

Keynote Address

Disarmament, Arms Control, and Non-Proliferation: A Look Ahead

By

Sergio Duarte
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



Partnership for Peace

Workshop on the Role of Parliaments in Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

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I am honoured to have this opportunity to address you today, and I wish to thank our hosts for their many efforts in organizing this event—the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and the NATO Weapons of Mass Destruction Centre.

Each of these institutions has made its own important contributions in advancing multilateral disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation objectives and it is indeed fitting to have them collaborate in organizing this particular workshop.

I would also like to commend the organizers for recognizing the important contributions in these fields by parliaments, whose deliberations provide an opportunity to ensure accountability in performing international commitments. Parliaments are involved in ratifying treaties, in appropriating funds and adopting legislation to implement treaty commitments, in helping to educate the public, and in serving as a bridge between civil society and national governments. In short, they have crucial roles to play in bringing both democracy and the “rule of law” to disarmament.

As everybody knows, predictions are difficult in this business, because there are a lot of unknowns about future intentions and capabilities, and hard facts can at times be hard to find. A good starting point for thinking about the future of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is to examine the implementation of past commitments and to consider what more is needed to fulfil them. In the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, “As for the Future, your task is not to foresee, but to enable it.”¹

Achievements—there have been many. We have, first of all, two multilateral conventions approaching universal membership that outlaw biological and chemical weapons. These conventions have established—and are helping to sustain—a global taboo against the very existence of such weapons. Today, nobody is boasting the vital benefits of such weapons for national security, or insisting upon the legality of using them. And nobody is putting forward chemical or biological weapons as a means to maintain a doctrine of extended deterrence to defend allies.

With respect to nuclear weapons, we see the impressive statistic of 190 States that have joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), recognizing that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has announced its withdrawal. The NPT contains specific legal obligations relating to non-proliferation, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and negotiations on nuclear disarmament—and goals in each of these areas were included in a 64-point Action Plan adopted by consensus at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. While the treaty does not outlaw nuclear weapons per se, the International Court of Justice has interpreted Article VI as encompassing not only the

¹ “The Wisdom of the Sands” (1948).

duty to pursue negotiations in good faith, but also the responsibility to bring such negotiations to a conclusion.

Yet there still is no nuclear weapons convention nor are there any negotiations underway in nuclear disarmament, as proposed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his five-point proposal of 24 October 2008. And despite many other calls worldwide to commence such negotiations—which are required by the NPT’s Article VI—and to establish timelines for achieving disarmament goals, such proposals continue to be opposed by many, including nuclear-weapon States and their allies. In contrast to this legal obligation and many policy statements on nuclear disarmament, we see robust nuclear-weapon “modernization” activities underway in all possessor States, backed by concrete, long-term plans extending decades into the future. Forty-one years after the NPT entered into force, it remains true that no nuclear weapons have been destroyed pursuant to treaty commitments, which so far have focused only on limiting deployments. The entry into force of the new START Treaty, which provides for reductions in deployed weapons, is of course a welcome development which will inspire further action towards creating a safer and more secure world for all.

Over 20,000 nuclear weapons reportedly remain, and nuclear deterrence—practiced either unilaterally or through alliance commitments—remains a security doctrine covering over half of humanity. Even the posture of nuclear “first-use” persists in several countries and many nuclear weapons remain on high-alert status. Meanwhile, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is not yet in force and negotiations are not yet underway on a fissile material treaty, a vision originally pursued over a half century ago. So yes, we are a long way from achieving “global zero.”

And this mixed track record is hardly limited to the elimination of nuclear bombs and warheads, as the rule of law with respect to delivery systems for nuclear weapons is even less developed. There are no multilateral treaties addressing long-range missiles, heavy bombers, or missile-launching submarines, and the only bilateral treaty addressing missile defence systems—the ABM Treaty—is no longer in force. There are also no treaties banning space weapons, though the Outer Space Treaty does ban the orbiting of weapons of mass destruction and their stationing anywhere in outer space.

