



The second nuclear age

By Rolf Mützenich

When Barack Obama gave his Berlin speech on 24 March 2008, his noble gesture in coming out in favour of a world without nuclear weapons was the point at which he received by far and away the greatest applause. “This”, the democratic presidential candidate said, “is the moment when we must renew our commitment to a world without nuclear weapons”. And it is a fact that nuclear disarmament is more urgent today than ever before. Although the Cold War has been over for more than 20 years, plans are still being developed, especially by the United States, which envisage nuclear war as part of a flexible response strategy, rather than as an apocalyptic move, as a limited - and therefore potentially successful - operation.

The worldwide stockpile of nuclear warheads is currently close to 30,000. There has therefore been only a marginal increase in mankind’s multiple destructive capacity since 1989. However the distribution of weapons of mass destruction has become much more dangerous, and it is not just due to the ongoing crisis over the Iranian armament programme. The world media spotlight has barely registered that for some time the leading military powers have been engaged in a new nuclear arms race and this has to be stopped as a matter of urgency. The nuclear bomb is experiencing a strategic renaissance among the military planners of the major powers. The nuclear shadow, the concrete danger of a nuclear war, is increasingly developing into a politically operational element of current

global politics.¹By constantly upgrading their arsenals, not only the USA, but also Russia, China, France and Great Britain are calling into question their duty to disarm under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and are thus getting round the 13 point action nuclear disarmament plan adopted by consensus at the NPT Review Conference in 2000.

So far there’s been no international consensus on renouncing the nuclear first strike option. Despite assurances to the contrary at the UN Security Council, fewer and fewer nuclear weapon states are prepared to renounce the use of nuclear weapons, continuing to proclaim their right to retaliate to a conventional, chemical or biological attack by employing nuclear

¹ Cf. Dieter Senghaa. Abschreckung nach der Abschreckung (*deterrence after deterrence*), in “Papers”, 7, 2007, pp 825-835, here: p 826

weapons. Little by little the nuclear taboo which has existed for more than 50 years is being emasculated.

The characteristics of this new nuclear age are already apparent. Worst-case scenarios, which seem increasingly probable, envisage a combination of terrorism and nuclear weapons. Or the possibility of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, triggered by the Iranian nuclear programme combined with the new definition of national sovereignty as nuclear sovereignty, together with a massive increase in the number of small and medium-sized nuclear weapon states. Or the possible collapse of governmental authority in Pakistan, a nuclear power. Or the illegal dissemination of military nuclear technology. Or the further legal proliferation of peaceful nuclear technology, leading to an increase in the number of non-military nuclear states with all the additional, related risks that would entail. Or the deployment of nuclear weapons in space and a new arms race between the major nuclear powers².

The pathology of nuclear deterrence

We are currently experiencing a second wave of intensive nuclear armament. Nuclear weapons had a major influence on world politics during the 40 years of the Cold War, even though they have not been used since the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945. Pressing the wrong button once or taking a false decision could have meant large areas of the globe disappearing in nuclear mushroom clouds. For decades, recognition of this apocalyptic effect was the foundation of a security concept which created a balance of terror between the superpowers: both sides stockpiled ever more modern nuclear weapons in the certain knowledge that any attack would inevitably lead to the aggressor's own destruction. A scenario for

which former US defence secretary, Robert McNamara, coined the expression *mutual assured destruction*, the guaranteed destruction of both sides. The resulting arms race swallowed up thousands of billions, while the arguments for and against the strategy of deterrence now fill whole libraries.

The original concept of deterrence was based on defence, with the threat representing retaliation. Deterrence was seen as putting threat and counter threat, attack and retaliatory strike on an equal footing, so that a state launching a first strike would have to reckon on a counter attack and consequent self-destruction. Examining the strategy of military deterrence, it doesn't at first sight seem to be either an irrational or immoral idea to deter a potential enemy from launching an attack by threatening equivalent retaliation. Mutual deterrence thus appears initially in the guise of an instrument for peace, from both the logical and moral points of view. However since the doctrine involves having an opposite number who can act and judge rationally, who should be neither crazy nor incompetent and capable of comprehending the threat and drawing rational conclusions from it, the paradox emerged during the Cold War that both West and East "considered each other's deterrence strategy as irrational and dangerous, but thought (and hoped) the other side had a sufficient grasp of reality to susceptible to threats". According to Karl Deutsch, the deterrence theory is dangerously naive in so far as: "it largely ignores the research which has been carried out on how rationally people behave, when they are subjected to varying degrees of pressure, tension and tiredness."³

