

The Prospects for Global Nuclear Disarmament

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Introduction

Predicting the future can be a risky business, but predicting the future of nuclear disarmament is especially difficult, linked as it is to the core security concerns of very powerful countries. Not only is the subject imperfectly defined but it is constantly evolving under the influence of forces that are too numerous and too complex to allow for any confident projections. Yet because the issue remains vital to the future of international security, indeed, the future of our planet, it surely merits some close attention at centres of academic excellence, this one in particular. I will therefore take this opportunity to identify some useful navigation points.

A Definition

Wherever one looks, one is hard pressed to find a precise definition of “disarmament,” not to mention wide acceptance of the term, which appears more commonly in the UN lexicon than in national discourses. Even *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines “disarmament” as merely “the reduction by a state of its military forces and weapons” -- a definition which hints of no goal beyond quantitative limitations of weapons stockpiles. So what exactly is disarmament? Is it a goal of law or policy? Is it a process? Or is it simply a rhetorical device meaning different things to different persons?

My answer will focus on a global dimension, and used in this context, disarmament encompasses some elements of all of the above hypotheses in varying degrees. Specifically with respect to nuclear disarmament, it is a goal that has been embraced by the 187 States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), an objective shared by the nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states alike. In 1996, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion indicating unanimously that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. This is about as close to a truly universal norm as one can get.

Yet the goal of nuclear disarmament cannot be easily distinguished from the process of its implementation -- a process involving progressive reductions of existing stocks of nuclear weapons, leading ultimately to the total elimination of all such weapons. Given the numerous technical, political, and institutional complexities associated with such a task, this can only occur as a result of some kind of organized process. After all, disarmament involves un-doing a lot of well-established activities -- activities that are deeply rooted in policies, organizations, vested interests, and fixed mindsets. It also requires doing many new activities that organizations, groups, and individuals may not be accustomed to doing. It requires an openness to change, an ability to perceive how disarmament serves both interests and ideals, and a willingness on the part of national leaders to work collaboratively with leaders in other countries.

What global nuclear disarmament does not involve is clear. It does not involve the perpetual possession by some states of weapons designated for disarmament or non-acquisition by others. It also does not confuse ends with means. It recognizes a distinction between the goal of eliminating weapons and the various complementary steps that may be taken in achieving this end. These would include such measures as the de-alerting of nuclear arsenals, quantitative reductions, restrictions on deployments, various limitations on the characteristics or effects of weapons, and other such activities none of which in isolation constitutes "disarmament." Useful projects like the US Cooperative Threat Reduction program and the recent joint US/Russian Y2K project at Colorado Springs are important developments -- yet their primary contribution at this stage comes in the realm of arms control rather than disarmament.

It is important to stress that disarmament entails the destruction of weapons -- either through unilateral initiatives or multilateral arrangements -- along with the critical materials needed to build such weapons. It also implies constraints and prohibitions on the technical capability to reconstitute such weapons, and agreement on the means to verify compliance with key disarmament commitments. And all of this surely requires strong political will.

Disarmament, therefore, does not occur automatically. It must be sustained over time by enlightened leaders, understood and embraced by an informed public, and reinforced by laws, policies, and institutions. Above all, it must be accompanied by an abiding confidence throughout society in the concrete national security benefits to be gained. Its larger goal is to serve international peace and security -- and ultimately human security -- by reducing the risk of civilian casualties in war, by preventing arms races, and by building trust between former or potential adversaries.

Progress and Setbacks

Offering such dividends, it should come as no surprise that the world community has made some progress in recent years in fulfilling at least some of the global nuclear disarmament agenda. Anyone examining the published numbers of nuclear weapons over time will note a consistent downward trend since the height of the Cold War. Though these numbers are still only a few thousand less than the 39,000 weapons that reportedly existed when the NPT was signed in 1968, the downward trend continues. Another major advancement was the conclusion of negotiations of a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) -- which has now been signed by 155 countries, 51 of which have also ratified.

The United Kingdom and France have also taken steps both to limit their nuclear arsenals and to increase transparency. China has joined the NPT, signed the CTBT, and has pledged that it would not provide assistance to any unsafeguarded nuclear facility. The Republic of South Africa abandoned its nuclear weapon programme and joined the NPT. The nuclear rivalry between Argentina and Brazil has now been supplanted by cooperation within the framework of bilateral arrangements, the Tlatelolco Treaty, and the NPT. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus joined the NPT after giving up the nuclear weapons that were on their territories when the Soviet Union disintegrated. In 1995, the States Parties to the NPT agreed to extend the treaty indefinitely, strengthen its review process, and establish principles and objectives for nuclear disarmament. Treaties have also been signed creating nuclear-weapon-free zones in Africa, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. These are all steps forward.

