

BY MIGUEL MARÍN-BOSCH

After the worst of times, we are perhaps entering the best of times for proponents of nuclear disarmament. At long last, advocates of the elimination of nuclear weapons have reason for some guarded optimism. The road to a nuclear-weapons-free world will be long and bumpy, but those expected to take the initiative seem to have finally decided to lead. That is encouraging.

Sixty-four years ago the world was free of nuclear weapons, but after the production of some 140,000 of these artifacts of mass destruction, there seems to be a significant shift in the role some Governments have assigned to them. They are no longer generally considered to be the best means to ensure national security. Deterrence and mutually-assured destruction have become outdated concepts in a world now more concerned with other questions and challenges, including

survival of all nations, which should be the point of departure of nuclear disarmament efforts.

To dwell on the potential danger that they may fall into the wrong hands is to misconstrue the argument for their elimination. They should be banned because they are immoral—and probably illegal—tools of destruction. Since their use would likely be fatal for all, they cannot even be considered instruments of war.

The twin questions of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy have been on the agenda of the United Nations since its beginning: the dawn of the atomic age coincided with its birth. The UN Charter, however, makes no mention of nuclear weapons for the simple reason that it was adopted at the San Francisco conference three weeks before the first test and six weeks before their use in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The transcendental nature of the discovery of atomic energy prompted the delegates to the UN General Assembly's first

A NUCLEAR-WEAPONS-FREE WORLD

Is It Achievable?

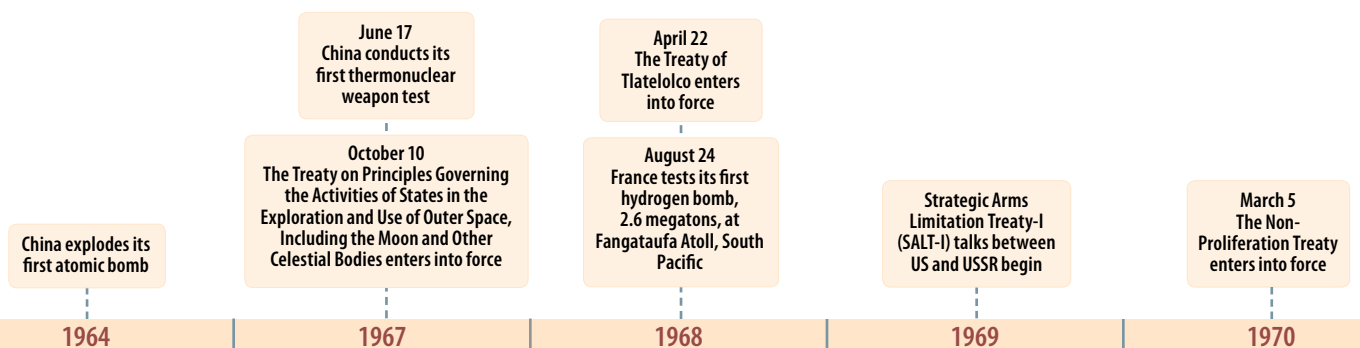
widespread poverty, climate change, a worldwide economic and financial meltdown, and other threats such as the recent alarm over the pandemic outbreak of a new kind of influenza virus.

Above all, the motivation for seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons now seems to be a fear of the further proliferation of these weapons to other States and possibly to the so-called non-State actors, including terrorist groups. There is the rub.

Nuclear weapons are intrinsically dangerous and pose an unparalleled threat to the very existence of humankind. They do not enhance a country's security, but rather imperil the

session to address the issue immediately. In its very first resolution—1 (I) of 24 January 1946—the Assembly established the Atomic Energy Commission, composed of the Security Council members and Canada, and requested that it submit specific proposals for ensuring the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes only, for the elimination of atomic and

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other weapons of mass destruction and for the establishment of a system of safeguards, including inspections, to prevent violations and evasions.

