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For a Middle East without Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Today the US President Barack Obama receives the Nobel Peace Prize which he was awarded on 13 October - nearly two months before he decided to send more troops to Afghanistan in the hope of "winning the war" that he inherited there. Let us briefly look back over the steps that earned him this Nobel Prize.

Elected on 4 November 2008, President Obama took office on 20 January. On 5 April he gave a speech in Prague calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and immediately US diplomats opened negotiations with Russia with a view to replacing the START Treaty on reducing nuclear weapons, which will lapse on 5 December, with an even more ambitious disarmament treaty. On 4 June in Cairo, Barack Obama delivered a great speech of openness towards the Muslim world. Then, on 25 September, he chaired a special session of the UN Security Council during which 14 heads of state or of government (plus one ambassador, from Libya) unanimously adopted a resolution of US origin promising us "a world without nuclear weapons".

On December 4, the Russian and US negotiators did not succeed in setting up a new treaty, but their presidents, Obama and Medvedev, put out a communiqué reaffirming their determination to achieve one, and to keep working "in the spirit of the START Treaty", despite it having lapsed.

Michel Rocard, Yehuda Atai and Jean-Marie Matagne are taking this opportunity to remind us that Obama's grand design of abolishing nuclear weapons will never come to fruition unless the Middle East becomes a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction... and to clarify what conditions are needed for such a zone to come into being.

The regional daily *Ouest-France* is the paper with the most readers in France, covering the twelve départements of Western France where it is distributed. It publishes this article on 10 December, the same day when Obama receives his Nobel Peace Prize.

FOR A MIDDLE EAST WITHOUT WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Two years ago, we issued *an appeal to Europeans to prevent war against Iran*.⁽¹⁾ We are pleased to see that after that appeal (even if it played no role), the "pre-emptive war" which was then seriously threatened against Iran did not take place. That possibility is not yet totally ruled out - the "Iran question" has yet to receive a diplomatic solution in an international context, and indeed such a solution, which we desire, seems to be moving further out of reach. Yet we must still have hope, given the major change in international prospects for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation that has occurred since Barack Obama became President of the USA.

On 13 October, the Nobel Committee awarded Obama the Nobel Peace Prize, "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples. The Committee has attached special importance to Obama's vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons". "Obama has as President created a new climate in international politics. Multilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions can play."

The prize-winner, however, recognised that he did not deserve it for what he had already managed to do for peace,

but rather for the objectives that he was proposing to the international community. Concerning nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, he remarked: "*Some of the work confronting us will not be completed during my presidency. Some, like the elimination of nuclear weapons, may not be completed in my lifetime...*" Concerning the Middle East, he emphasised: "*We must all do our part to resolve conflicts that have caused so much pain and hardship over so many years [... and to uphold] the rights of all Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security in nations of their own.*"

Those two objectives: a world without nuclear weapons, and a Middle East at last experiencing a just and durable peace, are closely linked. It is clear that Israel will always refuse to eliminate its own nuclear weapons (generally estimated at at least 200 warheads) as long as its security and permanent survival are not assured. Clearly, that security and survival will continue to be threatened as long as the Israel-Palestine question is not resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, and as long as the questions of Golan and Lebanon are not also resolved. Similarly, Iran will always be suspected, rightly or wrongly, of wanting to obtain nuclear weapons as long as the Israelis retain theirs, and of desiring the disappearance of Israel as long as Israel is not universally recognised as existing within certain frontiers (*a priori*, those of 1967) agreed to by the United Nations and by all Israel's neighbours, including the Palestinians. The Palestinians have a right to their own state, a sovereign, independent, viable state, which should exist until such time as the two parties agree, maybe one day, on an Israelo-Palestinian federation or confederation, which might be multi-religious or (even better) secular.

Whatever form it takes, an overall agreement of all the concerned parties is what must be sought. Multilateral negotiations, likely preceded by bilateral or plurilateral consultations, ought to achieve this end. The objective must be to resolve, through mutually acceptable compromises, the numerous concrete problems that exist, from the precise location of frontiers to the management of fresh water or of the oceans. But negotiations must also and above all aim at establishing a Middle East without any weapons of mass destruction, whether they be nuclear, biological, chemical, radioactive or new-technology weapons. That will be the Middle East's precious and indispensable contribution to building a world of peace, cooperation and mutual understanding, freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. The ball is in the court of Israel and the USA, just as much as it is in Iran's.

Paris, Tel-Aviv and Saintes

Michel Rocard, former French Prime minister, MEP, ambassador for the Poles

Yehuda Atai, publisher and editor of the *World of the Bible*, is a co-founder of the *Israeli Committee for a Middle East without nuclear, biological or chemical weapons*

Jean-Marie Matagne, Dr in Philosophy, president of ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire)

(1) Published in *Libération*, 16 November 2007 and on [ACDN Website](#). That appeal received widespread support (see the [list of first signatories](#)) and thousands of hits from francophone and anglophone web surfers.