

Nuclear endgame

The growing appeal of zero

Banning the bomb will be hard, but not impossible

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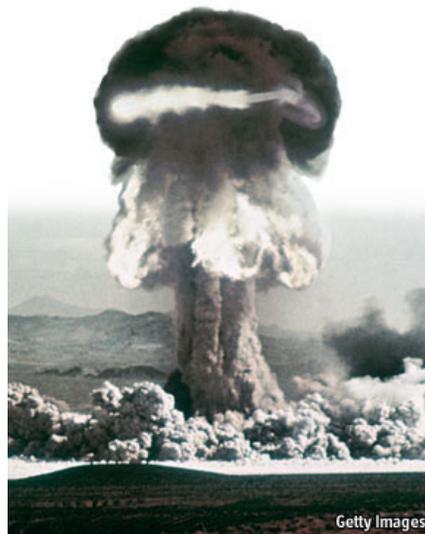
RIDDING the world of nuclear weapons has long been a cause of the pacifist left. But in the past few years mainstream politicians, retired military leaders and academic strategists have begun to share the same goal, albeit with a very different idea of how to get there. That is partly thanks to a campaigning body called Global Zero, which is holding its third annual “summit” in London next week.

Global Zero got going in late 2006. Its two founders were Bruce Blair, a former Minuteman ballistic-missile launch-control officer and fellow of Brookings Institution who had set up the World Security Institute, a think-tank in Washington, DC, a few years earlier and Matt Brown, who had served as a youthful secretary of state for Rhode Island. They set about creating from scratch a global movement that would be very different from previous nuclear-disarmament efforts. But they might not have got far had it not been for a stroke of luck.

In January 2007 a seminal article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*. The authors, who became known as the “four horsemen of the apocalypse”, were Henry Kissinger, Bill Perry, George Shultz and Sam Nunn. All were veterans of America’s cold-war security establishment with impeccable credentials as believers in nuclear deterrence. They now asserted that far from making the world safer, nuclear weapons had become a source of intolerable risk.

The risk of accidents, misjudgments or unauthorised launches, they argued, was growing more acute in a world of rivalries between relatively new nuclear states that lacked the security safeguards developed over many years by America and the Soviet Union. The emergence of pariah states, such as North Korea (possibly soon to be joined by Iran), armed with nuclear weapons was adding to the fear as was the declared ambition of terrorists to steal, buy or build a nuclear device. Only by a concerted effort to free the world of nuclear weapons could the terrifying trend be reversed.

Suddenly, Global Zero was able to recruit people who were a far cry from the old “ban the bomb” crowd. Taking his cue from the “four horsemen”, Mr Blair emphasised that Global Zero had to advocate the kind of pragmatic actions that mainstream politicians and foreign-policy experts could endorse, while preserving, as a destination, a goal that seemed inspiring. “Zero” was a catchier slogan than the arcane incrementalism that had come to characterise old-time arms control. By putting the dangers of proliferation and nuclear-armed terrorism at the forefront of its concerns, Global Zero would puncture the public’s post-cold-war complacency over nuclear weapons. Above all, Global Zero had to stand for a



realistic process that was phased, multilateral, universal and backed by hard-nosed verification.

Global Zero announced itself with a meeting in December 2008 that drew together more than 100 international political, diplomatic, military and academic bigwigs. They agreed to set up a commission that would draw up a practical, step-by-step plan. They also sent a jointly signed letter to Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, who were about to meet for the first time, urging them to make a commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons and start making further big cuts in their own arsenals.

Mr Obama could not have been more helpful. In April 2009, speaking in Prague, he condemned “fatalism” about the spread of nuclear weapons. Going further than any president since Ronald Reagan, he said: “I state clearly and with conviction America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” A year later Mr Obama and Mr Medvedev signed the New START arms-control treaty, limiting the number of “operationally deployed” strategic warheads on each side to 1,550 after seven years.

With wind in its sails, Global Zero met in Paris in February 2010. Bolstered by the presence of another 100 or so famous supporters and messages of encouragement from Mr Obama, Mr Medvedev, the secretary-general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, and the British prime minister, Gordon Brown, it released its four-phase plan for nuclear disarmament.

The first phase, intended to run from 2010-13, required America and Russia to negotiate a bilateral accord to reduce their total warheads to 1,000 each from their current inventories of, respectively, 8,500 and 11,000 (the two countries still account for 95% of the world’s 20,500 nuclear warheads). Once ratified, every other nuclear-armed country would agree to freeze its own arsenal and pledge to join multilateral talks in the second phase (2014-18). This would see America and Russia each cut their arsenals to 500 warheads each and the other states reduce their inventories proportionately.