Yet the challenges ahead are formidable. While some progress has recently been made in reducing the alert status

of nuclear weapons, deeper stockpile reductions await the entry into force of START II and the negotiation of START III. Last February, the Director of the US Defense Intelligence Agency testified in the US Senate that over the 20 years several additional states are likely to obtain nuclear weapons and that -- in his words -- "existing nuclear states will increase their inventories." The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998 undoubtedly set back global nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation efforts. Both countries have not yet joined the CTBT and -- along with Cuba and Israel -- both remain outside the NPT. Only 26 of the 44 countries required to bring the CTBT into force have ratified the treaty -- and three nuclear-weapon states (China, the Russian Federation, and the United States) have yet to ratify.

Many countries are beginning to take the weapons proliferation threat seriously, as seen in recent IAEA efforts to enhance significantly its nuclear safeguards and verification procedures. Yet as of last month the relevant enhanced safeguards protocol is only in force in seven countries, including the Holy See and Monaco, whose example one only hopes many others will follow. Meanwhile, tons of nuclear materials continue to accumulate in civilian stocks and in some unsafeguarded nuclear programs around the world. Agreement on a treaty to ban the production of fissile nuclear materials for weapons use would serve as a valuable stepping stone to a broader goal of eliminating the production and stockpiling of all weapons-usable nuclear material. Progress on this issue, however, has been set back by a stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) over nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The CD will open its new session next week with another opportunity to break the deadlock. And despite many improvements in the physical security of nuclear material in recent years, no control can guarantee that significant quantities of such material will not be vulnerable to terrorist threats.

There has been some success in strengthening the role of the UN in the disarmament field. A key institutional reform introduced by Secretary-General Kofi Annan was the re-establishment in 1998 of a UN Department of Disarmament Affairs under an Under-Secretary-General. The Department advises the Secretary-General on disarmament matters and supports activities throughout the UN's disarmament machinery, which includes the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, the Disarmament Commission, the First Committee of the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament, the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, and three regional centres. These include gathering and analyzing data on global weapons developments, sharing information with governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the public, assisting delegations at the UN, organizing international conferences, and serving as an advocate of disarmament. Yet the General Assembly's inability to convene a fourth Special Session on Disarmament has only further postponed a much-needed opportunity to update and strengthen the UN's disarmament agenda and its relevant machinery.

The world community also needs to improve its collective responses to violations of disarmament and nonproliferation norms. To the extent that sanctions have been imposed for such violations, many appear invidious and narrow in scope, while others have imposed great hardships upon civilian populations. The more customary form of response to such violations has been the ephemeral statement of regret. An international consensus is also lacking on the role for export controls and other measures to restrain the development of weapons of mass destruction.

The Obstacles in a Larger Context

Though nuclear disarmament is clearly a global norm, many of the traditional obstacles of disarmament remain with us today -- including nationalism, the notion of strategic nuclear supremacy, the lack of mutual trust, and the political problems arising from the inability of any technical verification system ever to guarantee perfect compliance. These have been supplemented in recent years by new obstacles.

One of the most troubling developments for the future of disarmament concerns the very language used to describe various remaining problems. One cannot help noting the enormous popularity in academic and policy circles of a simplistic vision of world politics as a battlefield between stable, law-abiding countries and so-called "rogue nations." To some of these observers, the disarmament formula is easy: just disarm the rogues and all will be well.

Yet who is to define whom as a rogue? And on what basis are universally-binding legal obligations

like nuclear disarmament now to be converted into restraints that apply only to some countries? The global non-proliferation regime has already been seriously challenged in many quarters of the world community because of certain inherently discriminatory features in the NPT, in particular its distinction between the rights and obligations of nuclear-weapon-states and non-nuclear-weapon states. So how would adding yet another discriminatory category to the registry of international obligations serve to promote the norm of global nuclear disarmament?

Slogans and national stereotypes have a dangerous tendency to change quickly from rhetorical flourishes into substantive policy. Some commentators in this country are citing the threat from these so-called "rogue nations" as a legitimate basis to abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and to reject the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. To them, unilateral technical and military measures -- often tied to the doctrine of "counter-proliferation" -- are the only appropriate response to this alleged threat. Yet this basic approach, if pursued at the expense of international disarmament obligations and without any global consensus, will more likely serve as a stimulus than a restraint on global nuclear and missile proliferation.

Other developments also inhibit the realization of the global nuclear disarmament norm. The first-use nuclear doctrine, which was recently re-affirmed by NATO, has in recent years also been adopted by the Russian Federation, which has in addition announced a greater reliance on tactical nuclear weapons for defense purposes. In contrast, the package of decisions at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference set for the nuclear-weapon states the target of eliminating all nuclear weapons. Any time officials from countries that possess nuclear weapons cite such weapons as the ultimate guarantee of national security, the cause of global nuclear disarmament suffers a setback. When they do so collectively, it is worse.