On the other hand supporters of the balance of terror concept believe that, given the conditions of mutual nuclear deterrence, a disabling first strike would be simply impossible because there would be no winners in any nuclear war, only losers. This "nuclear taboo" should therefore

² Cf. Harald Müller, *The Future of Nuclear Weapons in an Interdependent World*, in "The Washington Quarterly", 1/2008, pp 63-75

provide the basis for a lasting, stable peace. As a result, the combination of bipolarity and nuclear weapons should thus provide a form of security net which would operate as a guarantee for the stability of the international system.

But the consequences of the strategy of nuclear⁴ deterrence, armament autism in international politics and an internally directed, high pressure armament dynamic, make clear how an allegedly rational and morally defensible strategy consistently impedes learning processes on the road to peaceful cooperation. The superpowers put their nuclear forces on emergency alert status several times despite their apparent parity, based on enormous arsenals of both nuclear and conventional weapons⁵. Taking into account both the planning and what actually happened during the Cold War, one is forced to conclude that the fact there has not been a nuclear conflict was more a question of luck than thanks to any calculations by a few military strategists. As early as 1962 the Cuba crisis showed clearly how close the world had come to the brink of a possible nuclear war. So there was no way the East-West conflict provided a guarantee for a stable peace. It was more a situation characterised by an extremely unsafe threat level between two nuclear superpowers, both of them armed to the teeth. Four nuclear false alarms have been recorded: in 1979, 1980, 1983 and 1995 the nuclear threat cast its shadow across the globe.

⁴ Cf. particularly: Dieter Senghaas, Kritik der Abschreckung (*Critique of deterrence – a contribution to the theory of international politics*, Frankfurt/M, 1967. Drs. (Hg.) Zur Pathologie des Rüstungswettlaufs (*On the pathology of the arms race – a contributions to peace and conflict research*, Freiburg, 1970

⁵ During the Cold War, far in excess of 100,000 nuclear warheads were produced by both sides together

The renaissance of nuclear deterrence

The bipolar deterrence line-up only ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990's. But did this represent the end of the nuclear shadow? Had the people taking the political decisions grown any wiser? Were they prepared to learn from the mistakes and the wrong turnings of the past?

The hopes born out of the ending of the East-West conflict have not been realised over the ensuing twenty years. There was no interruption in the dynamic pace of armament. Following a decade of disarmament, which began in 1987 with the INF Treaty and ended with the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, from 1988 on there was a significant increase in military expenditure. And since 2002 there has been an increase of around 50 percent in international arms trading.⁶

According to the 2007 SIPRI handbook worldwide military expenditure in the year 2006 amounted to around 900 billion Euros. This was a 3.5 percent increase compared with 2005. Over the last ten years, worldwide expenditure on armaments has thus increased by some 37 percent. The USA is by far the biggest spender, paying out 396.2 billion Euros, 42 of global arms expenditure.

There has indeed been a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War, but there has been an equivalent rise in the quality of new equipment. There is increasing specialisation, with weapons being made more modern and more accurate. A “surgical strike” using scaled-down (miniaturised) nuclear weapons should only inflict “limited” damage: so weapons designed for deterrence are developing into weapons produced for attack. The

⁶ SIPRI (Ed), SIPRI- Yearbook 2007, Stockholm 2008.

“pathology of deterrence” – what D. Senghaas calls “the structurally based tendency to autism as well as the learning pathology of contemporary international politics”⁷ has therefore moved into a new phase. Thus the probability of nuclear weapons being employed has increased. Because scrutinising “American, French and Russian doctrines indicates that a minor nuclear conflict isn’t that bad providing the other side cannot shoot back”.⁸ Meanwhile, the other nuclear powers have been taking a similar route for years.