Critically, the second phase would depend on universal acceptance of a comprehensive verification and enforcement system accompanied by tighter controls on fissile materials produced by civil-nuclear programmes. The third phase (2019-23) would see the global zero accord legally agreed on and signed by all nuclear-capable states. The final phase (2024-30) would implement that treaty agreement.

Despite its rapid ascent, Global Zero, as it prepares for next week’s summit, is facing problems that it may find hard to overcome. Its plan’s timeline already looks optimistic. Mr Obama struggled even to get the New START ratified in the Senate. Last year’s Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference made little progress on bringing pressure to bear on Iran to mend its ways. For all Mr Medvedev’s rhetorical support, Russia’s armed forces are intent on becoming more dependent on nuclear weapons, not less. If progress is to be made, it will have to be at a far slower pace than Global Zero is urging.

More fundamentally, not all Global Zero’s signatories are convinced that zero is either achievable nor necessarily desirable. They support the journey, but are less sure about the final destination. And by focusing its campaign on the most dangerous proliferators and nuclear terrorism, it raises an awkward question: will minutely choreographed multilateralism make much difference to the hardest cases?

Global Zero’s persuasive backers, such as Richard Burt, a retired American diplomat who negotiated the first START treaty, have plausible answers to every objection raised by sceptics. But if the gap between what can be achieved and the high ambition of Global Zero grows too wide, its claim to temper idealism with gritty pragmatism will be in jeopardy.

from the print edition | International

<http://www.economist.com/node/18836134>

The road to zero

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In 1963, John Kennedy warned that by the end of the 1970s as many as 25 states could hold nuclear weapons. That nightmarish world has not materialised. Indeed, in the 66 years since the US dropped the first atomic bomb, only eight further states have joined the nuclear club. Yet despite this apparent success, the risks of nuclear proliferation are not ebbing, but growing. It is time for a renewed push towards nuclear disarmament.



Two developments are inching the world towards a nuclear tipping point. The first is the Iranian nuclear programme. Were Iran to reach nuclear status, it would spark a nuclear arms race throughout the Middle East. The second is terrorists' efforts to acquire fissile material. Proliferation to non-state actors is now as much of a threat as the spread of nuclear weapons among states. This is particularly worrying because the logic of mutually assured destruction that kept fingers off nuclear buttons during the cold war does not apply to terrorist groups.

To head off such threats, nuclear-armed states need to start shedding weapons. Until now, the drive to cut arsenals has centred on the US and Russia. That is understandable, since these two powers own 95 per cent of the world's nuclear weaponry. But this narrow focus is also a reason that broader disarmament has been conspicuous by its absence. As argued by Global Zero, an anti-nuclear group hosting a conference on disarmament in London this week, what is needed is a more aggressively multilateral approach.

Global Zero's attempt to shift the debate is welcome. But even with multilateral involvement, significant cuts in nuclear arsenals will be very hard to achieve. For countries such as Pakistan and Russia, nuclear stockpiles are a means of counterbalancing the superiority that their rivals in India and China hold in conventional armed forces. The chances of either fully disarming are remote. And even if widespread disarmament occurred verification would be tricky, especially in the later stages. When only one or two nuclear powers remained, the incentive to cheat and keep weapons would be enormous.

That does not mean multilateral reductions targets are useless. Any cut in the number of nuclear weapons is worthwhile. And by shrinking their arsenals, nuclear powers can encourage their non-nuclear cousins not to seek such weapons themselves. Global Zero's plan has shown the direction to be travelled; the world's leaders must now start moving.

Nuclear disarmament

Move the base camp

A campaign to get rid of all nuclear weapons is worth supporting even if the ultimate goal is unattainable

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THERE was a time when the sort of people who campaigned to rid the world of nuclear weapons wore anoraks and thick jumpers and camped out in yurts. Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, both secretaries of state in Republican administrations, did not belong among them. But those men have now been joined by Barack Obama and a cohort of hard-nosed politicians and diplomats in embracing the cause of multilateral disarmament with the aim of getting to zero nuclear weapons.

They argue that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is fast reaching a “tipping point” beyond which it will be impossible to check their spread.

Their use either in war, by accident or by terrorists is becoming increasingly likely. The only way to confront this danger, it is claimed, is by starting a phased, verifiable, multilateral process to eliminate all nuclear weapons. Since the cold war, America and Russia have cut their stocks sharply, but they still account for 95% of the world’s 20,500 nuclear weapons. If they dismantle their arsenals they will be in a stronger position to preach to others.

