

Global Zero: World without Nuclear Weapons

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“This is the moment to begin the work of seeking the peace of world without nuclear weapons” (Barak Obama)

Man has achieved tremendous progress in developing scientific technology for the welfare and well-being of humanity, but simultaneously, he has also developed weapons for his own destruction. To acquire power—the most flagrant of all passions—he created weapons including explosive, chemical, biological and nuclear. Among them, the nuclear weapons are the most destructive causing mass destruction. Though, these have been used once in history during the World War-II, these have created a perpetual fear of annihilation among all humans. Now, with the evolving of a multi-cultural globalised world, there is an increase in momentum to develop a consensus for achieving Global Zero—elimination of all nuclear weapons. To succeed in this initiative, the need is to sit together, contemplate, devise a strategy and agree to divert this capability from weapons to welfare of humanity. The most resounding argument,



generating urge to achieve this surpassable task lies in the brief history of apocalyptic perils of nuclear weapons.

The perils of atomic weapons were manifest as the two cities of Japan were wreaked when the bombs were dropped on them. In Hiroshima, some 75,000 people were immediately killed by blast, fire and radiation. Another 70,000 died by the end of 1945. Three days later in Nagasaki, plutonium bomb killed about 40,000 people immediately, another 75,000 died by the end of 1945. Five days after Nagasaki's flattening, Japan surrendered. But the impact didn't stop there. Thousands people died in following years due to radiation. Tens of thousands became disabled. Not only the people present at the time suffered but the 'unborn' as well. Thousands others were born with deformities and genetic disorders due to which successive generations have suffered.

The Americans and Japanese learned different lessons from these bombings. "The Americans lesson was; the nuclear weapons win wars, and therefore have value. The Japanese learned that human being and nuclear weapons cannot co-exist." (David Krieger, President Nuclear Age Peace Foundation). However, the danger posed by nuclear weapons today is far greater than the destruction they caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Today, the number of nuclear weapons around the world is about 30,000 bombs with far greater weight and destruction power. Even a fraction of these weapons could put an end to human as well as other species on our planet. It is clear that if we don't achieve 'Global Zero', our planet is always at risk, of being converted into a 'Ground Zero'. This could happen not only due to a deliberate act but also accidental incident. Therefore, there is a strong reason that 'these weapons must be abolished before they abolish us'.

The need to eliminate nuclear weapons is not only because these can be used for destruction in war but also because they pose equal danger in times of peace. There have been "Close Calls" to annihilation in various occasions. [In 1995] President Boris Yeltsin was informed that a nuclear missile was speeding towards the heart of Russia. Russian nuclear forces, already on hair-trigger alert, were put in even higher alert. Russian policy called for a "launch on warning". The fate of the planet hung in the balance. Yeltsin wisely waited. And within those moments, the alarm declared false. "An unimaginable nuclear disaster had

barely been avoided”, declared America’s Defense Monitor, Center for Defence Information, December 26, 1999.

Another, important incident took place in the US on August 31, 2007. Air Force crew loaded six live nuclear warheads onto a 8-52 Bomber and flew from ‘Minot Air Force Base’ in North Dakota to ‘Barksdak Air Force Base’ in cruising over the country’s heartland (Around 15 states). Each warhead was 10 times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In analysis report, America’s Defence science Board (DSB) revealed that ‘six of the planet’s most powerful weapons were missing and no one noticed until they had landed in Louisiana after flight of 3 ½ hours.’ The report concluded that ‘human error was at the heart of the incident.’

This incident underscores the risk of accidental nuclear explosion threat due to ‘human error’ even in the country of its origin and in the ‘peace times’. It is important to note that this incident occurred in the US, which claims to employ world’s best safety standards for nuclear weapons. While the US itself keeps expressing concern over the safety of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal.

It is learnt from these incidents that the humanity is at the risk of just single human error, if the nuclear weapons exist in the world. Therefore, wisdom calls for elimination of all nuclear weapons in order to make the future of humanity—our generation and our future generations – safe and secure.

In addition, the Cold War which was the pushing force behind nuclear race has ended two decades ago. Also due to the interdependence of states in the current scenario, there is unlikeness of revival of such conflicts.

Moreover, the presence of nuclear weapons in some states provides reason and pretext for other ambitious nations to acquire the same status. This unwise race has itself caused devastating effects on economy and human development, particularly in developing countries.

One of the major world powers, the USSR too, collapsed under the heavy burden of extraordinary defence spending on economy. The developing countries like India, Pakistan, and North Korea also joined the race. They did succeed in acquiring nuclear weapons but their poor population is suffering



from abject poverty. A country like Pakistan, which is merely surviving at the edge of economic insolvency, could gain much economic growth, had the resources been utilised for the welfare of people. Iranians are bearing the sanctions imposed by western powers through the UN for pursuing nuclear technology, which according to them, is aimed at acquiring weapons.