The Road Ahead

The road ahead for global nuclear disarmament consists actually of initiatives pursued on two roads, a high road and a low road. If effectively and energetically pursued, I believe they contribute significantly to the prospects for sustainable global nuclear disarmament. The high road consists of a revitalization of international efforts to complete the evolution of global nuclear disarmament from a global norm into concrete measures to implement such commitments. But what does this mean specifically?

- With respect to strategic arms reductions -- *It means* new initiatives by the nuclear-weapon states to demonstrate their sincere, good faith compliance with their disarmament obligations under the NPT. *It means* an early entry into force of the CTBT and START II treaties and early conclusion of START III involving deep cuts in nuclear arsenals and major improvements in the transparency of existing stocks of weapons and related materials. *It means* early agreement by the nuclear-weapon states to de-alert their arsenals -- as was recommended years ago by the Canberra Commission -- to abandon first-use nuclear doctrines, and to eliminate all tactical nuclear weapons. *It means* the establishment in the Conference on Disarmament of subsidiary bodies on nuclear disarmament and on fissile nuclear material. *It means* the preservation of the ABM Treaty as a basis of strategic stability.
- With respect to non-proliferation -- *It means* achieving universal membership in the NPT and CTBT. *It means* full implementation of the commitments that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. *It means* the placement under IAEA safeguards of additional fissile material recovered from dismantled weapons, as well as early adoption by countries with nuclear facilities of the Additional Protocol strengthening IAEA safeguards. *It means* new efforts to bring the Pelindaba Treaty into force -- creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa -- and to establish such a zone in Central Asia. *It means* serious new initiatives by India and Pakistan to promote nuclear disarmament objectives in South Asia, including joint and unconditional accession to the CTBT, agreements not to deploy or test nuclear weapons or long-range missiles, and a halt to the production of fissile nuclear material. And *it means* the negotiation of a treaty guaranteeing non-nuclear-weapon State Parties to the NPT against the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons.

The high road internationally must be reinforced by certain reforms at the level of national governments. Speaking in Stockholm last September, I stated that if we wish to curb the institutionalization of the arms race, we must do more to institutionalize disarmament at the national and international level. I called for a "disarmament stewardship" program consisting of deliberate action on the part of world leaders and from

civil society to address the combined needs of development and security through the reduction and elimination of arms.

Prospects for such an initiative will grow only if the public is informed of the full costs of past and current nuclear weapons programs and the full benefits to be achieved from successful disarmament arrangements. Information and education will therefore play major roles in the evolution of the institutions and policies of sustainable disarmament. One helpful step in this direction would be the development of indices of sustainable disarmament -- concrete empirical measures of the progress and setbacks we are experiencing in pursuing the disarmament goal. The staff of this Center could make an important contribution in exploring this idea further. Our public institutions already have results-based budgeting -- why not results-based disarmament?

In this context, technology should best be seen not as the culprit but a constructive partner. We have heard too much about the proverbial "revolution in military affairs" involving all kinds of advancements in modern weaponry, and not enough about a "revolution in disarmament affairs." Let us focus more on what benefits technology can bring -- through the use of satellites, computers, and advanced telecommunication capabilities -- in expediting global nuclear disarmament, rather than in perfecting the technology of death and destruction.

Surely if we are to move beyond discussions about managing the so-called "nuclear weapons complex" into the realm of elaborating an institutional infrastructure of a "disarmament complex," it is safe to assert that this task will require strong support from civil society. These range from national grassroots lobbying activities to coordinated international disarmament campaigns such as those organized by the Middle Powers Initiative -- working in support of the disarmament and nonproliferation goals of the inter-governmental New Agenda Coalition -- and the Hague Appeal for Peace, to name just a few. Progress is needed, in short, above, within, and below the level of national governments -- the high road and the low road must intersect at the destination of global nuclear disarmament. Popular support is the stable foundation upon which all sustainable disarmament policies must lie.

Conclusion

Fifty-nine years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt sketched out before Congress his vision of four essential human freedoms. The fourth of these was the freedom from fear, which -- in his words -- "means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbour -- anywhere in the world." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan echoed a similar theme in his report last year to the General Assembly on the Work of the UN. Interpreted in light of the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on nuclear disarmament, these are ideas which resonate in a public that is tired of living under the nuclear shadow, tired of subsidizing the nuclear genie, and tired of the insecurities that attend the selective possession and consequently inevitable proliferation of nuclear weapons.

I hope that the year 2000 -- with all of its special meetings at the UN, including the Millennium Assembly, the Millennium Forum for civil society, a Review Conference of the NPT, as well as a meeting of the heads of national legislatures organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union -- will help to rekindle some of the political will to pursue common disarmament goals in earnest. I am enthusiastic about the progress there is to be made and encourage you all to contribute all you can to converting the disarmament vision into a reality.