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POINT OF VIEW - LE MONDE - Paris, 14 October 2009

Worldwide nuclear disarmament is the only response to anarchic proliferation

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Introduction by ACDN

The article translated below, which appeared recently in France's leading daily *le Monde*, is a significant political event, because of the quality and variety of its four signatories. Two are former PMs, one from the UMP party (in the current rightwing majority) and one from the socialists (the former leftwing majority). The two other signatories are a general who was in charge of France's airborne forces and a former Minister of Defense. And although it does not say so explicitly, it calls into question not only the United States of America but also France for her own *"political and military establishment's attachment to the acquired symbols of power"*. Here that means the possession of a nuclear arsenal.

The publication of this "point of view" could mark the start of an important evolution in French defense policy. But will President Nicolas Sarkozy agree to reconsider the equation which claims that France's nuclear strike force is *"the Nation's life-insurance policy"*, as he called it in [two letters to us written](#) in March and April 2007 just before his election to the presidency, and as he said in similar terms one year later in his presidential speech at Cherbourg, 21 March 2008?

On 24 September 2009, speaking to the UN Security Council, President Sarkozy said that he *"fully supports what has been decided in the resolution"* (although France negotiated toughly in the Security Council) and *"fully supports President Obama's initiative"* in favour of abolishing nuclear weapons. Yet his speech was entirely given over to whipping those guilty of *"violating international rules"* - proliferating nations like North Korea and nations accused of proliferating like Iran. He called for strong sanctions against them - but not against Israel, India or Pakistan, which Nicolas Sarkozy perhaps categorises, along with Brazil, as states having the right to "civilian" nuclear technology. Above all, he said not a word about the *"violation of international rules"* by the nuclear states parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) - violations by the USA, UK and Russia beginning in 1968 and by France and China since 1992 when they signed.

How far will Nicolas Sarkozy really go in supporting President Obama's initiative in concrete ways, in order to give *"credibility to our commitment to a world with fewer nuclear weapons in future and perhaps one day none at all"*, as we read in the fairly sceptical conclusion of his speech at the Security Council? Will he grant the wish expressed by the four authors of this "point of view", the *"wish that France should resolutely affirm her commitment to the success of this disarmament process"*? That's the big question.

Perhaps the French people themselves, who have never yet been consulted about nuclear weapons, will need to make their voices heard. Once again, whatever the result may be, a referendum is the only way to legitimise *"France's point of view"* on this matter which concerns, literally, *the vital interests of the Nation* - and of other nations also, of course.

ACDN, 15 October 2009

POINT OF VIEW

Worldwide nuclear disarmament is the only response to anarchic proliferation

The nuclear bomb, conceived in the extreme struggle of World War II, became the tool of mutual deterrence for the two protagonists in the Cold War, and was acquired also by the UK, France and China. Deterrence, associated with the strategic supremacy of the two superpowers of the time, played a role in limiting armed conflict during the Cold War, and in part has retained that function subsequently. But two deep changes in the world scene force us to reexamine the role of nuclear weapons for tomorrow.

Firstly, the variety of conflicts since the end of the superpower blocs means that the mechanisms of deterrence have much less gripping power than they had. Many of the players involved engage in conflict with purely local objectives; they do not respond to pressures from any global power, nor do they touch the vital interests of the nuclear powers. The nuclear states, for their part, have opted for sustainable cooperative policies in their mutual relations. The only flagbearers of global contestation are non-state actors trying to spread their fundamentalism. The strategic applicability of deterrence is therefore reduced by larger and larger "dead corners".

Secondly, the regulating instrument constituted by the anti-proliferation agreements since the Treaty of 1968 (the NPT) has lost its effectiveness. Two or three decades ago it succeeded in leading some states to not acquire nuclear weapons or to renounce them. But the commitments made by the nuclear powers, commitments that were fundamental to the equilibrium of the system, were not carried through. Israel, India and Pakistan have entered the "club" without resistance, the settlement of the worst regional crises has not been achieved and possessors of nuclear weapons have made only limited progress in the disarmament process that they signed up to.

The failures of non-proliferation, now confirmed and accentuated by the actions of Iran and North Korea, have cumulative consequences: the legitimacy of the existing agreements is weakened by the proliferations that have already been accepted, and the effectiveness of a system founded on a small number of players knowing their adversaries' strategic coherence is undermined by the arrival of newcomers. With this phenomenon there are risks of enthusiasm being unsustainable because there are so many actors and because the institutions of one of them could be unstable. International security is therefore gravely weakened. Let us add that the relative successes won against the proliferation of certain other types of weapons may be rendered fragile by increases in the most powerful weapon of mass destruction, the nuclear bomb.

The consequence of these observations is clear: successful non-proliferation is a primary necessity for peace, and it depends on urgent and much more radical initiatives being taken by the five nuclear powers recognised by the NPT. They must undertake a process leading in a planned way to complete disarmament, they must bring into it the three *de facto* nuclear powers, they must abandon all projects for developing new weapons, and they must take more initiatives and political risks so as to overcome major regional crises.

Barack Obama, the President of the USA, has adopted some very promising positions, first in his speech in Prague on April 6 and his meetings with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. A major strategic movement may be getting under way. But the predictable obstacles are huge: the US political and military establishment's attachment to the acquired symbols of power, the Russian and Chinese leaders' distrust of change, the regional strategies of India, Pakistan and Israel, and the difficulty of persuading North Korea and Iran to renounce their programmes.

In this debate, France has a special place by virtue of her tradition of independence, her sense of responsibility as seen in the strict sufficiency of her arsenal and her solid safety regime, and her patient and constructive participation in all initiatives for limitation and effective monitoring of weapons. She has the same great interest as the other nuclear powers have in reestablishing credible non-proliferation. The political message of peace and justice that she wants the world to hear requires her to be a dynamic and creative player in the process that may be starting, the process leading to effective and balanced disarmament which is hoped for by the vast majority of the planet's peoples, including all our European partners.

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We the signatories of the present declaration, inspired by our experience in this field, express the wish that France should resolutely affirm her commitment to the success of this disarmament process and her resolution to draw the logical conclusions from it, when the time comes, as they affect her own capacities. France should open the necessary debates within her democratic institutions and prepare actively for the coming dates of negotiation, starting with the quinquennial Review Conference for the NPT in 2010.

Signed

Alain Juppé, former Prime Minister; **Bernard Norlain**, General, former commander of the air combat force; **Alain Richard**, former Minister of Defense ministre; **Michel Rocard**, former Prime Minister.

Translated into English by © Peter Low (NZ) for ACDN