Besides, the argument to possess nuclear weapons to maintain deterrence capability has also lost its ground. More the states acquire ‘nukes’, more the risk of their use builds-up. Moreover, the presence of nukes always poses risk of slipping into the hands of terrorists. Admiral Noel Gayler, a former commander-in-chief of the Pacific Command of US Navy, asks, “Is difference of nuclear weapons still possible?” He answers, “No”. He also questions, “Does nuclear disarmament imperil our security?” He answers, “No, it enhances it.” As human – beings are fallible, deterrence is not a perfect system. It can be failed by human error, accident, miscalculation or simply miscommunication. “Does it make sense to risk the future of our cities and even the human species on an unprovable theory?”, David Krieger, founder of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

This is why, fortunately, the initiative of achieving peace of the world without nuclear weapons is gaining support among both the senior military and the political leaders of the world. The increasing number of leaders have realised what Abraham Lincoln said, “We must think anew and act anew.” Recently many world leaders have expressed willingness to move towards this goal. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said in March 2008 that the UK was ready to work for “a world that is free from nuclear weapons.” On December 5, 2008, Nicholas Sarkozy, the French President, while holding EU Presidency, wrote a letter to UN General Secretary, outlining an EU plan to advance global progress toward nuclear disarmament.

In order to seize this positive trend, to achieve the commitment of the entire international community, and to re-energise effort for complete nuclear disarmament, a new initiative “Global Zero” was launched on December 9, 2008, in Paris. The initiative was endorsed by 100 international political, military, business and civic leaders across the world. The signatories included former US President Jimmy Carter, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, former British Foreign Secretary Margaret Becket, Queen Noor of Jordan,



Ehasnul Haq, former Joint Chief of the Staff committee (JCSC) of Pakistan, former Indian National Security advisor Brajes Mishra.

Global Zero envisages eliminating nuclear weapons through phased and verified reduction over a period of years. Key steps include:

- Massive reduction in Russian-US arsenal.
- Complete elimination to zero by all states.
- Establishing verification system to keep check.
- International management of the fuel cycle.

There are many positive indicators which indicate why this goal is achievable. First; there is a strong historical support. Throughout the nuclear age, even at the height of the Cold War, leaders foresaw a day when the world could be free of nukes. In 1986, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan agreed that: “A nuclear war could never be won and must never be fought.” In 1999, Chinese President Jiang Zemin stated: “There is no reason why nuclear weapons should not be comprehensively banned and completely destroyed.”

Second; as Jiang Zemin had emphasised in his statement, ‘What it takes to reach this objective is no more than a strong political will.’ The world leaders agree with the idea of a world without nukes and have the means to achieve it. What they only need is the ‘Political will’. Some analysts argue that even if the major world powers agree to eliminate nuclear weapons, country like Iran might not agree to abandon its ambition. Though Iran’s nuclear weapon ambitions is a fallacy, there is a strong reason why Iran would follow the course. “If there is growing support by nuclear powers and public opinion worldwide, I think it becomes harder for any government, including Iran, to cross that barrier”, said Richard Burt, who was Washington’s Chief negotiator in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) talks in the early 1990s. Naturally, no country can afford to be on the one side and whole of the world on the other.

Third; there is a strong support among majority of the people around the world. A poll of 21 countries conducted by Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), USA, shows that global public opinion is overwhelmingly in favours of an international agreement for eliminating all nuclear weapons. 76 per cent of

respondents, across all countries polled, favour such an agreement. As the public opinion tends to direct the policies of governments, it is likely that the leaders would come to the table.

Fourth; at this time particular, there is a new and great opportunity. US President Barak Obama and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin have signalled to work on nuclear disarmament. The former declared, “This is the moment to begin the works of seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons.” Similarly, Russian Prime Minister Putin expressed in a speech in September 2008 to “Close this Pandora’s Box”.

This new and unprecedented political support from the heads of the world’s most important governments’ for zero nuclear weapons has made this goal possible. This moment offers both the possibilities and dangers. Possibilities; because of new leadership in the US which appears to support the goal of nuclear abolition. Dangers; because, if this moment passes without action, then the nuclear-race could quickly gather pace with many more states acquiring weapons and the risk of weapons falling into the hands of terrorists would increase.

