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My plan to drop the bomb

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The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 marked an end and a beginning. The close of the World War II ushered in a Cold War, with a precarious peace based on the threat of mutually assured destruction.



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Today the world is at another turning point. The assumption that nuclear weapons are indispensable to keeping the peace is crumbling. Disarmament is back on the global agenda -- and not a moment too soon. A groundswell of new international initiatives will soon emerge to move this agenda forward.

The Cold War's end, 20 years ago this autumn, was supposed to provide a peace dividend. Instead, we find ourselves still facing serious nuclear threats. Some stem from the persistence of more than 20,000 nuclear weapons and the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Others relate to nuclear tests -- more than a dozen in the post-Cold War era, aggravated by the constant testing of long-range missiles. Still others arise from concerns that more countries or even terrorists might be seeking the bomb.

For decades, we believed that the terrible effects of nuclear weapons would be sufficient to prevent their use. The superpowers were likened to a pair of scorpions in a bottle, each knowing a first strike would be suicidal. Today's expanding nest of scorpions, however, means that no one is safe. The presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States -- holders of the largest nuclear arsenals -- recognize this. They have endorsed the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, most recently at their Moscow summit, and are seeking new reductions.

Many efforts are under way worldwide to achieve this goal. Earlier this year, the 65-member Conference on Disarmament -- the forum that produces multilateral disarmament treaties -- broke a deadlock and agreed to negotiations on a fissile material treaty. Other issues it will discuss include nuclear disarmament and security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states.

In addition, Australia and Japan have launched a major international commission on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. My own multimedia "WMD - WeMustDisarm!" campaign, which will culminate on the International Day of Peace (Sept. 21), will reinforce growing calls for disarmament by former statesmen and grassroots campaigns, such as "Global Zero." These calls will get a further boost in September when civil society groups gather in Mexico City for a United Nations-sponsored conference on disarmament and development.

Although the U.N. has been working on disarmament since 1946, two treaties negotiated under U.N. auspices are now commanding the world's attention. Also in September, countries that have signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) will meet at the U.N. to consider ways to promote its early entry into force. North Korea's nuclear tests, its missile launches and its threats of further provocation lend new urgency to this cause.

Next May, the U.N. will also host a major five-year review conference involving the parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which will examine the state of the treaty's "grand bargain" of disarmament,

nonproliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. If the CTBT can enter into force, and if the NPT review conference makes progress, the world would be off to a good start on its journey to a world free of nuclear weapons.

My own five-point plan to achieve this goal begins with a call for the NPT parties to pursue negotiations in good faith -- as required by the treaty -- on nuclear disarmament, either through a new convention or through a series of mutually reinforcing instruments backed by a credible system of verification. Disarmament must be reliably verified.

Second, I have urged the Security Council to consider other ways to strengthen security in the disarmament process, and to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against nuclear weapons threats. I have proposed to the council that it convene a summit on nuclear disarmament, and I have urged non-NPT states to freeze their own weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments. Disarmament must enhance security.

My third proposal relates to the rule of law. Universal membership in multilateral treaties is key, as are regional nuclear-weapon-free zones and a new treaty on fissile materials. President Obama's support for U.S. ratification of the CTBT is welcome -- the treaty only needs a few more ratifications to enter into force. Disarmament must be rooted in legal obligations.

My fourth point addresses accountability and transparency. Countries with nuclear weapons should publish more information about what they are doing to fulfill their disarmament commitments. While most of these countries have revealed some details about their weapons programs, we still do not know how many nuclear weapons exist worldwide. The U.N. Secretariat could serve as a repository for such data. Disarmament must be visible to the public.

Finally, I am urging progress in eliminating other weapons of mass destruction and limiting missiles, space weapons and conventional arms -- all of which are needed for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Disarmament must anticipate emerging dangers from other weapons.

This, then, is my plan to drop the bomb. Global security challenges are serious enough without the risks from nuclear weapons or their acquisition by additional states or nonstate actors. Of course, strategic stability, trust among nations, and the settlement of regional conflicts would all help to advance the process of disarmament. Yet disarmament has its own contributions to make in serving these goals and should not be postponed.

It will restore hope for a more peaceful, secure and prosperous future. It deserves everybody's support.