecedented resolution on non-proliferation and global nuclear disarmament, vague on the details perhaps, but nonetheless a symbolic first step toward a world without nuclear weapons. It was a down payment on pledges Obama made in Prague in April, when he spoke of America's commitment to nuclear disarmament, saying we "must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change." It didn't take long for those voices to chime. Three days after the Security Council resolution, the North Korean government fulminated that giving up its nuclear weapons was "unthinkable, even in a dream."

So who's naïve and who's behind the times? Should we ignore North Korea's naysaying? Should we dismiss President Obama's ambition as a "dream" and be skeptical about the Nobel Committee awarding its peace prize to him for it? Neither; we should take both positions seriously.

Abolition of nuclear weapons has indeed been an elusive dream ever since the birth of the atomic age in 1945. The very first resolution of the United Nations called for controlling nuclear weapons, then Cold War arsenals grew to the equivalent of 200,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs. At the end of the Cold War, Reagan and Gorbachev agreed on the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world, but amid the complications of atypical military forces and alliance structures, failed to agree on a path to it. Since then the situation has gotten more complex, with nuclear weapons proliferating to India, Pakistan and North Korea while other countries like Iran may be moving towards nuclear weapons capacity.

Most recently, President Obama has taken some serious steps forward, commencing negotiations with Russia on stockpile reductions, kick-starting deliberations at the Conference on Disarmament (the world's multilateral disarmament negotiating body) after a 12 year hiatus, and initiating steps towards Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Skeptics may be right in asking whether this amounts to any real change to the nuclear status quo or indicates any real hope for a nuclear-weapons-free world. A 'realist' might argue that nuclear deterrence is the indispensable guarantor of modern State security. On the other hand, the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world has been recently endorsed by such realists as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson, former German Federal Minister Egon Bahr, former Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema and former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser.

Why have they come to support it? Perhaps it's a strategic calculation -- the realization that the

status quo, where a few countries try to maintain their elite position of possessing nuclear weapons while denying them to others, is unsustainable. Perhaps it's pragmatism -- the recognition that in today's interconnected world, the borders and territorially-based wealth, which nuclear weapons were designed to protect, now barely exist.

I like to think of it as a question of ethics -- an admission that some of the laws which apply to resolving conflicts in the sandbox also apply at the international level -- that fairness should prevail, bullying is not allowed, toys should be shared and everyone needs to feel loved and respected. The best way to deal with a bully is not to punish but to resolve -- to draw a firm line against inappropriate behavior, but also to search for the reasons behind that behavior and address those.

This tough-love approach could work with countries of nuclear proliferation concern. It's appropriate to be tough and draw a line against the nuclear weapons programs of India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea - and against the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons. But one must also listen to them, cultivate some empathy and receptivity in order to understand the reasons these countries are pursuing nuclear programs, and find ways to resolve them. Perceived lack of security, unfairness or disrespect may drive governments to nuclearize. But they all can be overcome.

In the case of North Korea, assurances that they will not be attacked and some additional aid would be effective. North Korea is unlikely to return to the 1993 agreement on the demilitarization of the Korean Peninsula, but if it were no longer under current nuclear-threat postures from Japan and South Korea pursuant to their military alliance with the United States, it could be willing to join a North East Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, as recently proposed by the governing party in Japan.

With Iran, a regional equity approach could work. Iran has resisted giving up uranium enrichment and other proliferation-sensitive activities while other countries including Israel practice them. The proposal of Hans Blix, former United Nations Chief Inspector in Iraq, for a regional moratorium on such activities might be acceptable to Iran -- especially if it is put forward as a stepping stone towards a Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

India nuclearized for international status, after decades of pushing unsuccessfully for a global ban on nuclear weapons. Pakistan, also a supporter of a global nuclear weapons ban, simply followed suit. Neither is likely to denuclearize now, unless the other nuclear-weapons-possessors agree to a global ban. But if they did, it's likely India and Pakistan would join them.