

By Michael Hancock MP (UK, Lib) Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, Assembly of the Western European Union

The European Security and Defence Assembly through its Political Committee has focused extensively on issues of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. In recent years it has produced a series of reports providing detailed accounts of the various global non-proliferation efforts and making important recommendations as regards achieving their ultimate goals.

This report aims to continue this constructive debate and more importantly to provide input for the various fora involved in formulating non-proliferation policy at a crucial time when the two big superpowers are heading towards a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the United Nations is preparing for its Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in 2010.

START:

The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) between the US and Russia, is due to expire on 5 December 2009. Presidents Obama and Medvedev met in Moscow in July and signed a framework document in order to provide guidance for the negotiators of a follow-on agreement.

While START I required a reduction in the number of intercontinental ballistic missile delivery systems to 1 600 on each side, the new START will call for a further decrease to 500-1100. The 2002 non-binding Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) limited the number of deployed warheads to 1700-2200: the new START will call for a cutback to 1500-1675. It was recently stated that both sides are aiming to commit to negotiating the lower figures indicated. This would in fact be ideal, since cutbacks to the higher figures of 1 100 for delivery systems and 1 675 for deployed warheads would not represent any significant reduction in the current arsenals.

Current Arsenals:

- Intercontinental ballistic missile delivery systems: US: 859 / Russia: 620
- Warheads: US: 2,202 / Russia: 2,787

The biggest current challenge is the need to produce and approve a document within a very limited timeframe. Even if an agreement is reached by December the US Senate and the Russian Duma will not have enough time to debate and ratify the new treaty before the old one expires. An expiry date for START does not mean that a vacuum will be created in which a nuclear threat could arise. The most likely solution will be to extend the treaty through a "provisional application", though this might give rise to lengthy negotiations which could also

impede the work of the NPT Review Conference.

Any agreement signed by the two biggest nuclear powers has the potential to not only reinvigorate the non-proliferation efforts within the international community but also to demonstrate Russian and American leadership in strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a highly desirable result in light of the forthcoming NPT Review Conference in May 2010.

The missile defence shield in Eastern Europe:

The missile defence plan that had been strongly supported, prepared and partially negotiated by the Bush Administration envisaged the deployment of 10 missile interceptors in Poland, an X-band radar in the Czech Republic and a mobile radar system in an undetermined European location in order to protect the US and western Europe from long-range ballistic missiles potentially armed with nuclear warheads and launched from Iran. However this system offered no protection to south-eastern Europe, Turkey or Israel from the threats posed by Iranian short-range and medium-range missiles.

The Obama administration has proposed an alternative missile defence system to "provide stronger, smarter and swifter defences of American forces and America's allies", generating operational and financial advantages. The Obama Administration and the IAEA are now arguing that claims about an imminent Iranian nuclear threat and of long-range missile capabilities are premature. The new system would be more quickly deployable, more reliable and less costly, while under the old programme there would have been no verified missile defence until at least 2017.

The new approach has certain political implications for international relations. Russian hostility towards the original missile defence plan was preventing the US and Russia from reaching agreement on reducing their nuclear arsenals and cooperating with a view to containing and sanctioning the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea. Moreover, Russian involvement and goodwill are becoming increasingly fundamental for helping NATO out of the impasse in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin welcomed Mr Obama's announcement about abandoning the plan for the missile defence shield. Russia also announced that no short-range missiles would be stationed in Kaliningrad – although a Presidential decision has yet to materialise – and has relaxed its stance on the Iranian issue, showing greater willingness to cooperate.

At the same time, the decision had repercussions in eastern Europe, where the Czech Republic and particularly Poland viewed the American shift as underestimating their defence interests and as a concession to Russia. However, the US Secretary of Defense, Mr Gates, immediately gave his assurance that components of the new system could still be based in the two countries if they so wished. To reaffirm America's commitment towards its allies, Vice President Joseph R. Biden visited eastern Europe in October and officially proposed that the Czech Republic and Poland be involved in the new system. This renewed commitment was welcomed by the two countries, which accepted the new plan.

