

By Mikhail Gorbachev
Illustration by Sako Shahinian

Get Rid of Your

Nukes



ONE OF THE MOST URGENT problems of today's world is the danger of nuclear weapons. The unexpected nuclear test by North Korea on May 25 and its test-firing of a series of short-range missiles is the latest, frightening reminder.

Nothing fundamentally new has been achieved in the area of nuclear disarmament in the past decade and a half. Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the arsenals of the nuclear powers still contain thousands of weapons, and the world is facing the very real possibility of a new arms race.

In effect, all that has been achieved in nuclear disarmament until now is the implementation of the agreements that were signed in the late 1980s and early 1990s: the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987, which eliminated two classes of nuclear missiles, and the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduc-

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tion Treaty, which launched the biggest cutbacks of nuclear weapons ever. Thousands of tactical nuclear weapons were destroyed in accordance with this U.S.-Soviet agreement.

Subsequently, the pace of nuclear arms reduction has slowed and the mechanisms of control and verification have weakened. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has not entered into force. The quantities of nuclear weapons held by Russia and the United States still far exceed the arsenals of all other nuclear powers combined.

The nuclear nonproliferation regime is in jeopardy. While the two major nuclear powers bear the greatest responsibility for this state of affairs, it was the United States that abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, has failed to ratify the CTBT, and refused to conclude with Russia a verifiable treaty on strategic offensive arms.

Only recently have we seen indications that the major nuclear powers understand the current state of affairs is untenable. The presidents of the United States and Russia have agreed to conclude before the end of this year a verifiable treaty reducing strategic offensive arms and have reaffirmed their countries' commitment to fulfill their obligations under the nonproliferation treaty. Their joint statement calls for a number of other steps to reduce nuclear dangers, including ratification by the United States of the CTBT.

Those are positive steps. But the problems and dangers far outnumber the achievements. We cannot accept the erroneous evaluation of the events that led to the end of the Cold War. The United States and some other countries saw these as a victory of the West, and a green light for unilateralist policies. Accordingly, instead of creating a new architecture of international security based on real cooperation, an attempt was made to impose on the world a "monopoly leadership" by the sole remaining

superpower and the institutions and organizations, like NATO, that were inherited from the Cold War and not reformed after it ended.

The use and the threat of force, which, of course, are illegal under the U.N. Charter, were reasserted as a "normal" mode of solving problems. Official documents rationalized doc-

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trines of preemptive strike and the need for U.S. military superiority. Disregard for international law and for peaceful ways of settling disputes was proclaimed as a kind of policy.

As a result, we witnessed a war in Europe, in Yugoslavia, something that had previously seemed inconceivable; a long-term deterioration in the Middle East; the war in Iraq; an extremely severe situation in Afghanistan; and the increasingly alarming nuclear pro-

liferation crisis.

The members of the nuclear club need to move toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, as required under the nonproliferation treaty. Otherwise, there will be a continued danger that other countries may acquire nuclear weapons. Today, dozens of states have the technical ability to do so.

Humanity must be wary of a new arms race. Priority is still being given to financing of military programs, and "defense" budgets far exceeding reasonable security requirements keep growing, as does the weapons trade. U.S. military expenditures are almost as high as those of the rest of the world combined.

In the final analysis, the nuclear danger can only be removed by abolishing nuclear weapons. But unless we address the need to demilitarize international relations, reduce military budgets, put an end to the creation of new kinds of weapons, and prevent the weaponization of outer space, all talk about a nuclear-weapon-free world will be just empty rhetoric.

I think that after President Obama's Prague speech on April 5 [calling for a nuclear-free world], there is a real prospect that the United States will ratify the CTBT. This would be an important step forward, particularly in combination with a new strategic arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russia.

Following this, I believe that other nuclear powers, both the "official members" of the club and the rest, will have to, at the very least, declare a freeze on their nuclear arsenals and state their readiness to engage in negotiations on their reduction. If the holders of the largest stocks of nuclear weapons embark upon real reductions, others will no longer be able to sit it out and conceal their arsenals from international control.

This is an issue that we must raise now, if we are to have the kind of trust without which common security cannot be achieved. ♦