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Arms Control

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Introduction

This chapter examines the evolution and practices of **arms control** in international relations. It begins by discussing what arms control is and why it has featured so prominently in world politics, even after the ending of the **Cold War**, the period during which arms control can be said to have developed extensively. After a discussion of the various weapons that are covered by arms control processes, and the legal **regimes** that accompany these, the chapter proceeds to outline some of the ways in which arms control can be conceptualised and how various schools of thought in international relations can be related to arms control practices. We then look at the specific case of the nuclear weapons regime, as more **states** acquire nuclear weapons, and as calls increase for the elimination of these particular **weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)**. The chapter also examines how a number of key states have been involved in upholding various arms control and **disarmament** regimes in the contemporary period.

What is arms control?

Arms control can be described simply as any arrangement made directly between adversaries or **multilaterally** by the broader international community to limit the weapons that might be used in warfare. A more formal, or classical, definition of arms control is provided by Hedley Bull: 'Arms control is restraint internationally exercised upon armaments policy, whether in respect of the level of armaments, their character, deployment or use' (Bull 1961: vii). Arms control can be conducted as a formal process involving treaties and other binding arrangements, or as an informal practice between states. These processes or steps can be **unilateral, bilateral** or multilateral; the most essential element is a willingness to cooperate with other states to achieve **security** interests. These interests could be 'exclusively those of the cooperating states themselves' or interests that are 'more widely shared' in the international community (Bull 1961: 2).

Arms control has been applied to both weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and to conventional weapons, although it has been applied most heavily to WMDs. These are nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons, and are categorised as WMDs because of their enormous potential for causing mass casualties. (These are nevertheless very different types of weapon systems, and their lethality and damage potential vary greatly. By way of example, consider that the large-scale use of nuclear weapons could result in between sixty and 300 million deaths; biological weapons, from thousands to perhaps 20 million deaths; and chemical weapons the much lower figure of several thousand dead (Butfoyl 2005: 22–3). Equally, the ability to produce each of these types of weapon and maintain and deploy them successfully varies greatly.) Despite the heavy focus on this kind of weapon, there is no reason to limit arms control to WMDs only. While WMDs are rightly abhorred for their capacity for destruction, so-called conventional weapons – that is, weapons that are *not* WMD – have received much less attention from arms controllers, largely because of the implied right of **sovereign states** to possess a normal or 'conventional' weapons capability. This is changing, however, and although the focus for arms control continues to be on WMDs, certain kinds of conventional weapons are also now being considered as appropriate for restriction or elimination.

Why do states engage in arms control practices?

There are various compelling reasons why states might wish to conduct arms control arrangements. In a landmark study, Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin ([1961] 1985) explored the motivations that compel states to agree to cooperate. First, mutually agreeing to limit the kinds or numbers of weapons states may hold can help to prevent the outbreak of **war** between them. In this sense, arms control can be seen as a means of lessening, if not overcoming, the negative effects of the '**security dilemma**'. A security dilemma is said to exist when states are uncertain of the intentions of their adversaries, and fear an attack; this uncertainty can propel a state to protect itself against any possible attack by arming itself. This very measure, however, can stimulate fear for its own safety in the other state, which thinks that the original state is undertaking military preparedness, and interprets this as a possible prelude to attack. This fear impels the other state also to undertake militarisation measures, which in turn reinforces the original state's fear, thus leading to a spiral of arms acquisition and increasing suspicion of the other's intent. Given that wars can occur because of the fear of the military **power** of one's adversary, any mutual agreement to limit arms can open up communication between states, and lead to greater transparency and a better understanding of a state's intentions. This process is also referred to as a 'confidence building measure'.

