

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL ZERO

– Jayantha Dhanapala

There is, unquestionably – and long overdue twenty years after the Cold War ended – a revitalized global movement, both at popular and policy levels, for a nuclear weapon free world. The Global Zero Action Plan (GZAP) is a means of deepening and widening this movement in order to achieve its implementation. But the delicate gossamer of hope is no substitute for the hard reality of achievement.

So how do we translate rhetoric into reality? How do we build commitment?

Firstly, the Plan envisages two categories of nations – nuclear weapon countries and nuclear capable countries. However the vast majority of states belong to the category of non nuclear weapon countries that have neither nuclear weapons nor nuclear power for peaceful purposes. Some of them, under pressure from climate change, may be driven to nuclear power through the current demand to seek non-carbon emitting sources of energy. This “nuclear renaissance” would have no risks of nuclear weapon proliferation if nuclear weapons were outlawed under a system of verification. The citizens of these countries – many of them in the developing global south including the ‘bottom billion’ – see their economic development and their breakout from the poverty trap through the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. They will become practical beneficiaries of nuclear weapon abolition freeing them from any suspicion of nuclear weapon proliferation in accessing nuclear power.

Let us also not forget that national security must be linked to human security on a global basis.

Secondly, the Action Plan, as it stands, consists of four phases over a time span of twenty years. It has rightly been pointed out that bilateral US-Russian nuclear arms agreements also took several years to negotiate. Multilateral agreements too, like the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, took several years to be negotiated in the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament. The credibility of a process lies not so much in the period of time it takes but in the goal and the sincere commitment of the parties in the negotiation to this goal.

That is why a Nuclear Weapon Convention (NWC), aimed at the outlawing of the only category of weapons of mass destruction that has not been abolished, must be the framework for the GZAP. If nations embark on the negotiation of a NWC now – either in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) or in a special diplomatic conference – and ensure that the national security interests of all nations – nuclear weapon and non-nuclear weapon – are safeguarded equally in a nuclear weapon free world, we would be more likely to win global commitment to the process.

The NWC as an achievable objective is already gaining a groundswell of grass-root support in the world. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made it a part of his 5-point nuclear disarmament plan and several Governments and NGOs in civil society have endorsed it as a goal. There has to be a merging of the GZAP and the NWC to build international commitment. That is what I propose here.

Already at this Summit we have wisely ensured the participation of youth. This must continue. A campaign using Lawrence Bender's remarkable film "Countdown to Zero" and other educational and visual aids must sweep across the world. Other groups like women, trade unions, scientific associations, professional groups and other components of civil society must be informed of the issues involved.

Disarmament education is an important process to achieve this task. The UN already has a programme and if more resources are devoted to this we will see a campaign to make the GZAP gather more support.

The trade-off between global military expenditure and economic development is more compelling as an argument at a time when the world is struggling to recover from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The world spends \$ 1464 billion on military expenditure in one year with the US accounting for 41.5% of that. This translates into \$ 217 per person per year in a world where one billion live on less than \$ 1.25; where one in six fellow human beings go hungry every day and where a child dies every six seconds through malnutrition. An estimated \$ 90 billion is spent on nuclear weapons programme and Vice-President Biden still wants to spend \$ 600 million more on maintaining a credible nuclear weapon stockpile. Meanwhile the World Bank estimates that it will cost \$ 40-60 billion to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

We have specific occasions to ensure a commitment to Global Zero. There is the Washington Nuclear Security Summit in April. In May the NPT Review Conference takes place in New York. The CD in Geneva and the First Committee of the UN General Assembly are also logical for a for the GZAP o receive a commitment from governments.

The Nuclear Posture Review of the US and the nuclear doctrines of other nuclear weapon states and NATO must reflect a commitment to Global Zero by de-emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons in their defence strategies and adopting a road map to nuclear weapon elimination to which a commitment was already made at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs – built in 1957 on the foundation of the Einstein-Russell Manifesto – has campaigned for a nuclear weapon free world for several decades. Others have also fought long and hard for the same goal. Now is the time for all forces to join together. In Milan last week Pugwash adopted a document that contained important steps to mobilize an international commitment to global zero.

Phased programmes have an inbuilt danger of converting their goals into mirages. The use of phrases like “the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons” is no way to gain commitment. The goal must be seen to be immediate and real. We cannot also achieve this goal by spending more money on nuclear weapons in order to have a credible deterrent while calling at the same time for zero nukes. This is actually “anti-nuclear nuclearism” – the double-speak that has dominated the nuclear disarmament dialogue for decades. Let us make a clean break from that by being sincere in our commitment and action.

As Secretary Schultz has reminded us, we missed a glorious opportunity to achieve global zero at Reykjavik in 1986. Richard Rhodes has immortalized this moment in history in his new play “Reykjavik”. Let us not lose this fresh opportunity we now have almost a quarter of a century later. The achievement of Global Zero is too important to sacrifice at the altar of domestic politics whether in the US or anywhere else.

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