Recommendations:

Urge the EU Political and Security Committee to develop an EU missile defence concept in connection with both NATO and with Russia.

NPT:

The positive spirit of Prague and the new US Administration's encouraging approach to non-proliferation and arms controls already gave impetus to the work of the May 2009 Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) – the third and last before the 2010 Review Conference – which was thus able to establish a constructive basis for the review process. The PrepCom focused on three main areas relating to the implementation and the strengthening of the Treaty provisions:

- prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons, disarmament and international peace and security;
- non-proliferation, nuclear-weapon-free zones and safeguards; and
- the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The US PrepCom delegation has signalled the new administration's determination to persuade the Senate to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), drawing attention to the START negotiations with Russia reaffirming the US's intention to engage in negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and reiterating its firm line on states' compliance with the NPT verification measures and on automatic penalties for transgression.

Compliance and enforcement are particularly important in the case of countries like Iran invoking the NPT Article IV provision that "Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination [...]". That right must be seen in the context of the growing global energy demand and the evidence in favour of making wider use of civil nuclear power in order to address the problem of climate change.

In this regard the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) offers member states and in particular developing countries technical assistance for the development of a sustainable nuclear power sector.

Over the last decade various proposals have been put forward by several countries (Germany, Japan, Russia) and organisations (the Nuclear Threat Initiative, NTI, and World Nuclear Association, WNA) for the multilateralisation of nuclear fuel-cycle activities in order to guarantee both the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and secure access to nuclear fuel. The most widely supported initiative involves the creation of a "nuclear fuel bank": the IAEA would administer a reserve of low enriched uranium (LEU) which would provide member states which so requested a back-up fuel supply for their nuclear reactors on a non-discriminatory and non-political basis, provided that the states concerned met the non-proliferation requirements.

Recommendations:

- Lend support to the NPT Review Conference of 2010 in order to ensure its success and, in particular, seek to promote the provisions aimed at strengthening the treaty outlined by the three Preparatory Committees.
- Forge an EU-US non-proliferation strategy concept in the run-up to the NPT Review Conference.

IRAN:

On 25 September Iran announced that it was in the process of building a an urgent statement issued during the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh the US, Britain and France condemned the creation of a second nuclear facility and urged Iran to fully cooperate with the West and to comply with NPT standards.

During the 1 October 2009 Geneva talks with Iran, represented by the Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Jalili, the E3+3 found themselves faced with a much more cooperative Iran. It is too soon to say whether this was due to the threat of further sanctions, or whether Iran is planning to drag out negotiations as much as possible before pulling back, or whether it has decided to cooperate with the West. Nonetheless, the facts arising following the Geneva talks point towards a much more positive climate. The most important development has been Iran's agreement to open the doors of its previously undisclosed nuclear plant, where IAEA inspectors began their work at the end of October.

On 21 October, following a plan by the E3+3 that Iran's low-enriched uranium (LEU) should be transported to third countries for further enrichment and transformation into fuel assemblies for the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces isotopes for medical purposes, it was agreed that 1 200 kg of Iranian LEU would be transferred to Russia before the end of the year to be further enriched and subsequently sent to France for turning into fuel.

The Iranian delegation initially cautiously welcomed the agreement. It has subsequently however requested that a technical committee be setup in order to review the plans.

Recommendations:

- Encourage a deepening of the dialogue which has recently opened with Iran within the E3+3 framework and actively pursue contacts with the Iranian Government urging it to cooperate fully with the IAEA and to agree to its low-enriched uranium being processed by third countries for use solely for medical and civilian purposes.
- Prepare for the eventual imposition of stringent sanctions against Iran should it backtrack on its current position and cease to cooperate with the international community regarding its nuclear programme.

NORTH KOREA:

Relations between the West and North Korea have deteriorated significantly in the past three years. North Korea has conducted 2 nuclear bomb tests and several missile tests.