The USA

Under the presidency of George W. Bush the expenditure on armaments went up by 62 percent. The 2007 budget was around 535 billion dollars, without taking the costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan into account. Despite its commitments the United States never ratified the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, blocked a controllable ban on the production of fissile material, withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and replaced the START treaties with the SORT treaty, which can be cancelled at any time. In addition, research continued under the Bush administration on the “bunker buster” or the “mini nuclear device”. At the present time, more than two decades on, the United States is producing new nuclear warheads because of concern about the reliability of its nuclear weapons arsenal. As from 2012 the ageing warheads on US submarines are to be replaced with updated versions. Because of the development of this new generation of nuclear weapons the Americans could resume nuclear testing, thus providing a

⁷ Dieter Senghaas, *Wissenschaftsbiographische Notizen (research and biographical notes)*, in Ulrich Menxel (publ.), *Vom ewigen Frieden und vom Wohlstand der Nationen (Of permanent peace and the prosperity of nations)*, Frankfurt/M 2000, p. 609

⁸ Harald Müller, *Nichtverbreitungsvertrag: Regime kaputt. Bedingungen für die Stabilität von Vertragsregimen (NPT: regime kaput, prerequisites for the stability of contracting countries)*, in: “*Internationale Politik*”, 8/2006, pp 16-23, here: p. 18

welcome opportunity for countries such as Russia to follow suit.

Russia

Russia aims to regain its role as a global player. The country’s reliance on its enormous reserves of oil and natural gas means that it now has the financial muscle to aspire to the status of a military superpower, a status that it had never lost in terms of its strategic nuclear capability anyway. To that end, Russia is carrying out a comprehensive modernisation of its strategic nuclear forces (the US planned missile defence systems provide the excuse), partially funded by its extensive weapons export policy.

Since 1990 Russia’s military expenditure has again been on the rise. In 2007 the defence budget amounted to some 83 billion US dollars. The plan foresees modernising 45 percent of the weapon systems and totally replacing the strategic weapons and the intercontinental missiles by 2015. For the first time Russian arms exports in 2007 exceeded the record sum of seven billion dollars.⁹ Russian military strategy has been modified many times, but nuclear weapons continue to occupy the primary position. Despite earlier binding Soviet denials, first strike operations are now once again seen as a possible option. Like the USA and France, Moscow claims the right to employ everything at its disposal, up to and including nuclear weapons.

Having rejected the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) Treaty and having resumed patrols by its strategic bomber squadrons, Russia is now threatening additional measures, such as abrogating the bilateral INF treaty, which envisages the total abolition of intermediate range missiles. As early as 2002 Moscow had no longer felt itself bound by the limitation on

⁹ Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, *Neue Hochrüstung: Ursachen und Alternativen (New Arms Race: causes and alternative options)*, in “*Friedensgutachten 2008 (peace assessment 2008)*”, pp 30-41, here: p.34.

multiple warheads contained in the SALT II Treaty. A mobile version of the modern Topol-M missile type is under construction. New intercontinental missiles with hundreds of warheads, which are highly manoeuvrable meaning they can dodge anti-missile missiles, are scheduled to come into service from 2010. Though global public may hardly have recognised it as yet, a new round in the nuclear race has been well under way for some time.

Great Britain

Great Britain was the third country to develop nuclear weapons after the USA and the Soviet Union, thus becoming the world's first "minor" nuclear power. Britain's nuclear weapons were originally conceived as a deterrent against the Soviet Union, now they are seen as elements in the war against terror and for the defence of British interests around the world. Thus British policy, like that of France, is based on the nuclear weapons policy of the United States. In other words, like France, Britain also uses US nuclear policy as yardstick. Britain's traditionally close relationship with the United States forms, together with cooperation with NATO, the cornerstone of Britain's 21st century security policy. Marine-based strategic nuclear weapons and their carrier systems are imported from the United States, though the British warheads are produced using American models as a basis.

Great Britain currently has more than 160 fully operational nuclear warheads. And London, too, is planning to upgrade its nuclear arsenal: the government wants to spend some 30 billion Euros on modernising Great Britain as a contemporary nuclear power. The four nuclear submarines equipped with Trident D5 missiles – "Vanguard", "Victorious", "Vigilant" and "Vengeance" are to be replaced by a new generation over the coming two decades.

France

France's strike force (known as the "*force de frappe*") has three nuclear submarines – and with the "Terrible" it will soon be four – each of which carries 16 missiles and has a range of 6,000 kilometres, as well as 60 bombers which can carry an estimated 300 nuclear warheads. Increasing consideration is being given to the idea of France providing a nuclear umbrella over Europe – though this is something France's European neighbours have so far treated with scepticism and reserve.¹⁰ France would hardly be prepared to transfer control of its nuclear weapons to a European command system, because Paris continues to stress its role as a world power which is, if necessary, prepared to pursue its national interests on its own ("*exception française*"). At the same time the option of the French suggestion of a European dialogue on the role of nuclear deterrence within the context of European security might be worth considering, though only with the clearly defined purpose of deciding on options for nuclear disarmament.