Arms control can also reduce greatly the military and economic costs of preparing for war; knowing that an adversary will not acquire a type or particular numbers of weapons is of benefit to states when making their own calculations about military preparedness. There is also, of course, a very compelling humanitarian reason for engaging in arms control: limiting the type and numbers of weapons can mean that if war does break out, deaths and casualties will likely be limited because of undertakings previously made to restrict weapons held by all warring parties. It is this humanitarian consideration which is now, arguably, the most prominent driver of contemporary arms control and disarmament efforts.

Cold War arms control

Arms control found particular resonance during the Cold War, when the world was faced with the very real possibility of war – especially nuclear war – occurring between the major antagonists in that conflict, the US and USSR and their respective allies. The US had exploded the world's first atomic bombs over Japan in 1945; the USSR acquired its nuclear capability in 1949 and an upward spiral of nuclear arms acquisition quickly followed. The intensification of what is sometimes called the 'first nuclear age' was, by the 1960s, seen as causing the need for formal and binding agreements between these states. Because of the hugely destructive nature of nuclear weapons, the US and USSR determined that various agreements must be reached if these states were to prevent a catastrophic war engulfing humankind. The concept of 'mutually assured destruction' – a situation which would occur if nuclear **deterrence** did not work and nuclear war was launched – was unacceptable to those who advocated an urgent reduction in weapons and therefore the likelihood of war.

Notable products of this effort at arms control by the **superpowers** included the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963), the SALT agreements (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) of 1972 and 1979, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987 and the START agreements (Strategic Arms Reduction

Figure 12.1 Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev and US President Reagan signing the INF Treaty at the White House, December 1987



Source: US National Archives and Records Administration, Id. 198588, courtesy Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

Treaties between the US and Soviet Union/Russia), begun in 1991. The earlier treaties did little except to enshrine a balance of terror between the superpowers, rather than bring about any meaningful reductions in the numbers of nuclear weapons. It was only towards the end of the Cold War, and especially with the emphasis put on arms control by the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, that substantial reductions began to occur, under the START process.

These were all bilateral treaties; there was little or no mechanism for states other than the superpowers to have any substantial impact on arms control during the Cold War. There were three notable exceptions to this series of bilateral arrangements. Even though it was an initiative of the two superpowers (and by this time Britain, France and China had also joined the nuclear club) the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was clearly designed to operate at a global level. It was followed in 1972 by the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), also a multilateral treaty, albeit one that still lacks any effective monitoring and verification abilities. An important arms control achievement relating to conventional weapons, and again a multilateral agreement, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty emerged in 1990 and was crucial to the winding down of conventional weapons held by the superpowers and their allies in the European arena at the end of the Cold War.

Why is arms control still important in the post-Cold War period?

The ending of the Cold War did not lessen the need for arms control, despite the thaw in relations between the US and Russia. If anything, it highlighted the need to continue to limit or proscribe certain kinds of weapons. It also freed up processes of arms control to include initiatives and participation from a much broader range of states than was possible during the more rigid structure of the Cold War order. The need to continue

with arms control is not surprising when we consider that although the superpowers have made dramatic reductions in their nuclear arsenals, there still remain over 22 000 nuclear weapons in the world today (SIPRI 2010), many of them on hair-trigger alert. The vast majority of these weapons are held by the US and Russia. (See Figure 12.2 for details.)

If the continued existence of many thousands of nuclear weapons has been an incentive to continue with arms control measures after the end of the Cold War, so too is the view that certain other kinds of weapons should also be controlled. Thus, we have seen arms control processes extended to other WMDs (chemical weapons), and to certain kinds of conventional weapons such as landmines and cluster munitions, because of their highly destructive and/or indiscriminate nature, as well as to the spread of ballistic missiles and materials and technology that can be used for illicit weapons purposes. The most prominent arms control and disarmament agreements reached since 1990 are listed in Table 12.1.