A number of specific proposals followed, including one by the United States in June 1946. As the only nuclear-weapon State (NWS), it was natural that the United States put forward its own ideas on the matter. These were contained in what became known as the Baruch Plan, which was based largely on the United States government publication *A Report on the International Control of Atomic Energy*, issued in March of that year.

The US, which still held an unchallenged nuclear monopoly, called for an open exchange among all nations of basic scientific information for peaceful ends; control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes; the elimination of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction from national arsenals; and the establishment of effective safeguards by way of inspection and other means to protect complying States against the hazards of violations and evasions.

Though forward-thinking in many aspects, the Baruch Plan had several drawbacks. The most controversial one was probably its insistence that the United States retain its nuclear stockpile (which then consisted of nine weapons) until it was satisfied with the effectiveness of the international control system.¹ This proved unacceptable to the USSR, which wanted to reverse the order: all should first surrender their nuclear weapons and then implement an international verification system. One will never know if the world might have returned in 1946 to its nuclear-weapons-free status. What we do know is that there followed four decades of an unbridled nuclear arms race between the US and the USSR and the acquisition of those weapons and their delivery systems by other nations.

After the USSR's first nuclear test in 1949, the United Kingdom followed in 1952, France in 1960, China in 1964,

India in 1974 and Pakistan in 1998. Israel also acquired nuclear weapons as did South Africa, which later surrendered its stockpile. After the USSR's collapse, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine became for a time *de facto* NWS. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has also tested a nuclear device. In

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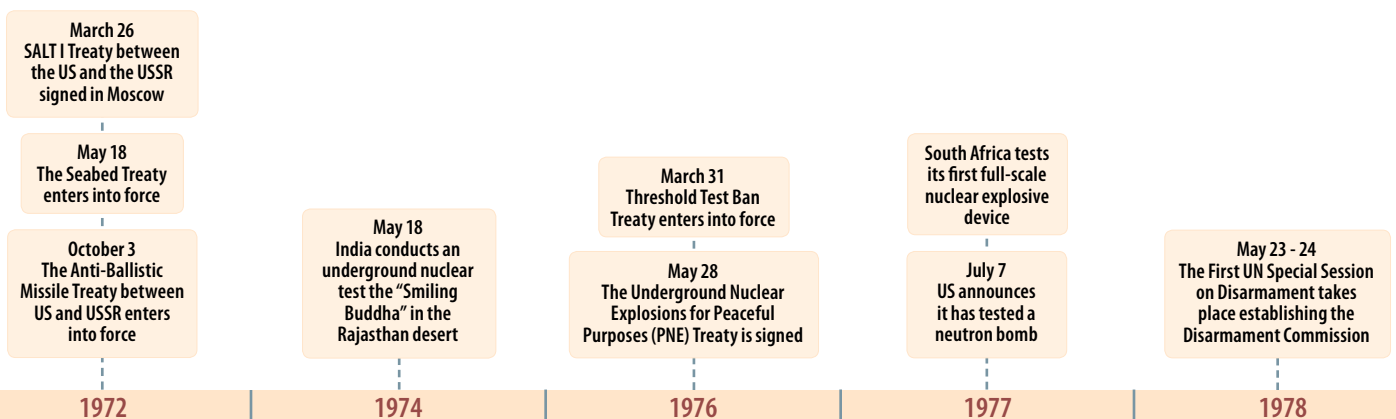
addition, there are many countries that possess the scientific know-how, technology and fissile material that would allow them to play the nuclear card in a relatively short time.

In 1952 the US achieved a qualitative leap in the nuclear-arms race when it detonated its first thermonuclear device. A year later the USSR followed suit.

The development of nuclear-weapons delivery systems—bombers, missiles and submarines—is another chapter of the arms race. However, the testing of nuclear weapons and the rockets to transport them would eventually rally public opinion (at least momentarily) in favor of nuclear disarmament measures.

Despite repeated and sometimes intense efforts to put disarmament efforts on track, the United Nations was unable to devise negotiating schemes that would bring the different parties together. Deep-rooted suspicion of the rival's motives and the absence of political will ensured a negotiating stalemate for almost two decades.

