

DISARMAMENT AND ARMS PROLIFERATION

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History records the invention, proliferation and use of weapons. It also records efforts to reduce arsenals and regulate the spread and use of weapons. This corresponds to humankind's contradictory propensities for war and peace. With the evolution of technology, weapons have become more lethal and have increased civilian casualties. With widening global trade, weapons have been exported and imported like any other commodity at increasing costs, including opportunity costs. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, world military expenditure in 2007 is estimated to have been \$ 1.339 trillion or 2.5 percent of world's gross domestic product- about \$202 for every person. The United States alone accounted for 45 percent of this amount. Global arms exports are estimated at \$ 45.6 billion in 2006. They fuelled 14 major armed conflicts in 2007.

The emergence in the 20th century of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons as distinct from conventional weapons marked a watershed. These weapons of mass destruction were shown to be vastly more devastating to human life and material property than earlier weapons, causing long-lasting environmental and genetic effects. Thus the elimination or control of such weapons became the priority of the United Nations and the international community.

The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention, with 162 subscribing countries and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, with 186, banned these two categories of weapons. The only category not subject to a universal ban is the nuclear weapon. Treaties between the two largest holders of nuclear weapons – the US and Russia which have 95 percent of them – and multilateral treaties banning nuclear tests and the spread of these weapons to additional countries have sought to regulate their within countries as well as their horizontal spread. It is estimated that today there are more than 25,000 nuclear warheads in the world with the US, Russia, Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan and Israel possessing almost 10,300 ready to be launched within minutes.

ONE SOLUTION WITH TWO GATES

The structure for controlling all weapons has two aspects. One is to seek disarmament through universal bans on inhumane weapons or particular categories of weapons for humanitarian reasons. The other is to seek to control levels of arsenals or to prevent new possessors.

Disarmament requires verifiable destruction of existing weapons and cessation of production, sale, storage, transfer or acquisition. Thus total disarmament (as distinct from limitation) of biological weapons, chemical weapons, antipersonnel landmines, cluster munitions, laser weapons and other categories has been achieved globally, even though the treaties negotiated for these purposes may not be universal and verification not reliable. General and complete disarmament has been the agreed goal of the UN. Whether disarmament brings security or security must precede disarmament remains disputed.

Agreed disarmament goals are set in place through a web of many-sided or two way treaties. Multilateral treaties, those expected to have many adherents, are negotiated in

the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, which is the sole multilateral negotiating body, and are carried out within the UN frame work. Treaties involving more than two nations, but not a large number, can be concluded regionally or among other groups of countries, as with nuclear weapons-free zones.

Although the Geneva conference and its predecessor bodies have negotiated many treaties, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, its procedures, requiring a consensus among all its members, have led to a stalemate for over a decade.

‘OTTAWA’ AND ‘OSLO’ BRING RESULTS

Existing treaties can be amended or receive new protocols through conferences of the subscribing countries. This process also requires procedures that can be obstructed, especially by the major powers. Because of this, like minded countries encouraged by dedicated nongovernmental organizations, have adopted innovative treaty making procedures like the “Ottawa process,” which led to the antipersonnel mine convention. This was signed in 1997 outside the UN structure, but thereafter brought within the bounds of the organization. It has 156 subscribing countries, although major powers like China, Russia and the US remain outside. By the same technique, the “Oslo process” resulted in the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008.

The one treaty that aims to combine disarmament and arms control is the Treaty of the Non-proliferation of Nuclear weapons, which is the world’s most widely subscribed - to arms treaty. The pact is carried out through the UN, which organizes review conferences and serves as its secretariat.

The treaty openly accepted two categories of nations: nuclear-weapons states and non nuclear-weapon states. In terms of the disarmament approach, countries with nuclear weapons exhorted only to negotiate reduction and elimination of their weapons, whereas those without re forbidden to acquire them. The International Atomic Energy Agency, an independent arm of the UN based in Vienna, is empowered to enter into arrangements with no nuclear countries when peaceful uses are involved, to verify there is no diversion for other purposes.

As far as arms control is concerned, holders of nuclear weapons are allowed to retain them with the restraints that apply through other treaties. No nuclear countries are not only subject to the absolute prohibition against acquisition but can also have nuclear energy subject only to safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The agency reports to the Security Council on nonproliferation issues and otherwise to the General Assembly.

AMBIVALENCE AND TENSIONS

The presence in the agreement of two categories of countries that are treated differently has caused tensions, which have only increased over the 40 years of the treaty. Strains on the treaty have risen further with the emergence of Israel, India and Pakistan as nuclear counties outside the frame of the treaty – proliferation known to have been assisted by the nuclear countries defined in the treaty- and the recent grant of benefits to India that were hitherto confined to non nuclear countries defined in the treaty. A review conference scheduled for 2010 is therefore in jeopardy, especially after the failure of a 2005 review.

The discovery of Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapon program in the early 1990s; the withdrawal of North Korea from the treaty and its subsequent nuclear test; the acknowledgement and the rectification of Libya's noncompliance; and the continuing questions over Iran have seriously weakened the treaty as a means to reduce nuclear spread. With the ambiguity of the treaty's approach, regional conflicts breed insecurity and therefore give rise to development and hoarding of nuclear weapons. For others, nuclear weapons are a badge of great-power status.

REJOINING IS ESSENTIAL

At the juncture, only a rejoining of the disarmament approach and a nonproliferation approach seem capable of saving the treaty. This is an urgent issue, because climate change is driving many countries toward use of nuclear energy in a "nuclear renaissance." However, the technologies of peaceful use and weapons use can no longer be kept in sealed compartments.

The threat of nuclear terrorism is also real. In the US, op-ed articles in the Wall Street Journal in January 2007 and 2008 called for a world free of nuclear weapons. These were signed by four elder statesmen, George P. Shultz, former US secretary of state; Henry A Kissinger, also a former secretary of state; Sam Nunn, former head of the US Senate Armed Services Committee; and William J. Perry, former secretary of defense. These calls for the end of nuclear deterrence theory have been echoed by similar sentiments in Britain, Italy and Germany. They were also endorsed by President Barack Obama in his election campaign

The translation of those campaign promises into policy will lead the world to the only viable way in dealing with weapons of mass destruction: universal elimination under strict verification.