

Overcoming Nuclear Dangers

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OPENING REMARKS by **MIKHAIL GORBACHEV**

First, let me express my condolences and sympathy to the people and government of Italy after the recent tragic earthquake that struck Abruzzo.

Since our first conference on Overcoming the Nuclear Dangers, held at Harvard in December 2007, many things have happened, some of them unexpected and dramatic. The world is now going through a global crisis, which is an unprecedented challenge to international politics. It has created a new context for our conference.

The current crisis will be exacerbating the critical challenges of the global world:

- the challenge of security in its politico-military aspect;
- the challenge of backwardness and poverty, which create fertile ground for conflict, extremism and terrorism;
- the challenge of the global environmental crisis, which according to credible forecasts may soon cause outbreaks of violence and international conflicts.

International politics is not keeping pace with the rapidly changing world. It risks becoming a purely rhetorical enterprise producing empty declarations. The result is increasing global instability and failure of governance.

We are witnessing an intersection of global trends and challenges and the emergence of a new generation of leaders. Their task is to overcome current failures of declaratory and ineffective international politics.

Our time calls for change. Conferences such as ours, representing a wealth of experience of political veterans, experts and the non-governmental community, could become a bridge linking this demand for change and decision making at the level of government policy.

We are meeting to discuss one of the most urgent problems of today's world – the nuclear dangers. In fact, it's a whole range of problems, including of course non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear terrorism. But what must worry us above all else is the fact that twenty

years after the end of the cold war the arsenals of the nuclear powers still contain thousands of nuclear weapons.

In effect, all that has been achieved in nuclear disarmament up until now is the implementation of the agreements signed in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I am referring to the 1987 INF Treaty, which eliminated two classes of nuclear missiles, and the 1991 START Treaty, which launched the biggest cutbacks of nuclear weapons ever. Thousands of tactical nuclear weapons were destroyed in accordance with the US-Soviet agreement of October 1991.

We have to admit that nothing fundamentally new has been achieved in the past decade and a half. The pace of nuclear arms reductions has slowed. The mechanisms of arms control and verifications have weakened. The comprehensive test ban treaty 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 taken together, thus making it more difficult to bring them into the process of nuclear disarmament. The regime of nuclear non-proliferation is in jeopardy.

The two major nuclear powers – the United States and Russia – bear the greatest responsibility for this state of affairs. I have to note, however, that it was the United States that abrogated the ABM Treaty, has failed to ratify the comprehensive test ban treaty and refused to conclude with Russia a legally binding, verifiable treaty on strategic offensive arms.

It is only recently that the first signs have appeared that the major nuclear powers understand that 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 obligations under Article 6 of the non-proliferation treaty. The joint statement approved by the two president calls for a number of other steps to reduce the nuclear dangers, including ratification by the United States of the comprehensive test ban treaty.

Those are positive, encouraging steps. And yet, we have to recognize that the problems and dangers are still more numerous than the achievements. The road to a nuclear weapons free world is filled with multiple obstacles.

Nuclear weapons are an extreme manifestation of militarization of international relations and of political thinking. We have so far failed to overcome this dark legacy of the XX century. In fact, over the past decades, things have even gotten worse.

The root cause of this is the erroneous evaluation of the events leading to the end of the cold war. They were seen in the United States and some other countries as a victory of the West – and a green light for unilateralist policies.

Instead of creating a new architecture of international security based on real cooperation, as called for in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed in 1990, an attempt was made to impose on the world a “monopoly leadership” of the sole remaining superpower and of the institutions and organizations, such as NATO, inherited from the cold war and not reformed after it.

The use of force and the threat of force – which, of course, is also illegal under the UN Charter – were reasserted as a “normal” way of solving problems. Official documents rationalized doctrines of pre-emptive strike and the need for US military superiority.

Today, we are facing a real possibility of a new arms race. Priority is still being given to financing of military programs; “defence” budgets far exceeding reasonable security requirements keep growing as well as weapons trade. The United States spends for military purposes almost as much as the rest of the world taken together.

Disregard for international law and for peaceful ways of settling disputes, for the United Nations and its Security Council, is being proclaimed as a kind of policy.

As a result, we have witnessed a war in Europe – in Yugoslavia – something that had seemed inconceivable; a long-term deterioration in the Middle East; the war in Iraq; an extremely severe situation in Afghanistan. And something that we are particularly concerned about here – the increasingly alarming nuclear non-proliferation crisis.

Its main cause is the failure of the members of the nuclear club to fulfil their obligations under NPT Article 6 – to move towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. While this fact remains, there will be a continued danger that other countries would acquire nuclear weapons. Today, dozens of states have the technical ability to do so.

In the final analysis, the nuclear danger can only be removed by abolishing nuclear weapons. But could one regard as realistic the prospect of one country retaining the quantities of conventional weapons that exceed the combined arsenals of practically all other nations – the prospect of one country achieving absolute global superiority?

Let me be very frank here: such a situation would be an insurmountable obstacle on the path to a world without nuclear weapons.

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 weaponization of outer space, all talk about a nuclear weapon free world will be just inconsequential rhetoric.

I think that this aspect of the problem should be given priority attention at our conference.

The experience and wisdom of its participants give hope for a productive outcome. Our assessments, judgments and proposals could be a contribution to overcoming the current shortage of practicable ideas, a real help to political decision-makers and government leaders.

I am sure that the ideas and recommendations coming from this conference will be given proper attention. Let me therefore offer a couple of suggestions.

First, concerning the need for an international discussion of the problem of militarization. Some of its aspects are addressed by the United Nations Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Its work should certainly be re-energized – and I welcome the participation here of UN Under Secretary General Ordzhonikidze – and the valuable proposals of the UN Secretary General should be given support.

Furthermore, the discussion of this subject should be given an impetus through the G-20. That forum must not be limited to the role of a “fire brigade” in the current crisis. I believe it is inevitable that the G-20 will have to deal with political problems. The G-8, too, needs to address the problem of demilitarizing world affairs, lest they be marginalized in a rapidly changing world.

My second proposal concerns the nuclear issues directly. After the recent speech by President Obama in Prague there is a real prospect that the United States will ratify the test ban treaty. 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 others – will have to, at the very least, declare a freeze on their nuclear arsenals and their readiness to engage in negotiations on their limitation and 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, concealing 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.

Finally, let me throw in, by way of discussion, the question of possible use of nuclear devices to protect the Earth from asteroids. Scientists believe that a collision with an asteroid could happen as early as 2036. Perhaps retaining a small “safety reserve” under the control of the UN Security Council might be a reasonable precaution. Addressing this problem together, without prejudice to the cause of nuclear disarmament, could be an excellent example of international cooperation.

As we start our debate I hope that it will produce ideas that could advance the process of moving toward the goal that I trust we all share. Let us go beyond rhetoric to bring this goal closer and ultimately make it a reality.