In 2006 France moved away from its former doctrine, which considered nuclear weapons as being exclusively deterrent. The then French president, Jacques Chirac, announced that from now on the France's nuclear forces could be employed in response to a terrorist attack. Besides which from now on the nuclear weapons should be used to ensure French supplies of raw materials – "a new development in western security doctrine"¹¹. At the same time some significant changes emerged within French security policies. For example, at the April 2009 summit meeting in Strasbourg and Kiel, celebrating the 60th anniversary of NATO, France officially plans to return to the ranks of NATO's command structure.

¹⁰ As late as at the Franco-German summit meeting in September 2007, N. Sarkozy invited a nonplussed Chancellor and Foreign Minister to participate in the French arsenal. After all, the President said, the French "*Force de frappe*" also offered protection to their neighbour. The Germans politely refused. 11/2007, pp. 1014-1025, here: p.1017.

The French white paper maintains that additional cornerstones of defence policy will be reforming the army and the reorganisation of French bases overseas.¹² On top of which it is proposed to cut the army budget in favour of nuclear capabilities. In addition by 2010 at the latest it is intended to begin production of smaller warheads, the so-called mini-nukes, which means the inhibition threshold over using nuclear weapons is still further reduced. The extension of nuclear doctrine to cover both raw materials and the war on terror has led to a worrying attitude, where nuclear weapons are looked on as banal and marginal. So overall France is following the American preventive war strategy and effectively suspends the prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons against non nuclear weapon states.

China

Up to now China's nuclear policy has been generally defensive in character. Its relatively modest arsenal of 180 nuclear weapons is primarily intended to provide protection against a possible attack by a superpower. It is the only country in the world which has a nuclear doctrine with a guarantee renouncing the option of a nuclear first strike. At the same time China is engaged in a comprehensive rearmament programme. However China is also reacting to the United States' nuclear policy, and its plans for missile defence, by modernising its old nuclear arsenal with new intercontinental missiles and by reequipping its nuclear submarines. Nobody knows whether China will continue its defensive nuclear policy. Between 2001 and 2006 China increased its military expenditure from 28 billion US dollars to 49.8 billion US dollars. Part of this sum (together with other, undisclosed funds) would be spent on nuclear systems. China was not included either in START or in the INF treaty, which is an added cause for concern, and is thus

¹² Cf. "Le livre blanc sur la défense et la sécurité nationale" (*White book on defence and national security*), Paris 2008.

not subject to any restrictions as far as the modernisation and expansion of its nuclear weapon arsenal are concerned. In addition to which Peking has one of the world's most ambitious carrier rocket programmes¹³.

India and Pakistan

India and Pakistan describe themselves officially as nuclear weapon states. Thus the South East Asian states effectively disprove the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which only recognises five nuclear states officially. India considers the treaty incorporates "inherent discrimination"¹⁴, which it feels is primarily intended to perpetuate nuclear imbalance within the community of nations.

India considers itself to be a great power and has consistently refused to reject the nuclear option, so long as the original nuclear powers do not comply with their commitment to destroy all their nuclear arsenals. India only sees two options for dealing with the "global apartheid system"¹⁵: either the nuclear powers should do away with their nuclear stockpiles in the medium term, or the non-nuclear powers have no choice other than trying to catch up and also obtaining nuclear weapons. Besides which India considers it necessary to have a deterrent capability with which to confront the nuclear powers of China and Pakistan. But many experts are of the opinion that the real reason for India's nuclear policy to date has been more a question of national prestige, rather than the need to face any

¹³ Cf. Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, Chinese Nuclear Forces 2008, in: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists", 7-8/2008, pp 42-45

¹⁴ Katja Frank and Annette Schaper, das Nichtverbreitungsregime in der Krise? Massenvernichtungswaffen in Indien, Pakistan, Nordkorea und Irak. (*Non-proliferation regime in crisis? Weapons of mass destruction in India, Pakistan, North Korea and Irak*), in: Friedensgutachten 1999, Berlin 1999, pp 228-237, here: p.230

¹⁵ Karsten Frey, Indiens Nuklearpolitik zwischen Sicherheitsinteressen und Statusdenken (*Indian nuclear policy between security interests and status thinking*) In : Asien. Sonderheft zur Indische Union", 10/2006, pp 7-28, here p.225

genuine threat from outside. India wants to be recognised as a global player and to emerge from the shadow of China, the only Asian member to hold a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a position to which India also aspires.

