

**The Unthinkable Becomes Thinkable:
Towards Elimination of Nuclear Weapons**
By Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Lech Wałęsa

The meeting of US and Russian presidents has prompted us to speak out about the global abolition of nuclear arms. The urgency can hardly be exaggerated: nuclear weapons may come into the possession of states that might use them as well as stateless terrorists—creating new threats of unimaginable proportion.

A noble dream just several years ago, the elimination of nuclear arms is no longer the idea of populists and pacifists; it is now a call of professionals—politicians known for their sense of realism and academics for their sense of responsibility.

An inspiration to discuss a world free from nuclear peril came from a statement by four US statesmen, two Democrats and two Republicans. In ‘A World Free of Nuclear Weapons’ (*Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2007), former US secretaries of state George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, former defence secretary William Perry, and former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Sam Nunn proposed several measures in pursuit of this goal. A year later, in another article expanding their initiative, they used this metaphor: “[T]he goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is like the top of a very tall mountain. From the vantage point of our troubled world today, we can't even see the top of the mountain, and it is tempting and easy to say we can't get there from here. But the risks from continuing to go down the mountain or standing pat are too real to ignore. We must chart a course to higher ground where the mountaintop becomes more visible” (*WSJ*, Jan. 15, 2008).

These words provoked an avalanche of support from leading figures on the British political scene, from Italian politicians from the left, centre and right, and eminent figures on the German political scene, whether Social Democrats, Christian Democrats or Liberals.

In January 2009, 130 world politicians and scientists gathered in Paris to sign the Global Zero Declaration. Elsewhere, the governments of Australia and Japan established an International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. Leading research centres in all corners of the globe are

working on reports to provide arguments for a political decision on the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

We are now adding our voice from Poland, a country tested by the atrocities of World War II, and familiar with the nuclear threats of the Cold War period. A country heavily affected by the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl.

This growing concern mirrors the perception of new threats and risks. The invention of nuclear weapons—which served the goal of deterrence during the Cold War, with the world divided into two opposing blocks—answered the needs and risks of the time. Security rested on a balance of fear, as reflected in the concept of mutual assured destruction. In that bipolar world, nuclear weapons were held by only five global powers, permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Today the global picture is different. Sparked by the Solidarity movement in Poland, the erosion of communist systems in Central and Eastern Europe led to our region's new "Springtime of the Peoples". With the Warsaw Pact dissolved and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the bipolar world and its East-West divide vanished. And the hope for a better future came to our hearts.

An order based on the dangerous doctrine of mutual deterrence, was not, however, replaced with a system founded on cooperation and interdependence. Destabilization and chaos followed, accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability. Nuclear weapons are now also held by three states in conflict: India, Pakistan and Israel. Given the development of the nuclear programmes in North Korea and Iran, both these countries may also become nuclear-weapon states, and there is a real danger that this group may further expand to include states where governments will not always be guided by rational considerations. There is also the risk that nuclear weapons may fall into the hands of non-state actors, such as extremists from terrorist groupings.

We share the view that an effective non-proliferation regime will not be possible unless the major nuclear powers, especially the USA and Russia, take urgent steps towards nuclear disarmament. Together, they hold nearly 25,000 nuclear warheads—96% of the global nuclear arsenal.

It gives us hope that US President Obama recognizes these dangers. We note with satisfaction that the new US administration has not turned a deaf ear to voices from statesmen and scientists. The goal of a nuclear-free world was

incorporated in the US administration's arms control and disarmament agenda. We appreciate the proposals from the UK, France and Germany. Russia has also signaled recently in Geneva its readiness to embark upon nuclear disarmament.

Opponents of nuclear disarmament used to argue that this goal was unattainable in the absence of an effective system of control and verification. But today appropriate means of control are available to the international community. Of key importance are the nuclear safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The world must have guarantees that civilian nuclear reactors will not be used for military purposes – a condition for non-nuclear-weapon states' unrestricted access to nuclear technologies as proposed recently Prime-Minister Brown in his initiative on *A global nuclear bargain for our times*. This is specially urgent at the present time, with the search for new energy sources and a “renaissance” of nuclear power.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference calls for an urgent formulation of priorities. The Preparatory Committee will meet in New York this May, and this is where the required decisions should be made. The main expectations are for a reduction of nuclear armaments, a cutback in the number of launch-ready warheads (de-alerting), negotiations on a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty, ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, and other means of strengthening practical implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, especially its universal adoption.

The time has come for a fundamental change in the proceedings of the Geneva-based Disarmament Conference. It has for years failed to meet the international community's expectations.

We share the expectation expressed by the academics, politicians and experts of the international Warsaw Reflection Group, convened under auspices of the Polish Institute of International Affairs in co-operation with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that consideration should be given to the zero option as a basis for a future multilateral nuclear disarmament agreement. The Group's report, *Arms Control Revisited: Non-proliferation and Denuclearization*, elaborated under chairmanship of Adam D.Rotfeld of Poland and drafted by British scholar Ian Anthony of SIPRI was based on contributions made by security analysts from nuclear powers and Poland as well as from countries previously in possession of nuclear weapons (South Africa) and countries where they had been stored: post-Soviet

armouries were located in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. The fact that these new states were denuclearized as part of the Safe and Secure Disarmament programme provides a valuable lesson.

Today we have to set the process of gradual nuclear disarmament in motion. It will not produce results overnight but would give us a sense of direction, a chance to strengthen non-proliferation mechanisms, and an opportunity to establish a global, cooperative non-nuclear security system.

The deadliest threat to global security comes from a qualitatively new wave of nuclear proliferation. The heaviest responsibility is shouldered by the powers that hold the largest arsenals. We trust that the presidents of the USA and Russia, and leaders of all other nuclear powers will show statesmanlike wisdom and courage, and that they will begin the process of freeing the world from the nuclear menace. For a new international security order, abolishing nuclear weapons is as important as respect for human rights and the rights of minorities and establishing in the world a governance based on rule of law and democracy.

Aleksander Kwaśniewski was Polish president between 1995 and 2005; Tadeusz Mazowiecki was prime minister in the first non-communist government of Poland (1989-1990); Lech Wałęsa, leader of the Solidarity movement and Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1983), was Polish president between 1990 and 1995.