To be sure, there will be many opportunities for multilateral cooperation in the next few years to address some of these shortcomings, and nobody should conclude that past setbacks will dictate outcomes of the future, and this applies not just to disarmament efforts involving weapons of mass destruction. These opportunities include—

- The Seventh Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), which will get underway next December
- The convening in 2012 of a conference on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East

- The first meeting in 2012 of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference
- An international meeting in 2012 to negotiate a multilateral Arms Trade Treaty
- The fifth Biennial Meeting of States in 2012 to implement the Programme of Action against illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons
- The Third Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013

Yet the future of disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation will not be determined solely by what transpires at large gatherings such as these. Progress will remain driven by the policies and priorities of States and this, I believe, is an area where the activities of the international diplomatic community and civil society must have some real impact if disarmament will have any hope of moving forward in the years ahead.

At present, virtually all the key components of the UN disarmament machinery are facing significant difficulties because of the lack of a consensus in State policies. The Conference on Disarmament—the world’s sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations—has been deadlocked for the last 13 years. The UN Disarmament Commission—a purely deliberative body—has also been unable to reach a substantive consensus in over a decade. And the nuclear-weapon-related resolutions of the First Committee of the General Assembly continue to be adopted only by deeply divided votes.

With this UN disarmament machinery locked in chronic conflicts over competing priorities and policies, some States have proposed that the next step for building multilateral norms should take place through actions of “coalitions of the willing.” Similar reasoning led groups of States to conclude the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines and the Oslo Convention on cluster munitions. Some States have proposed this approach if the Conference on Disarmament is unable to commence negotiations on a fissile material treaty. This was a theme found in several statements made at the UN’s High Level Meeting in September 2010 on Revitalising the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations.

Of course, if States do conclude that the best way forward in constructing new multilateral disarmament norms is through small steps by like-minded States—then the problem will inevitably arise of how to convert these ad hoc agreements into universal norms. This problem becomes more challenging when States are asked to join regimes that they had no role in creating, and to adopt standards that they may not regard as fully equitable. Such initiatives can give rise to questions of both their legitimacy and efficacy.

In looking ahead, we should also consider what might be the full implications of efforts that attempt to disaggregate specific weapons challenges into problems susceptible to their own unique solutions. This kind of piecemeal approach to disarmament and non-proliferation challenges inevitably raises questions about how these various efforts and so-called “partial measures” can be integrated into a broader multilateral framework.

In the past, the world community has on three occasions been able to assemble for a fully comprehensive examination of the multilateral institutions and priorities in the field of disarmament. These occurred at the General Assembly’s Special Sessions on disarmament, which took place in 1978, 1982, and 1988. The two latter Sessions ended without agreement. The First Special Session, however, produced by consensus a very valuable Final Document. More than thirty years have elapsed, and even though there is today widespread recognition of the difficulties facing each of the various institutions comprising the UN disarmament machinery, there is still no consensus that holding a Fourth Special Session on Disarmament is the best way to address those concerns.

Long ago, efforts to integrate disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation were widely viewed in the context of the broader framework of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control” (or GCD), which the General Assembly declared in 1978 was the UN’s “ultimate objective”. Although GCD is a concept found in over a dozen multilateral treaties—including the NPT—it is scarcely mentioned today, except perhaps as a rationale for postponing nuclear disarmament until all the other challenges of international peace and security can be resolved first.

Yet if we consider just for a moment what GCD means, the more sense it makes as an integrating device for organizing multilateral cooperation toward agreed goals. Frankly, the goals of GCD are not as utopian or unrealistic as the term implies. The concept entails the simultaneous pursuit of efforts to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction—nuclear, chemical, and biological—while also working to limit and to regulate conventional armaments. These echo the goals found in the UN Charter of pursuing “disarmament” and the “regulation of armaments”. There is a solid basis of logic and experience in pursuing both of these goals together, as opposed to pursuing them sequentially, with one serving as some kind of precondition for the other.

