



# WEAPONS OF PEACE

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**D**isarmament and arms limitation are spheres inextricably linked to international security. No examination of the threats, challenges and changes to collective global security would be complete without reviewing developments in these areas. General and complete disarmament (GCD) has been the objective of the United Nations (UN) for many years. While GCD, per se, may seem a nebulous concept, it has translated broadly into seeking the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and the regulation of conventional weapons commensurate with the legitimate defence needs of countries and consistent with common security.

The current focus, however, has been on the proliferation of WMDs to those states and non-state actors outside the 'club' of the five Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear-weapon states and the three non-NPT nuclear-weapon-capable countries. There are two important reasons why this emphasis is inadequate. Firstly, it ignores the fundamental linkage between WMD proliferation and WMD disarmament. If all WMD possession was delegitimised, the politico-military task of arresting proliferation would have indisputable legitimacy and greater success. Secondly, and more relevantly, it ignores the dominant role of conventional weapons – including landmines and small arms – in the conflicts that are currently being waged throughout the world, the mounting global military expenditure (estimated at over US\$ 800 billion per year), and the fact that terrorist groups continue to use conven-

**Jayantha Dhanapala reconnoitres around strategic moves being made on the world scene to end or contain armed conflict on a global scale.**

tional weapons, small arms and explosives in their terrorist acts.

Attention to the first issue clashes inevitably with the nuclear-weapon reliant postures of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Until changes take place in these policies, little progress can be expected on WMDs – despite the urgency derived from the enormous lethality of those weapons and the ever-increasing danger that the taboo over their use may soon be broken. More wars may therefore be fought to prevent WMD proliferation, more pre-emptive counter-proliferation measures may be launched, and asymmetric and crude use of WMDs may be attempted by terrorists despite all precautions.

The second issue presents the international community with a viable area for policy action. In bringing this area to the policy forefront, we can reduce the incidence and intensity of conflict and make more likely the peaceful resolution of conflicts. This does not mean that we will not run into the vested interests of major powers that are among the largest exporters of conventional arms. Nor will solutions be readily accepted – especially in areas of protracted conflict and by non-state actors. However, the propensity for enhancing common security in the short term lies clearly in this area.

The significantly increased role of conventional weapons arises from the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs

(RMA) with the application of information and computer technology to weapons manufacture. Thus, precision-guided weapons and other sophisticated weaponry have been used in recent wars and have led to their increased demand.

Global agreements and ongoing initiatives have already addressed the problems confronting international peace and security through the unbridled use of conventional arms. They relate to regional arrangements or to the prohibition of inhumane weapons. It is in the conventional weapons area that peace and development – and ultimately, human security – is directly affected. The outlay for weapons manufacture and purchase diverts resources from urgent people-centred development needs. More arms have necessarily not led to more security. The actual use of the weapons results in deaths and destruction of property. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) alone is said to account for 500,000 deaths per annum. SALW supplies exacerbate civil conflicts, creating insecurity and instability in countries and hampering development. Nowhere, therefore, is the nexus between disarmament and development more apparent and real than in the area of conventional weapons. The need for remedial action is, therefore, especially urgent.

A number of policy options are available to the international community. Some of them will impinge on state sovereignty and the right – under Article 51 of the UN Charter – to defend themselves in the event of an armed attack. On the state sovereignty argument, it must be recognised that the world has moved on since 1945; and if collective security is to be preserved, then compromises are necessary along the lines recommended by the December 2001 Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State



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