Experts believe that North Korea has produced about 50 kg of plutonium, enough for 6-8 bombs. However, it has not yet been able to miniaturise the weapons and place them on missiles; and does not yet possess the technology to guide those missiles to a target.

The six-party nuclear talks framework (North and South Korea, China, Russia; Japan and the US) set up in 2003 to address North Korea's nuclear activities has to date proven ineffective. In the past North Korea was offered extensive aid and an end to its international isolation in exchange for giving up its efforts to build an atomic arsenal.

The negotiations have stalled on two occasions (most recently in April 2009), with North Korea pulling out of the talks and demanding bilateral negotiations with the United States and recognition as a nuclear state.

Washington has always opposed bilateral talks; however, in September 2009 there were indications that it would be prepared to sit at the table with North Korea in order to persuade Kim's regime to return to the multilateral framework.

China today can play a key role in persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme. China accounts for three-quarters of North Korea's total trade, all its oil supplies and half of its food, giving China unparalleled leverage over its small neighbour.

This does not necessarily mean, however, that China would swiftly move to punish its neighbour should it engage in further nuclear and missile tests. China has every reason to fear a collapse of Kim's regime as it would lead to a mass influx of refugees fleeing their impoverished state and to new concerns about the future of the Korean peninsula.

Recommendations:

- Offer support to the six nations in their negotiations with North Korea and urge China to support the armaments and financial sanctions called for under UNSCR 1874 and to play a key role in persuading North Korea return to the negotiations table and abandon its nuclear programme.

PAKISTAN:

Pakistan's nuclear sites, mainly situated around the capital, are close to unstable tribal regions and areas dominated by Taliban militants. Nuclear matters remain mainly under the direct command and control of the military, limiting the role of the government in nuclear decision-making. Such limited oversight combined with the risk of the conflict being so near to the nuclear sites pose significant dangers in terms of nuclear consequences.

Recommendations:

- Lend support to the government of Pakistan in its fight against the Taliban and in its efforts to secure its nuclear installations.

Leading non-proliferation theories:

- **Global Zero:** The total elimination of nuclear weapons. This initiative was first launched in December 2008 by 100 political and military world leaders and subsequently reinvigorated in the wake of President Obama's speech in Prague. The Global Zero group proposes a plan for the gradual and monitored elimination of nuclear weapons, starting with significant reductions in the arsenals of the two former superpowers: the United States and Russia. A new START would in fact be the starting point of the plan; further reductions should be undertaken along with multilateral negotiations among all nuclear powers for an agreement to eliminate all nuclear weapons, that is, global zero. The plan entails four phases with a timeline of 20 years, starting from 2010. A commission composed of political and military leaders will meet in February 2010 to present a final and detailed plan.

- Another leading theory being increasingly promoted is that all talks should include both nuclear and non-nuclear states. That is to say there should be an all-inclusive debate with full transparency; after all there are non-nuclear states in the world today which choose not to possess these weapons not because they cannot but because they rely on the weapons of their allies. By including everyone in the "club" and creating higher levels of mutual trust, it is easier to ensure that the non-proliferation efforts and debate move forward.

- Another argument on the opposite side of the spectrum advocates that by abandoning arms control talks and negotiations nuclear states can cut through the cumbersome bureaucratic and even diplomatic red tape and go straight to the heart of the matter – reducing their arsenals. This is the type of nuclear disarmament implemented by Presidents George Bush and Vladimir Putin at the beginning of the 21st century when they signed the Moscow Treaty or SORT in 2002. Though this might have been considered a successful venture at the time, in today's climate – where secrecy surrounds nuclear proliferators such as North Korea and Iran – and ahead of the crucial 2010 Review Conference, though greater transparency may lead to lengthier negotiations it does at the same time open the doors to the wider world and it is this kind of climate that needs to be generated before the NPT Review Conference in May 2010.

Recommendations:

Promote a pan-European and wide-ranging nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament dialogue at EU level to expand the EU's experience and its current supporting role in these fields.

The full report will be published in early December at

<http://assembly.weu.int/>