In their recent op-ed of 7 March in the *Wall Street Journal*, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn stated that “A world without nuclear weapons will not simply be today’s world minus nuclear weapons.” The same could be said about a world without WMD in general—the goal of the whole business of disarmament is to strengthen international peace and security, not simply to destroy a particular type of weaponry as an end in itself. This argues powerfully for returning to an approach that seeks to combine and integrate WMD disarmament with conventional arms controls—without sacrificing one to the other, or holding one hostage to the other. Both should be pursued concurrently as interdependent paths to a more secure world.

Without such a comprehensive approach, we may well find ourselves engaging in multiple processes without purposes, or in “redoubling our effort when we have forgotten our aim”—words that the philosopher George Santayana once offered to define fanaticism. We could find ourselves incapable of collective action because of competing demands that various preconditions must first be met before progress can proceed. This is a recipe not just to postpone disarmament indefinitely, but to ensure a perpetual stalemate in the evolution and growth of global multilateral norms in disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation. In other words, international peace and security is not a precondition for disarmament to occur—it is instead strengthened by disarmament.

As President Obama stated in his speech in Prague in April 2009, we should be seeking “the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”—which is quite different from saying that we should be seeking peace and security as a precondition for disarmament to occur.

We need therefore to consider more closely how progress can be sustained as a dynamic process in these fields—how concrete steps forward in nuclear disarmament can build confidence that will permit not only further steps forward in that direction, but can also enable progress in alleviating threats posed by other types of weaponry, including missiles and other delivery systems, space weapons, and conventional arms.

We need to consider more closely what kind of examples we are setting for tomorrow, by our current policies of today—and I am thinking here in particular of the various rationales for the legality of the use of nuclear weapons and claims of their unparalleled effectiveness in ensuring national security interests. Such policies and practices virtually invite their further spread in the world—and we know well that ideas and concepts proliferate just as readily as weaponry, if not more so.

We need to consider what kind of world would exist, as suggested in that *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, if what I might call the great destiny of “global zero WMD” were ever actually achieved. Would we be facing never-ending conventional wars, based on regional or sub-regional conventional arms races and rivalries? How would security and stability be maintained—to the dubious extent it applies today—in a world without nuclear deterrence? What would be needed to strengthen compliance with the other fundamental norms of the UN Charter, in particular those that prohibit the threat or use of force against other States and that require the peaceful settlement of disputes? Serious consideration should be given to these questions, and the place to do so is at the United Nations, in a fully multilateral environment.

One of the reasons why I have cited the concept of GCD here today is that it offers us clues about how to answer these questions. In the specific case of nuclear disarmament, the world community has made it clear—notably through General

Assembly resolutions and NPT consensus documents—that it should be achieved in a manner that satisfies certain agreed multilateral criteria or standards. These include irreversibility, transparency, verification, universality, and binding commitments. Clearly, disarmament arrangements satisfying such rigorous standards would significantly enhance confidence in compliance. But they would do much more. They would enhance the world’s ability to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, because there would be no double standards, as “zero” would mean zero for all. It is far easier to prevent the development of weapons whose very existence is prohibited and illegitimate, than it is to attempt to maintain forever a discriminatory regime of have and have-not States.

This is why I believe disarmament—achieved consistent with these standards—is best viewed as both a responsible national security policy and as a significant and credible means to strengthen international peace and security overall.

Now I wish to conclude by warmly encouraging all who are involved with NATO policy or who work in NATO institutions—and all who are cooperating with NATO through the Partnership for Peace—to build on the progress made at our present conference today, by raising the profile and priority of disarmament in your work.

The official web site of the NATO Partnership for Peace identifies several subjects as “activities on offer” under the programme, and I quote: “defence-related work, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues.” Surely the time has come for the term “disarmament” to be added to this list. This would help ensure that this conference becomes part of an unfolding process of strengthening security through disarmament—one of the greatest challenges of our time.