You might conclude that the gravel-voiced Mr Kissinger is going soft, but the idea has caught on among other strategic thinkers. World leaders, such as Russia’s president, Dmitry Medvedev, have signed up. In September 2009 the UN Security Council endorsed the vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Much of the running has been made by Global Zero, an organisation founded four years ago that is holding its third “summit” in London next week. It has come up with a four-phase action plan for reaching zero by 2030 (see [article](#)). The plan starts in the right place, with the scaling down of America’s and Russia’s nuclear arsenals to 1,000 weapons apiece. It acknowledges that progress will depend on verification and other states playing their part.

An alpha particle for effort

Part of the point of Global Zero is to inspire interest in the subject. The old way of doing arms control—highly technical and incremental—no longer captures the public’s imagination. It also fails to deal with today’s worries, such as a nuclear Iran triggering proliferation in the Middle East, or Pakistan’s bomb falling into the hands of jihadists. If states contemplating a weapons programme believe that counter-proliferation can work, then they are less likely to proliferate themselves.

There are some big objections to Global Zero’s aspirations. In a world where owning even a handful of bombs would confer huge advantage, verification will have to be completely reliable. Thankfully, the sophistication of verification techniques is improving at a rate that makes this at least feasible. And getting even close to zero may require settling some of the world’s most intractable arguments, such as the tussle between India and Pakistan over Kashmir or the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, though America and the former



Soviet Union made some progress in cutting weapons, despite their cold-war relations. Lastly, nuclear deterrence and America's extension of it to its allies may be one reason why great powers have not directly gone to war against each other for 65 years. That's true; but even if nuclear weapons were eliminated, the threat that they could be rebuilt would remain a reason to avoid conflict.

What about terrorists or rogue states? Nuclear weapons cannot be uninvented; they use a mature, widely understood technology. At present, it is all too easy for nuclear material to be diverted from a civil programme to bombmaking. Without a treaty to prohibit the use of fissile material for weapons production the world will not get to zero.

But do not conclude from this that the Global Zero campaign must be either a fantasy or a cynical ploy to use token disarmament to stop proliferation. It is neither. If done in the right way the process of disarming can do enormous good, regardless of whether that final step can ever be taken. Sam Nunn, a former American senator who now leads the Nuclear Threat Initiative, likens nuclear zero to a mountain. Even though the peak is far beyond reach today, it still makes sense to move from the foothills up the mountain to a higher, safer base camp. From there—who knows?—the world may one day be able to strike out for the summit.

from the print edition | Leaders

http://www.economist.com/node/18834021?story_id=18834021&fsrc=rss

Nuclear powers expected to spend \$1,000bn

By James Blitz in London

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The world's nine nuclear-armed powers are set to spend a total of \$1,000bn on the procurement and modernisation of atomic weapons programmes over the next decade, according to an anti-nuclear weapons group whose cause has won high-level US support.



Global Zero, which is campaigning for abolition of the world's nuclear arsenals by 2030, will host a London conference this week attended by senior Russian, Indian, US and Chinese figures, among others. It aims to highlight how the cost of nuclear weapons is becoming ever more unaffordable for states whose defence budgets are hard pressed by the financial crisis.

According to the organisation, the nine nuclear states – the US, Russia, China, the UK, France, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea – are set to spend \$100bn between them on nuclear arms programmes this year.

The figure comprises the cost of researching, developing, procuring and testing nuclear weapons.

Global Zero calculates that the states will spend the same amount in every year of this decade.

The organisation says spending on atomic weapons accounts for about 9 per cent of total defence spending in these countries – a proportion set to rise because budgets for conventional military hardware are being cut back in many countries.

The campaign to seek total abolition of nuclear weapons has received high-profile backing in recent years, notably from Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, two former US secretaries of state who have embraced the cause of multilateral disarmament. Barack Obama, the US president, has said the organisation “will always have a partner in me and my administration”.

The group's two-day London meeting will be attended by Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the foreign affairs committee of the Russian parliament; Jaswant Singh, the former Indian defence minister; Valerie Plame, the former CIA operative; and leading Chinese government figures.

One of its aims is to try to expand discussion of disarmament beyond the US and Russia, which have 95 per cent of the world's atomic arsenals between them, and to engage some of the other nuclear states.

The US and Russia recently ratified a new Start agreement cutting the size of their arsenals. But the deal will not cut how much each state spends on nuclear weapons, according to Bruce Blair, a Global Zero founder.

“Spending will increase because of decisions by both nations to upgrade and replace,” he says. “Modernisation is progressing at such a pace we are seeing more spending on nuclear weapons than at any time since the cold war.”

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/dc3dba1e-9aa4-11e0-bab2-00144feab49a.html#axzz1PI528vqB>