The intention is to implement a planned bilateral nuclear agreement with the United States. This would provide for India to receive full non-military nuclear cooperation with the USA. "In return India would separate its nuclear programmes and open those facilities officially categorised as non-military to inspection. The dangerous thing about this is that the agreement would remove the spotlight from India's nuclear weapons programme – something, Pakistan in particular views in a highly critical light.¹⁶ Most members of India's elite take the agreement as representing final recognition of India as a nuclear power. This nuclear agreement will enable India to accelerate its armament programme. India currently has around 100 nuclear weapons and can probably produce up to seven warheads a year. Indian and Pakistani experts assume that the nuclear agreement will enable it to increase its production to 40 or 50 nuclear weapons per year. If the Indian-American nuclear agreement is implemented, it will burst the nuclear floodgates. "Israel and Pakistan, which like India reject the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, have already demanded that the restrictions on supplying them with nuclear materials should be lifted." The two countries argue that they, too, are "responsible nuclear powers".¹⁷

It is hard to forecast what shape Pakistan's future military policy might take. The country, which is internally unstable and which has been ruled mainly by the military since its foundation as a state 60 years ago, is currently believed to have around 60

nuclear warheads. It is possible that a fundamental Islamic regime could take power in a country which is constantly shaken by political and religious unrest. And it is not just India which would be concerned to learn that nuclear weapons were in the hands of a fundamentalist national leadership. Especially after, as early as 2002, Pakistan threatened that it would be prepared to carry out a pre-emptive nuclear strike if this was the only way to defend itself against the militarily superior India, which had moved several hundred thousand soldiers to the India-Pakistan border, after there had been a terrorist instigated bloodbath in the Indian parliament.

The assassination of the opposition leader, Benazir Bhutto, illustrates once again the country's closeness to internal political chaos. Any destabilisation of Pakistan would play into the hands of the radical forces located along the border regions with Afghanistan. Concern that Pakistan could be caught up in the Islamic fundamentalist movement is more than justified. The massive political and financial support provided by the United States, which the country needs as one of the most important allies in the war against terror, will only be able to slow this development to a limited extent. There is good reason to believe that Islamic forces could carry out a putsch which would provide them with access to the nuclear arsenal. Pakistan's explosive mixture of latent warfare, political radicalism and potential nuclear terrorism could prove exceptionally dangerous, not just for Pakistan but for the world at large.

North Korea

North Korea has refused to comply with its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) commitments for years. In January 2003 North Korea announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. And since February 2005 North Korea considers itself one of the nuclear powers. In October 2006 Pyongyang

¹⁶ Hans-Joachim Schmid and Niklas Schörning, Nuklear- und Rüstungspolitik wichtiger Akteure im asiatisch-pazifischen Raum *The (nuclear policies and arms policies of crucial players in the Asian-Pacific rim)*, in: Friedensgutachten 2007, Berlin 2007, pp 219-232, here: p.225

¹⁷ "die tageszeitung" *newspaper of* 3.8.2008.

announced that it would be carrying out an underground nuclear test, and on 9 October it was announced that this had been completed.

Attempts were made to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis through six-party talks. The central point of these talks, involving North Korea, the USA, South Korea, the Peoples' Republic of China, the Russian Federation, and Japan, is the termination of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. After a long period when nothing happened, the deadlocked negotiations took on a new impetus. On 26 June 2008 Pyongyang presented its negotiating partners with the details of its nuclear programme which they had been demanding for so long. In return the USA announced that it would raise some political and economic sanctions. Despite these latest positive developments, it seems clear that Kim Jong Il has no intention of simply giving up his nuclear trump card without receiving something in return and that he will want any step towards disarmament, however small, to bring in the maximum compensation possible.¹⁸

Israel

So far there are only estimates as to how many nuclear weapons Israel possesses. It is accepted that Israel's nuclear arsenal is the biggest apart from the five officially recognised nuclear powers, but estimates of its stockpile range from 80 to 200 warheads. Since the time when Golda Meir was the Israeli prime minister, there has been an informal diplomatic agreement between the American president and the leader of the Israeli government: Israel agrees never to admit publicly that it does have nuclear weapons; in return the Americans for their part have declined to force Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Israel has never admitted possessing nuclear weapons on the record, but nor has it ever denied it.