In addition to these treaties, the post-Cold War era has seen the strengthening of various export-control measures vital to non-proliferation efforts, some of which had been established during the Cold War. These measures include:

- The Zangger Committee, 1974 – Thirty-seven members maintain a list of nuclear-related equipment that may only be exported if International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards are applied to the receiving state or facility.
- The Nuclear Suppliers Group, 1975 – An agreement among forty-six nuclear supplying states to ensure that exports of nuclear materials or technology for peaceful purposes cannot be used for weapons purposes.
- The Australia Group, 1985 – An informal arrangement among forty-one states to restrict the export of materials that might be diverted to the production of chemical or biological weapons.
- The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods, 1996 – The successor to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom) arrangement, this forty-member group attempts to regulate materials pertaining to conventional arms.
- The Missile Technology Control Regime, 1987 – An informal agreement between thirty-four states to prevent the proliferation of missile technology; it was supplemented in 2002 by the International Code of Conduct against Missile Proliferation (ICOC) and its membership of 119 states.

One fact becomes evident when we look at the range of agreements reached. Included among them are explicit programs of disarmament. Although arms control and disarmament have in the past been seen as distinct processes – with ‘arms control’ implying the continued, albeit limited, existence of particular weapons, and ‘disarmament’ specifying the complete abolition of a particular weapon – it is possible to argue that we are seeing a greater degree of convergence in these ideas. Where arms control was considered to be a discrete process, and one which aims essentially to confirm and, importantly, to *balance* weapons possession between participating states, disarmament was seen as both a process and an end state, the end state being the complete elimination of a type of weapon. Although disarmament acquired something of a bad name during the era of the League of Nations (it clearly was not able to disarm Germany effectively, let alone move the world towards even a vaguely defined sense of general disarmament), more recent attempts at the

Figure 12.2 Estimated nuclear weapons stockpiles



Source: This data is drawn from the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Global Nuclear Weapon Inventories* and SIPRI 2010. All figures are estimates only.

Table 12.1 Major arms agreements reached since 1990

Name of treaty/convention	Purposes	Relevant difficulties
START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) 1, 1991 START 2, 1993	Restricted the US and Russia to no more than 6000 strategic nuclear warheads each and incorporated unprecedented verification and monitoring controls. To achieve further deep cuts in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia.	Represented complex negotiations but resulted in a drastic reduction of Cold War nuclear arsenals. Not ratified by Russia until 2000; Russia then dismissed the treaty in response to US abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. Eventually overtaken by the SORT treaty.
The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), 1993	Banned the production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons; global in scope; included well-developed monitoring and verification procedures.	Signed and ratified by most states, including all large states in the international system; the destruction of stockpiles is slower than envisaged.
The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference, 1995	Five-yearly reviews of progress made in non-proliferation and disarmament efforts are routine; this review noted for extending the treaty indefinitely.	Marked by tension between the nuclear weapon states pushing for extension, and some non-nuclear weapon states who preferred extension to be conditional on disarmament by those states with nuclear weapons.
The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), 1996	To ban the testing of nuclear weapons; part of the agreement to extend the NPT (note above).	Cannot enter into force until ratified by key states, among them the US, China, India and Pakistan.
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (The Ottawa Landmines Convention), 1997	To ban the production, stockpiling and deployment of anti-personnel landmines.	Initiated by civil society groups and supported by Canada; US, China, Russia have resisted signing.
The SORT Treaty (Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, also known as the Moscow Treaty), 2002	To limit the US and Russia to 1700–2200 deployed strategic nuclear weapons each by 2012.	Critics argue that it allowed unlimited numbers of nuclear weapons to be held as non-deployed.
The Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo Treaty), 2008	To prohibit the use, transfer and stockpile of cluster bombs.	Led by civil society groups and the state of Norway, but resisted by key states who produce and use cluster bombs (including US, Russia, China, Pakistan and Israel).
New START, 2010.	Replaced the expired START1 Treaty. Limits the US and Russia to no more than 1550 deployed strategic warheads and a maximum of 800 launchers and heavy bombers. It also restores the monitoring and verification provisions that had lapsed with the expiration of START1.	Faced considerable ratification difficulties in the US, but is seen as a key victory in President Obama's campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons.

