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## **All we lack is the will to disarm**

Even battle-scarred Cold Warriors want a world free of nuclear weapons, says Nobel laureate

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"The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted," said Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. The truth that nuclear weapons are hazardous to their possessors is, at last, beginning to get itself accepted.

President John F. Kennedy described the new reality in his Address to the American People on the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty on July 26, 1963: "I ask you to stop and think for a moment what it would mean to have nuclear weapons . . . in the hands of countries large and small, stable and unstable, responsible and irresponsible, scattered throughout the world. There would be no rest for anyone then, no stability, no real security, no chance of effective disarmament. There would only be the increased chance of accidental war . . ."

Seldom can there have been a more eloquent plea for disarmament. Yet the world still struggles to arrive even at an effective test-ban treaty.

The latest group of converts to nuclear disarmament, calling for the total abolition of nuclear weapons, made their case last week in an article in *The Wall Street Journal*. The group, all battle-scarred Cold Warriors, included, prominently, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn (two former U.S. secretaries of state, a former secretary of defence and a former chair of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee).

Ordinary mortals making such a plea expect to be labelled as out of touch with reality. These petitioners cannot be so easily dismissed. What they see from the vantage of their experience is a world poised "on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era."

They characterize this era as "new" since today's terrorist threat has a real nuclear dimension. New, too, is the fact that nuclear-armed terrorists would fall "outside the bounds of deterrent strategy."

But these developments alone would not suffice to persuade such a group to endorse global nuclear disarmament, nor can these developments fairly be described as constituting the dawn of a new nuclear era.

The fateful change these authors see stems, instead, from the proliferation of nuclear states. "New nuclear states," they warn, "do not have the benefit of years of step-by-step safeguards put in effect during the Cold War to prevent nuclear accidents, misjudgments or unauthorized launches".

The "new and dangerous" era is, therefore, the one president Kennedy described 44 years ago. The group's solution is that put forward by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik in 1986: an end to the reliance on nuclear weaponry.

Most observers, today, regard the path to disarmament as closed. These four individuals remind us that it was closed by choice. The instruments for disarmament remain readily at hand, as does the legal obligation to use them. The circumstances for disarmament, with the U.S. as the only remaining superpower, are uniquely favourable -- only the will is lacking.

The instrument for disarmament is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which came into force in 1970, and has been acceded to by the vast majority of the world's nations. It legislates an end to nuclear weaponry since it embodies two provisions: first, that states without nuclear weapons in 1967 should not obtain them, and second that (with no timetable set) nuclear-armed signatories divest themselves of their weapons.

Every president of the United States has reaffirmed these treaty obligations. None, however, has been more laggardly in fulfilling them than the present incumbent, with the result that this bulwark against nuclear anarchy is today in danger of collapse.

If the five major nuclear powers, led by the most powerful, the United States, were to show evidence of a desire to keep their side of the NPT bargain, the treaty could still be saved. This lies at the heart of the present appeal.

The steps along the path to disarmament are so evident that it is appalling they have not yet been taken. There can be no justification, 18 years after the end of the Cold War, for the U.S. and Russia to maintain thousands of nuclear-armed ICBMs in readiness for firing at one another within minutes. Equally, the world would be safer with the removal of the many tactical ("battlefield") nuclear weapons deployed across Europe. Also, the grotesque level of nuclear armament, amounting to something approaching 30,000 warheads -- predominantly American -- needs to be addressed. Why, we should further enquire, do nations (the U.S., UK, Russia) need to "modernize" their nuclear weaponry? And why leave the door open to renewed production and testing, scuttling the impending Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty?

The four authors of the statement in the Journal, joined by 16 distinguished colleagues, make all of these points.

What they fail to remark is that the huge U.S. preponderance in nuclear weaponry constitutes a challenge to lesser powers, such as Russia and China. A continued Pax Americana, guaranteed by U.S. nuclear weapons, is no more palatable to them than would be Pax Russica or Pax Sinica to the United States.

If, taking this thought a step further, the U.S. regards its nuclear ascendancy as vital today, will it still do so tomorrow? Can it continue indefinitely to bear the cost? Or is it, in fact, bringing that cost upon itself, through its unrestrained pursuit of nuclear dominance?

Finally, one notes a compelling item on the positive side of the ledger favouring the case for legislated disarmament. It relates to the central question of emerging nuclear states, which have the potential to destabilize entire regions of the globe -- today, Iran and North Korea.

Given an international regime of nuclear disarmament, their deployment of nuclear weapons would represent an affront to the international community. This community does not lack the power to disable such weapons. What it lacks, is the right.

Through a commitment to legislated disarmament, it can create that right. It would be folly, therefore, not to do so.

As so often, the choice is between law or war.

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