In the early 1960s the US and the USSR finally agreed to lead disarmament talks at the Geneva Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) meeting. Calls for an end to nuclear tests, especially in the atmosphere, and a stop to further horizontal proliferation were instrumental in getting



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the ENDC going in 1962. Not surprisingly, the first order of business was a treaty to ban nuclear-weapons tests in the atmosphere, under water and in outer space.

The 1963 Partial Test-Ban Treaty was agreed upon rather quickly. It did not contain verification measures and it prohibited activities which the ENDC's three participating nuclear-weapon States—the UK, the US and the USSR (France refused to take its seat at the table)—were ready to forego. Underground testing would continue for over 30 years.

The next item on the ENDC's agenda was a multilateral legal agreement to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons to other nations (horizontal proliferation). The 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has become the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament efforts since its entry into force in 1970.

By the late 1950s, the possible spread of nuclear weapons to more countries (horizontal proliferation) had become a source of increasing concern. So had the continued improvement of existing arsenals (vertical proliferation) and the testing of those weapons was seen as the key element of the qualitative nuclear arms race. Both horizontal proliferation and nuclear testing had found their way onto the United Nations agenda.

By the mid-1960s a number of countries had decided to forego the nuclear option and agreed to a trade-off from the nuclear-weapon States in return for a legally-binding commitment to remain non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS). It was time to sit down and negotiate a treaty. Countries in Latin America had already begun the pioneering efforts to establish

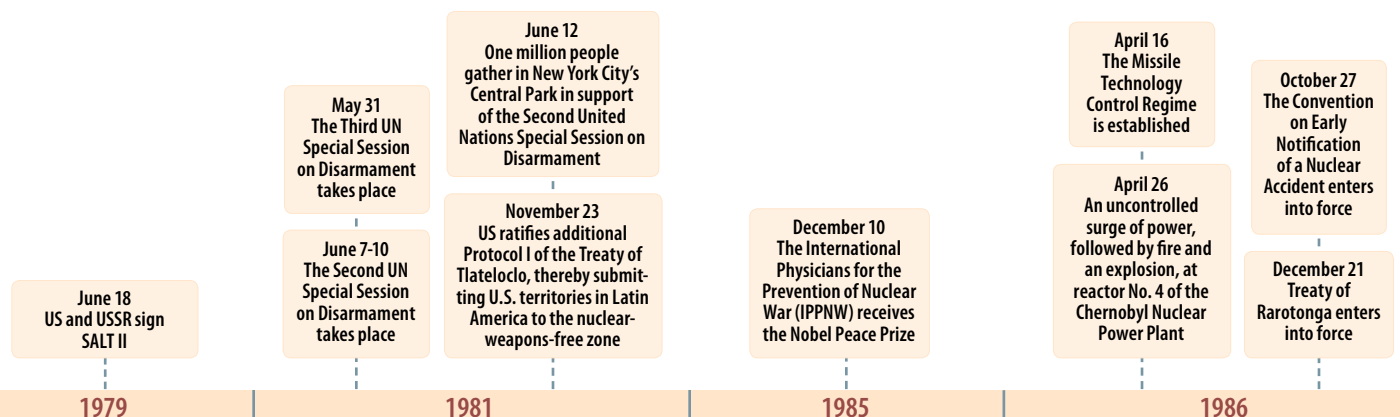
a nuclear-weapon-free zone in their region, which they saw as a way to begin to achieve a nuclear-weapons-free world.

The NPT's approach was different. It rests on three pillars: horizontal non-proliferation; vertical non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament; and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It is a contract between NWS and NNWS. The latter would enjoy the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons. The former would pursue nuclear disarmament, beginning with the cessation of all nuclear tests.

By then, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was in place, providing all parties with an international verification system, including inspections. The IAEA would do the same for the nuclear-weapon-free zones that have been established.

The NPT was done in good faith, but the non-nuclear-weapon States insisted that the situation regarding its implementation be reviewed periodically; thus the five-year conferences. In addition, the NPT was a temporary agreement whose extension would have to be examined after 25 years. In 1995 it was extended indefinitely.

