

The vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world was most famously dismissed by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as being "pie in the sky" – such was the derision which greeted the disarmament scenario championed by governments, especially the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as non-governmental organisations such as Pugwash. It is, therefore, a revolutionary change to note senior officials in former US Administrations combine to write – not one, but two – Op-Eds in the conservative Wall Street Journal, calling for precisely such 'pie in the sky'.

In the past, other senior members of US Administrations – such as Robert McNamara and retired military top brass like General Lee Butler – have also experienced their epiphanies and recanted erstwhile views on nuclear weapons.

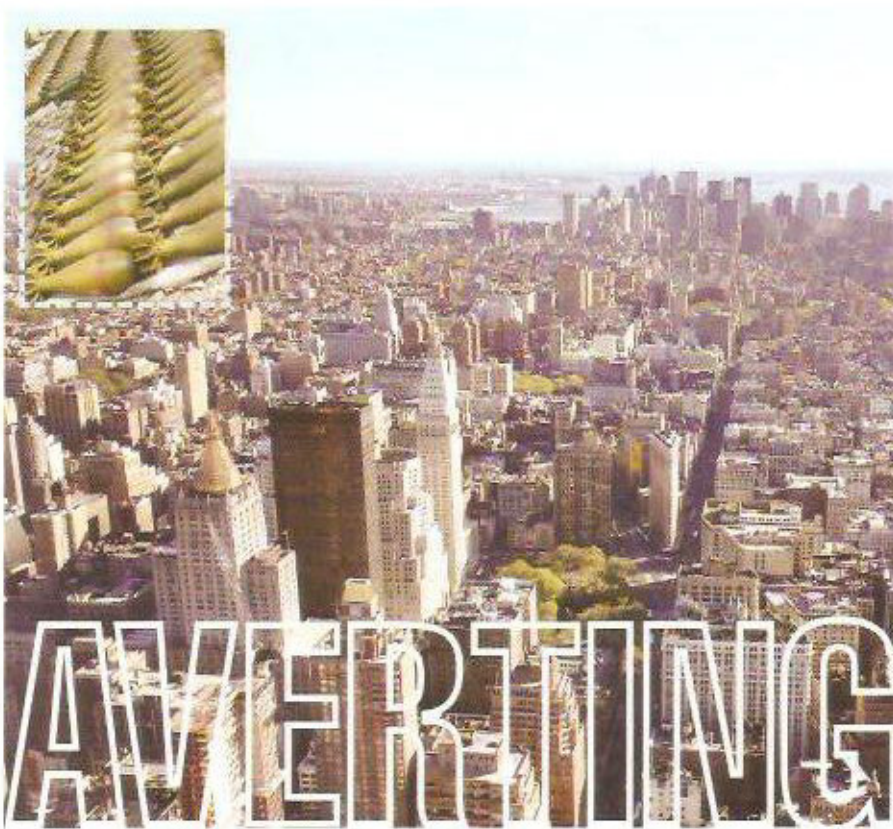
What distinguishes this year-long initiative by George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Samuel Nunn Jr. and William Perry is the fact that they have been able to gather a number of distinguished US individuals – such as Madeleine Albright, James Baker III, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Warren Christopher and General Colin Powell – behind them, with a group of scholars at Stanford University's Hoover Institution providing the scientific expertise.

The influence of this extraordinary initiative is beginning to percolate the campaigns for the US presidential elections and the policies of other countries like the UK. At the end of February, the Norwegian Government hosted a meeting of global experts in Oslo to take the initiative further.

A major aim of the initiative is to make the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world into "a joint enterprise". The need for broader support is obvious. Not only do many of the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) and NATO retain policies for the first use of nuclear weapons, but some also have plans for pre-emptive strikes and the construction of new weapons with the specific intent of violating the taboo in existence since the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that has long stood as a bulwark against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and represented a hope for nuclear disarmament is now in grave jeopardy. There are no ongoing negotiations for nuclear-weapons reductions, negotiations about the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran are still inconclusive, and there is growing evidence of terrorist groups seeking access to nuclear-weapon technology and materials.

Faced with this seemingly entrenched attitude in favour of nuclear weapons and their use, broader support for an initiative that will eventually lead to



A CATASTROPHE

Jayantha Dhanapala notes with interest an influential initiative to take anti-nuclear sentiment from pie in the sky to action-oriented agenda.

the elimination of the world's 26,000 nuclear weapons must come primarily from the governments and peoples of the NWS – two of which (the US and Russia) own 95 per cent of the weapons between them, will soon have new presidents.

At the same time, the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) and their citizens also have a right – and, indeed, an obligation – to take steps that will help usher in a nuclear-weapon-free world. NNWS do not, however, form a monolithic group. There are the NNWS which are allied to NWS and which, like Japan, enjoy the benefits of a security umbrella by belonging to a security pact – or, like Canada, to a security alliance (NATO) with 'nuclear-sharing arrangements'. The NATO Summits in April 2008 – and, again, on the 60th anniversary of the alliance, in 2009 – will enable a review of the 1999 Strategic Concept of the alliance. The involvement of some NNWS in ballistic-missile defence plans clearly linked to nuclear-weapons strategy is another factor compromising these NNWS.

But we do have a unique opportunity where the fulfilment of the reciprocal – albeit asym-

metrical – obligations of the nuclear haves and have-nots can, together, help usher in a nuclear-weapon free world. This is the partnership that the Wall Street Journal's Op-Eds called for.

A new US President can take the lead. But for this US leadership to be effective, the support for the Shultz-Kissinger-Nunn-Perry initiative must also come from other NWS and NNWS.

The Swedish Government-sponsored Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC), chaired by the respected Dr. Hans Blix, proposed a world summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. The time is opportune to prepare for this summit, in 2009. The alternative scenario is too awful to contemplate.

As the Blix Report noted: "So long as any state has such weapons – especially nuclear weapons – others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain in any state's arsenal, there is a high risk that they will one day be used, by design or accident. Any such use would be catastrophic."



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