A Proposal for an Arctic Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone

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1. Introduction

Since nuclear weapons were first used on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there has been a global movement seeking their elimination. The strength of this movement has waxed and waned, but the recent ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) in 2010 by Russia and the United States has renewed global interest in working towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This broad-based global movement includes heads of state and government, international commissions, and civil society groups working towards this goal. Indeed, a recent poll of citizens of the Arctic Council member states – commissioned by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation – shows a strong preference for the outright removal of nuclear weapons from the Arctic region.1 This desire for the creation of an Arctic Nuclear-Weapons-Free-Zone (ANWFZ) is the subject of this paper.

President Barack Obama and former President Dmitry Medvedev have put nuclear arms control back on the international agenda. In his April 2009 speech in Prague, President Obama gave hope to humanity when he announced that his administration would work towards “a world without nuclear weapons”.2 Both

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2 President Obama also committed to: maintaining a safe, secure and effective arsenal for deterrence; reduce the nuclear arsenal; ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; conclude a treaty ending the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons; and strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty and secure vulnerable nuclear materials to keep them out of the hands of terrorists – Secretary, Office of the Press, “Remarks by President Barack Obama,” The White House, April 5,
governments signed (and have since ratified) New START, which builds upon earlier arms control measures to essentially reduce the number of Russian and American strategic warheads to 1,550 each.\(^3\) The new treaty entered into force on February 5, 2011. Also, on April 12–13, 2010, 44 heads of state met in Washington for a global nuclear security summit to focus efforts on securing nuclear materials and preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Then in May 2010 in New York, there was a review conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and his colleagues have declared, “there has never been a better time to revive total nuclear disarmament”.\(^4\)

President Obama, however, is not the first leader of a nuclear power to make overtures sparking hope for real progress towards a world in which nuclear threats no longer exist. President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union vividly remarked in 1987 that “there would be no second Noah’s ark for a nuclear deluge”.\(^5\) Thus, Gorbachev proposed a “zone of peace”.\(^6\) In a speech in Murmansk, he introduced the idea of an “Arctic Zone of Peace” saying, “let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace. Let the North Pole be a pole of peace”.

He set out a six-point program for how this “zone of peace” could be achieved, including: the establishment of a Nordic nuclear-free-zone in Northern Europe; limiting naval activities in the seas adjacent to that region; peaceful cooperation in exploiting the resources of the North and Arctic; scientific research; cooperation in environmental protection; and opening up the Northern Sea Route to

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\(^3\) This represents a reduction of roughly 30 percent from the 2,200 limit set in 2002’s Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), and a reduction of 74 percent from New START’s direct successor’s limit, the 1991 START I Treaty, of 6,000 weapons each. However it should be noted that New START only addresses strategic, and not tactical, nuclear weapons. Arms Control Association, “New START at a Glance,” http://armscontrol.org/print/4287 (accessed May 4, 2011).

\(^4\) Malcolm Fraser, “Eliminating Nuclear Weapons: No Longer the Impossible Dream” (paper presented at the National Consultative Committee on Disarmament, Wellington, New Zealand, May 24, 2009).


\(^6\) Gorbachev used the “zone of peace” notion for a number of regional initiatives including Asia-Pacific (Vladivostok, July 1986), the Arctic and Northern Europe (Murmansk, October 1987), and the Mediterranean (Belgrade, March 1988). Kristian Atland, “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of Interstate Relations in the Arctic,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 43 (2008): 293.

\(^7\) Mikhail Gorbachev’s Speech in Murmansk at the Ceremonial Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Stat to the City of Murmansk, Murmansk, Russia, October, 1987.