After 1970, despite some very limited bilateral agreements between the US and the USSR, the nuclear arms race continued. The 1963 Partial Test-Ban Treaty had been a hoax, since underground tests multiplied. It appeared that since nuclear tests were out of sight, they were also out of mind. Calls for a comprehensive nuclear-weapon-test prohibition fell on deaf ears.



The non-nuclear-weapon States tried to raise visibility of the nuclear disarmament issues. Some pursued an amendment conference of the Partial Test-Ban Treaty to convert it into a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as a means of promoting public awareness of the dangers of a continued nuclear arms race. Others refused to endorse the conclusions of the NPT's five-year review unless a CTBT was specifically mentioned. Still others requested an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice regarding the legality of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Some continued to insist on the conclusion of a treaty prohibiting those weapons of mass destruction. After all, the international community had already banned biological and chemical weapons through multilateral treaties, why not nuclear weapons as well?

In 1996 the CTBT was finally concluded. Unfortunately, it contains a provision for its entry into force that is reminis-

cent of the conditions set forth by the Baruch Plan fifty years earlier in order to proceed to a nuclear-weapons-free world. The CTBT must be ratified by the world's 44 nations that have nuclear-related activities. That is the bad news. The good news is that the five nuclear-weapon States that have signed the NPT are abiding by the CTBT's provisions.

same basic elements. As in 1946, the US is expected to take the lead.

Public officials in some countries have begun to consider what a world without nuclear weapons would look like. The UN Secretary-General has detailed a five-point proposal.² The UK has put forward its ideas in this regard.³ A number of former political leaders in and out of the US have enlivened the debate with calls for the elimination of nuclear weapons.⁴

The new administration in Washington has begun to bring about some important changes in international relations. During last year's presidential campaign, then Senator Barack Obama called for a world in which there are no nuclear weapons, adding that to get there would not entail unilateral disarmament, but a continuing commitment under the NPT on the long road towards eliminating them.⁵

Once in office, President Obama reiterated his general commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons. That was one of the basic tenets of the 1946 General Assembly resolution. In his speech in Prague, on 5 April 2009, President Obama described the path to a nuclear-weapons-free world.⁶ He began by stating what many believe:

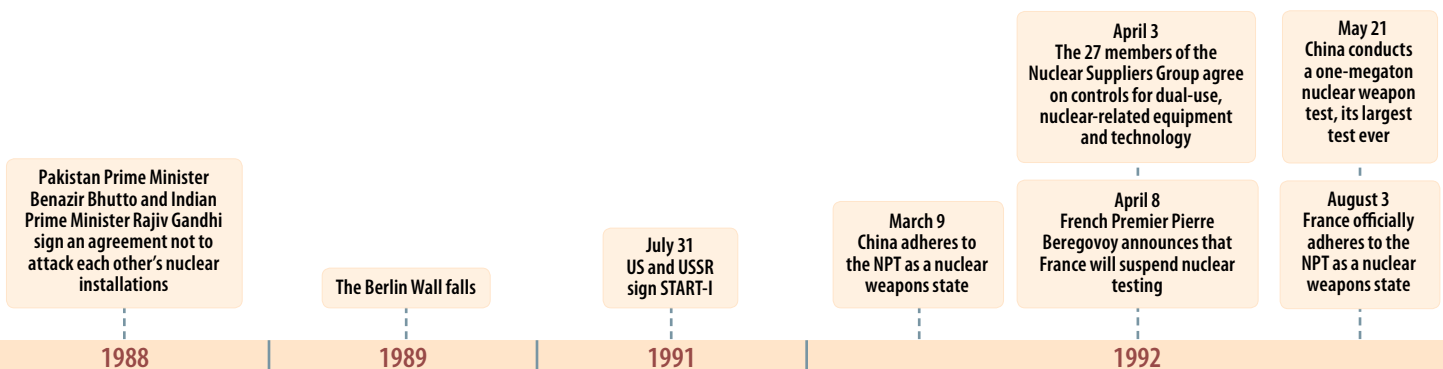
“The existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the cold war.” He then added:

“Today, the cold war has disappeared but thousands of those weapons have not. In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up. More nations have acquired these weapons. Testing has continued. Black markets trade in nuclear secrets and nuclear materials. The technology to build a bomb has spread. Terrorists are determined to buy, build or steal one. Our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach the point where the center cannot hold.”

