

Nuclear Disarmament

Four MPs show how Canada could change the world

JIM CRESKEY



Four MPs, one from each party, came together last week on Parliament Hill, vowing to put Canada in the forefront of a practical plan that would lead to a worldwide nuclear weapons ban.

It's an ambitious goal, but if this session's venomous parliamentary partisanship can evaporate around it—as these four MPs have proved is possible, and as it did in unanimous motions of the Commons and the Senate last year—it could have a chance.

Of course, the four MPs—Conservative backbencher Scott Armstrong, Liberal Foreign Affairs critic Bob Rae, NDP counterpart Paul Dewar and Bloc Defence critic Claude Bachand—are not party leaders. They will have to find support in their own caucuses and, for Armstrong, in the Harper Cabinet.

It is not necessarily an easy job for an issue that, though it might be motherhood,

doesn't poll very high in Canadian politics. That is, it doesn't command great public interest unless a nuclear weapon is detonated somewhere in the world—an event that security experts say is a looming eventuality rather than a possibility.

The good news is that working out a means to eliminate nuclear weapons is no longer pie in the sky. It has become an entirely sensible and completely viable diplomatic exercise.

"The debate has changed from the utopian to the practical," said Mr. Rae at the Hill event, organized by former Canadian disarmament ambassador Doug Roche, now a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, and tireless weapons convention advocate Murray Thomson.

"The only coherent way," said Mr. Rae, "is a ban. It has my full support."

Mr. Armstrong, who was a Nova Scotia teacher and school principal before he was elected to Parliament in 2009, said he wanted "to make sure that there is a planet for his students to walk on."

"I soundly support Canada's wonderful plan to host it [a nuclear weapons ban conference]."

The conference that Mr. Armstrong and the others are aiming for is the necessary set-up that the UN needs for a full round of nuclear disarmament protocols. Canada is in the enviable position of being able to get the ball rolling.



Conservative Scott Armstrong, Liberal Bob Rae, NDP Paul Dewar and Bloc Claude Bachand came together last week to talk about hosting a landmark nuclear security summit in Canada.

Mr. Bachand took some wry pleasure in the idea that he—a Quebec separatist—was actually promoting an event that would massively raise Canada's international reputation.

"The path to success," he said, "is to make sure we are not partisan."

Mr. Dewar, who grew up going to anti-nuclear weapons demonstrations with his late mother, Ottawa mayor Marion Dewar, said that Canada brings important skills to the table.

"We do have Canadian experts in verification," he said. "But our job as politicians is to tell Canadians that we agree on this."

Cross-party agreement on anything at all in this Parliament would be a source of great relief to many Canadians. Reaching an agreement to start a chain of activities to rid future generations of, in Murray Thomson's words, "the most outright evil thing the world has ever made," would be a source of great joy to the world.

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The path towards eliminating nukes is clear-cut

DOUGLAS ROCHE

Two events have coincided to give the Canadian government a powerful opportunity to play a key role in the growing effort to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Both the Senate and House of Commons have unanimously adopted a motion calling on the government "to deploy a major worldwide Canadian diplomatic initiative" for nuclear disarmament. At the same time, a draft resolution asking Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to convene a diplomatic conference in 2014 to start negotiating a legal ban on nuclear weapons is circulating among governments.

In light of both these developments, 550 Order of Canada members have signed onto an initiative calling on the Canadian government to host a preparatory meeting in Ottawa in 2012 to begin the process.

What would such a preparatory meeting do? US President Barack Obama has set out the vision of a nuclear-weapons-free world. Ban Ki-Moon has pointed to a Nuclear Weapons Convention, which would be an enforceable global treaty, as the instrument to implement the vision.

A convention could be negotiated outright, or the goal of prohibiting nuclear weapons might be reached by building a framework linking several measures, such as a ban on testing and a ban on the production of fissile material, into one legal instrument.