¹⁸ Cf. Roland Hiemann, *Geduldspiel mit Pyongyang. (A game of patience with Pyongyang)* SWAP-Aktuell 63, 2008

However, by 1985 at the latest, there were clear indications that Israel was storing a nuclear weapons arsenal in the desert town of Dimona.¹⁹ In December 2007 the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, confirmed this while he was visiting Germany, thus for the first time breaching one of the ground rules of Israeli policy. He confirmed, even if only indirectly, what had been public knowledge for years but could not be published in Israel: the country does in fact possess nuclear weapons.

If necessary Israel is prepared to use force to defend its nuclear monopoly in the Middle East. It was something Iraq learned to its cost in the early 1980's, when its scientists had made great strides in building a nuclear bomb. In June 1981 the then Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin, ordered the Israeli air force to destroy the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak. And on 6 September 2007 the Israeli air force apparently bombed a Syrian nuclear facility, which was said to have been constructed with North Korean expertise – though the Israeli government has never said a word about any such military operation and the Damascus government, too, has consistently worked on playing down the air attack on Syrian territory as essentially unimportant. Besides which, scenarios for a possible Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities have filled the newspaper columns for months.²⁰

However the possession of nuclear weapons has not prevented wars in the Middle East. The weapons are of no real use and could not be employed against immediate neighbours without Israel inflicting damage on itself. Thus the importance of Israel's nuclear weapons is largely symbolic, intended to demonstrate and reinforce Israel's military primacy and technical

¹⁹ In 1985 an Israeli nuclear engineer defected to Great Britain and published photos of Israel's nuclear facilities. Since then, Israel has been counted as a nuclear power.

²⁰ Cf. for example Seymour Hersh, *Preparing the Battlefield. The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran*, in: "The New Yorker", 7.7. 2008

superiority in the Middle East. Israel categorically refuses to renounce its nuclear weapons, to join any nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East or to join the global nuclear non-proliferation system.

Overcoming the autism of deterrence

Surveying the current efforts at nuclear rearmament it is hard to escape the conclusion that armament dynamics and a refusal to learn lessons will continue and characterise a second nuclear age. If aspiring nuclear powers such as China and India together with other, new nuclear powers, act both domestically and abroad as the USA and the Soviet Union have done since the 1950's, then the consequences for international politics will be extremely disturbing.

Despite which, however, there are some first indications of a willingness to reconsider, though this a taking place largely outside the ranks of the US government. Influential former politicians – such as Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and Sam Nunn, whose previous experience means they know what they are talking about – have for some time been working for revitalising international arms control. The ultimate aim of their initiative is nothing less than an agreement on doing away with all nuclear weapons.²¹

The two presidential candidates, Barack Obama and, John McCain, made this philosophy their own. Barack Obama voted several times in the US senate for ratification of the Test Ban Treaty and against the development of new nuclear warheads. And he is also sceptical about stationing anti-ballistic missiles in Eastern Europe. Admittedly the senator from Illinois does not hold with unilateral disarmament, but he has said that he will approach Russia, initially with a view to scaling down the

dangerously high state of readiness of their own nuclear weapons, and then work towards a substantial reduction in the number of their nuclear warheads.²²

The Republican presidential candidate, John McCain, also wants to reduce the American nuclear arsenal. And he, too, appealed for an international offensive to reduce the proliferation of nuclear weapons. International disarmament treaties were needed, together with effective control of nuclear operations.²³ Both candidates also made clear they would work to ensure the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is, finally, ratified by the US Senate.

With Dimitri Medvedev taking over the presidency in May 2008, there could be a thaw in the deadlocked relations between Russia and the West – despite the setbacks caused by the war in Georgia. The lawyer Medvedev pays more attention than his predecessor to the tenets of public international law. He wants to strengthen the UN and build the OSCE into the foundation of an all-European security concept: “if our forbears worked out the Helsinki Final Act under the conditions of the Cold War [...], why should we not take the next step now? And that would be working out and concluding a legally binding treaty on European security.”²⁴

Which means there is now an offer on the table, which should elicit a reaction from the EU and the new American president. And it should also lead to an increase in the involvement of OSCE political forums on arms control, including the forum for security cooperation.