This opportunity must be seized. It is the time for a new beginning to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. This moment calls for embracing possibilities and dispelling dangers. The phased and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons is possible. Here are some of the steps needed to achieve this goal:

Firstly; the ratification of Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The NPT, which was sponsored by the US, UK and the USSR, was aimed “to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapon technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament”. The treaty was signed by 187 states and was ratified in 1975. However, the US, its sponsors, did not ratify it. Other four countries which have not signed it are: India, Pakistan, Israel and Cuba. Similarly, CTBT, introduced in 1995, has not been ratified by many states, including the US. It is strongly felt that if the US ratifies these treaties, others would follow the course. “Early the US ratification would do much to encourage the few remaining states to follow suit,” wrote David Miliband, UK’s former Foreign Secretary, in The Washington Post on December 8, 2008.

Secondly; negotiations between Washington and Moscow should start to cut back nuclear stockpiles to minimum. According to moderate estimates, the US and Russia have about 26000 of total 27000 weapons in the world. As both these states possess largest stockpiles—96 per cent of all the nuclear weapons in the world—they should reduce their arsenal in the first step. “Process needs to start with American and Russian leaderships”, argues Richard Burt.

This is an absolutely insensible approach to accumulate that much big arsenal that fraction of which can destroy the whole world. “When a country can be destroyed by a dozen weapons, its own possession of thousands of weapons gains no security”, says Admiral Noel Gayler. The huge possession of nukes itself puts larger responsibility on the US and Russia to initiate the process of disarmaments up to minimum level. The successful conclusion of ‘START NEW’ between both powers strengthens the possibility of reaching an agreement on nuclear disarmament.

Thirdly; following the reductions by the US and Russia, the rest of the countries can be brought on board for complete abolition of nukes. It would not be a difficult task. Once the powerful countries lead the course, rest will follow them. Perhaps others seem poised to welcome such move. The willingness of China, the UK and France has already been mentioned. The two South Asian countries India and Pakistan are also ready to shun the nukes. Last June, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, backed the same goal, saying that: “The only effective form of nuclear disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons is global disarmament.” President Zardari has also talked of “nuclear weapon-free South Asia”. North Korea is already on-board in six-party talks and has also committed to abolish nuclear weapons for economic incentives. The only country which has stayed silent is Israel which is undeclared nuclear state. But given the leverage, Washington enjoys over it, Israel will have to be part of the process.

Once this process sets in momentum, the weapons could be delivered to a single and common remote place in oceans for dismantling under the supervision of skilled scientists. The nuclear material could be returned to the donors for use in the energy sector or disposal.

Lastly, having achieved the complete and verified elimination of nuclear weapons from the world, all the countries will have to conclude a joint treaty at the UN platform banning any development of nuclear weapons and technology. As Queen Noor of Jordan told BBC, “We have to work on de-legitimising the status of nuclear weapons.” This is vital for making the elimination of nukes irreversible. This would require establishing many mechanisms to constitute an eventual regime for overseeing the global ban.

It is also important to realise that advantage of use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes is too great to be ignored. The NPT also underscores ‘to promote cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy’. And, every country has the right to acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. But given the element of conflict in international affairs and atmosphere of mistrust, all the countries can’t be trusted as reliable for not pursuing the ambitions of acquiring nuclear weapons again. This situation warrants a new approach, which would allow the use of nuclear energy and deny the weapons technology.

The Global Zero initiative envisages ‘international management of the fuel cycle to prevent future development of nuclear weapons.’ “An agreement on a new International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) led system that would help states wishing to develop a civil nuclear energy industry to do so without increasing the risk of nuclear weapon proliferation” says David Miliband. Creation of such international fuel bank would also end the conflicts in the world like Iran Nuclear Issue. This proposal was also forwarded by IAEA’s former head Muhammad Elbradi as early as in 2003, that: “all production and processing of nuclear material be under international control”. This novel idea has attracted the EU and an American billionaire ‘Warren Buffett’ for financing the project.

In this way, the world could not only be safe from destruction and the humanity from annihilation, but the tremendous energy potential of the nuclear resources could also be utilised for the welfare of people. The resources that go into weapons would help keep people safe and healthy and to give them opportunities. Not only the world is facing energy crisis due to depletion of fossil fuels, but with their emissions our environment is being damaged severely. Nuclear power possesses tremendous energy and simultaneously it is clean energy. It is important for health purposes as it is used in the treatment of



many diseases, including cancer. Its use in agriculture enhances crop yield which would help mitigate the food crisis.

Global Zero offers two-pronged benefits: achieving safety by eliminating nuclear weapons and to achieve prosperity by using nuclear energy. The leaders of world have the greatest moral responsibility to seize the opportunity for the welfare of the living and the future generations of mankind. As Benazir Bhutto said, “We owe it to our children to build a world free of the threat of nuclear annihilation.”