A preparatory meeting in 2012 would examine the legal, technical and political requisites for a nuclear-weapons-free world. These include issues of verification, compliance and enforcement, controls on nuclear facilities, and

individual responsibility. An agenda for both substance and procedure would be developed.

On substance, these measures would be identified for action:

- an undertaking not to be the first to use nuclear weapons;
- an assurance to non-nuclear-weapon states that nuclear weapons will never be used against them;
- an end to the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes;
- an end to all nuclear testing;
- an end to the production of new nuclear weapons; and
- a schedule for all states progressively to engage in nuclear disarmament.

On procedure, the meeting would seek agreement on how to develop and codify these elements and whether they should be put in the framework of mutually reinforcing instruments or whether one whole Nuclear Weapons Convention should be constructed.

What is especially needed from this first meeting is agreement that these topics are apposite and will lead to shutting the gate on any further production and use of nuclear weapons while opening the gate to their elimination.

After an opening plenary, the meeting would split into working groups on the various topics drawing up the terms of reference for technical papers to be prepared later by experts under a mandate from the secretary-general. A second preparatory meeting a year later would examine the papers and start drafting texts for presentation to the diplomatic conference in 2014.

This consultative approach would, in essence, put a central focus on the end result of elimination. Until now, nuclear disarmament has consisted of disconnected steps without an end goal—which is why

there are still more than 22,000 nuclear weapons held by nine states and the threat of proliferation grows constantly.

"It's time to refuse to accept any more temporizing assurances by nuclear weapons states that they mean well and they'll do better next year," says ambassador Richard Butler, chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative. "The time is upon us now. If we do not consign nuclear weapons to history, new wars will be found to justify their continued existence."

Butler, an Australian who led the way in having the UN adopt the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, believes a new negotiating process is essential for nuclear weapons.

The 65-nation Conference on Disarmament, headquartered in Geneva, has been deadlocked for more than a decade as a result of the consensus rule in which one state can and does block the progress desired by others. It has not even been able to start a dedicated discussion on nuclear disarmament.

Canadian Ambassador Marius Grinius, who chaired the conference in January, calls the body "an oblivious island of inactivity" devoid of political will. Similarly, review meetings of the Non-Proliferation Treaty have been too timid; moreover, the treaty does not include India, Pakistan and Israel, three nuclear-weapons states. When President Obama convened his Washington summit last year, he specifically included the three states.

"If Canada can seize this moment and start the ball rolling, it will be doing a superb service to the world," says Butler.

With solid credentials in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, NATO, La Francophonie, the Commonwealth as well as trusted relationships with the US, the UK and France, Canada is instrumentally placed to play a role in hosting an initial meeting. It was this

kind of Canadian invitation to governments to come to Ottawa in 1996 that led to the Anti-Personnel Landmines Treaty.

Since President Obama himself is such an ardent advocate of a nuclear-weapons-free world, it is highly likely the US would attend a preparatory meeting in Ottawa.

China has already voted at the UN for the start of negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention and would likely attend. The UK is moving in this direction. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has committed his country to global negotiations.

Within NATO, Germany and Norway are calling for stronger nuclear-disarmament measures. Austria and Switzerland have explicitly called for a start on a convention. The New Agenda Coalition countries—Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden—are deeply committed to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Canadian government naturally would want "good company" for a meeting in Ottawa. The chances are excellent that it would be proud of the guest list. Working with Ban Ki-Moon to bring governments to Ottawa to start work on the foremost security issue in the world would be a brilliant act.

For many years, nuclear disarmament has been a desultory process, doing little to stir public imagination. But now an attractive and single-focused idea—a Nuclear Weapons Convention—is here. It provides the way to rid the world of all nuclear weapons in a safe and secure way. And Canadian hospitality can lead the way.

Former Canadian ambassador for disarmament and senator Douglas Roche is author of the newly published *How We Stopped Loving the Bomb*.

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