In Britain under Gordon Brown there have been similar remarkable developments – analogous to those in the USA – which

²¹ George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, *Toward a Nuclear-Free World*, in: “The Wall Street Journal”, 15. 1 2008

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Stockholm Office
for the Nordic Countries

Västmannagatan 4
11124 Stockholm

Phone +46 (0) 8 454 65 90
Fax +46 (0) 8 454 65 95

e-mail info@fesnord.se
website www.fesnord.org

²² Barack Obama, *Renewing American Leadership*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 7-8/2007

²³ Cf. “New York Times”, 2.6.2008.

²⁴ Presentation of the Russian President Dimitri A. Medvedev on 5 June 2008 in Berlin, www.russische-botschaft.de (*website of the Russian Embassy in Germany*)

could signal a new approach to disarmament and arms control. For example one year ago the then Foreign Minister, Margaret Beckett, gave a remarkable keynote speech to the Carnegie Non-proliferation Conference in which she called for an end to nuclear weapons: “Mine is a generation that has existed under the shadow of the bomb. But there is a danger in familiarity with something so terrible. We should review our concepts of global transparency and global verification – and create a framework which provides sufficient security for states to carry out a comprehensive reduction of their nuclear weapons so that, one day, they can give them up completely. If we allow our efforts on disarmament to slacken, if we allow ourselves to take the non-proliferation consensus for granted, the nuclear shadow that hangs over us all will lengthen and it will deepen.”²⁵ And finally four leading British politicians who had, at different times, served as foreign minister or defence minister wrote an open letter to the London “Times” calling on Russia and the USA to reduce their nuclear weapons.²⁶

Disarmament and arms control as the dictates of the hour

If however the number of nuclear weapons really is to be drastically reduced, then the United States and Russia must start the ball rolling with a new treaty. After all, the two states currently hold more than ninety percent of the existing weapons systems.

It looks as if an agreement on a maximum of one thousand nuclear warheads on each side, together with a mandatory control mechanism, could well be possible under the new US president, whether it turns out to be McCain or Obama. The Review

Conference in 2010 on the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty will provide an opportunity to tighten up the existing controls. And it is essential that the talks there should not under any circumstances be allowed to fail again, thus leading to further erosion of the global non-proliferation agreement. There is no shortage of suggestions, for example that uranium enrichment for civilian purposes should be carried out under international supervision.²⁷ It is therefore possible to regain the political and diplomatic initiative as far as non-proliferation policies are concerned. But this presupposes a renewed perception of the United States taking a leading multilateral role in the field of non-proliferation policy. This also means that the Europeans would have to give greater priority to the strategic importance in the whole field of non-proliferation. The EU’s strategy for limiting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction contains an important basic principle for joint EU negotiation, and for strengthening and standardising the existing multilateral disarmament and arms control agreements.

On 22 November 2006 Kofi Annan made clear in one of his last speeches to the UN General Assembly that: “While governments are coming together to deal with many worldwide dangers, there is one field where there is a total lack of any common strategy, and that is the area which presents the greatest possible danger – nuclear weapons.”

For this reason disarmament and arms control must again become a significant principle in regulating international relations. This certainly made the world a safer place over previous decades. Arms control contributed significantly to

²⁵ Margaret Beckett, A nuclear weapons-free world, speech of 25.06.2007, www.britischebotschaft.de/de.news/items/070625a.htm.

²⁶ Douglas Hurd, Malcom Rifkind, David Owen and George Robertson.” Start worrying and learn to ditch the bomb. It won’t be easy, but a world free of nuclear weapons is possible”, in: “Times”, 30.06.2008

²⁷ Cf. Frank Walter Steinmeier, Sichere Urananreicherung für alle. Eine kommerzielle Anlage unter der Hoheit der IAEA könnte die Weiterverbreitung von Atomwaffen verhindern (*Secure uranium enrichment for all, a commercial plant under an IAEA umbrella may prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons*), in: “Handelsblatt”, 02.05.2007

preventing wars and building confidence during the East-West conflict and created the preconditions for cooperation and change. The limitation and dismantling of strategic nuclear weapons, the destruction of all intermediate range ballistic missiles, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and the limitation of conventional armament in Europe are just some of the important success stories so far.

There is therefore no sensible alternative to a renewed and verifiable arms limitation treaty.