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In 2009, the international community has come full circle. United Nations General Assembly resolution 1946 contained the basic elements of a nuclear-weapons-free world: a general commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons and an internationally-acceptable and verifiable system to promote the peaceful uses of atomic energy. After more than six decades of nuclear proliferation—both horizontal as well as vertical—the world seems poised to implement those

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Admitting that the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world would not be easy to achieve, he then described the steps the United States was ready to take:

- 】 reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy
- 】 negotiate a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia this year to reduce warheads and stockpiles
- 】 ratify the CTBT
- 】 conclude a treaty that verifiably ends the production of fissile materials intended for use in nuclear weapons
- 】 strengthen the NPT as a basis for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy
- 】 ensure that terrorists never acquire a nuclear weapon
- 】 promote a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years.

President Obama has made a bold proposal for the elimination of nuclear weapons. If nothing else, he has put nuclear disarmament on the international agenda. A long debate and complicated negotiations will follow, but the US has shown a willingness to lead and, even more important, to set an example. The START proposal is a case in point.

Fortunately, the Russian Federation seems to be a willing partner in this first stage. Moscow and Washington must reduce their own arsenals before asking others to do the same. Yet, there is bound to be much foot dragging among some of the other nuclear-weapon States. In that regard, the US will also have to point the way in its nuclear posture review. Significant changes in its official nuclear policy could translate into a new nuclear posture for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The nuclear-weapon States and their allies must abandon the way they now relate to nuclear weapons.

Another question which President Obama did not mention is the degree to which his proposals will encounter resistance within his own country, especially among groups most interested in the maintenance of the nuclear *status quo*, beginning with the nuclear laboratories themselves. In the US, as

elsewhere in the nuclear-weapon States, these have grown accustomed to receiving funding from the national defense budget. The development, effectiveness and safety of nuclear weapons are their livelihood, which they have resisted to surrender in the past.

Six decades ago it might have been easier to achieve a nuclear-weapons-free world, but now it will take an enlightened leadership to do so.

To the memory of William Epstein, a relentless advocate of nuclear disarmament.

Notes

- 1 Bernard Baruch, the US representative to the UN Atomic Energy Commission, submitted the proposal on 14 June 1946 and stated in part: "The United States proposes the creation of an International Atomic Development Authority, to which should be entrusted all phases of the development and use of atomic energy... We of this nation, desirous of helping to bring peace to the world and realizing the heavy obligations upon us arising from our possession of the means of producing the bomb and from the fact that it is part of our armament, are prepared to make our full contribution toward effective control of atomic energy. When an adequate system for control of atomic energy, including the renunciation of the bomb as a weapon, has been agreed upon and put into effective operation and condign punishments set up for violations of the rules of control which are to be stigmatized as international crimes, we propose that:
 - Manufacture of atomic bombs shall stop;
 - Existing bombs shall be disposed of pursuant to the terms of the treaty; and
 - The Authority shall be in possession of full information as to the know-how for the production of atomic energy."
- 2 "The United Nations and security in a nuclear-weapon-free world," 24 October 2008.
- 3 "Lifting the Nuclear Shadow: Creating the Conditions for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons", a Policy Information Paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 4 February 2009.
- 4 For example, George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," and "Toward a Nuclear-Free World," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 January 2007 and 15 January 2008.
- 5 His proposals were the most sweeping put forward by a presidential candidate except for Congressman Dennis J. Kucinich's call for the abolition of nuclear weapons.
- 6 The White House, www.whitehouse.gov.
- 7 On 1 April 2009 Presidents Obama and Medvedev agreed in London to pursue such an agreement.