disarmament of specific kinds of weapons have been successful. We have seen the banning of biological weapons via the BWC, the destruction of a particular kind of weapon – intermediate-range nuclear forces – in the INF Treaty, the banning of chemical weapons with the CWC and, in terms of conventional weapons, the Ottawa Convention banning landmines and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions. These latter treaties were the result of intense lobbying by non-government organisations concerned with the humanitarian effects of landmines. This element – of non-state drivers of arms control and disarmament processes, for humanitarian, rather than strategic, motives – is a noteworthy feature of contemporary international politics and will be examined further in this chapter.

While this growth in the limiting of weapons does not mean that we are inevitably moving towards disarmament at a broad level it does reveal that any differences between arms control and disarmament processes are now arguably more blurred than they once were. No agreement these days attempts to enshrine indefinitely the possession of particular weapons by states. Indeed it is possible to see, at least in some cases, arms control processes as being part of a desired move towards disarmament. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, between the US and Russia, 2002) or NewSTART (US–Russia, signed 2010) agreements respectively reduced deployed warheads to 1700–2200 and 1550 each; one can argue that these reductions are an essential step towards the goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons – something the five ‘legitimate’ nuclear weapon states are obliged to achieve under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Sometimes, therefore, the terms ‘arms control’ and ‘disarmament’ are used interchangeably, even though the degree of overlap between these processes will vary according to the weapon under consideration.

New initiatives in arms control: small arms and conventional weapons

As noted at the opening of this chapter, arms control need not be limited to weapons of mass destruction only, although it is indeed WMDs which have received greatest attention from the international community. One important development in the area of arms control study is that conventional weapons, or rather, limited types of conventional weapons, are also now becoming objects of keen attention. This development should not be overstated; conventional weapons, as their name implies, are seen as ‘normal’ and it should not be interpreted here that the sovereign right of **nation**-states to possess (and indeed to manufacture and export) arsenals of various (non-WMD) weapons is coming under serious threat at the moment. We have also noted, however, that two very important agreements – the 1997 Ottawa Landmines Convention and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions – banned widely used conventional weapons, a development that would have been considered highly unlikely even as recently as twenty years ago.

This could be considered as the beginning of a trend to scrutinise conventional weapons more closely. Since 1995 we have seen increasing concern about the spread and devastating impact of what are called small arms and light weapons (SALW), weapons which are commonly possessed by all states (see Box 12.1).

The spread of SALW has now come to be recognised as posing a substantial threat to international and domestic security, resulting as it does in the deaths of approximately 300 000 people in conflict zones every year, up to 80 per cent of them women and

children. This is evident from numerous studies; see for example the report published by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, in their international campaign to prevent small arms violence (IPPNW 2005).

Perhaps it is SALW which we should consider as being the real weapons of mass destruction, as these are used on a daily basis and with devastating results. They are relatively cheap to purchase, easy to handle and have come to be the weapon of choice in numerous deadly internal conflicts around the world. There are estimated to be around 900 million SALW in circulation at present, serving to fuel and prolong conflict, and to make the processes of conflict-ending and development and reconstruction immensely difficult (Small Arms Survey 2010). The **UN** initiated a Conference on the Illicit Traffic in SALW in 2001, which resulted in a Program of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, a process which might be seen as the start of a more concerted restrictive process.

It must be noted, however, that substantial barriers exist to any attempt to regulate conventional weapons generally. These include the fact that a vast global arms trade is perpetuated legally by the most powerful states in the **international system** – including China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US – which account for the production of the majority of conventional weapons. The difficulties associated with restricting conventional weapons and sovereign rights were evident at the UN's SALW Conference; it was not able to address the licensed arms trade of these weapons in any form. Still, these attempts are being made. In October 2006, the vast majority of states at the UN voted in favour of a resolution to establish an International Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) that would establish common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional weapons – a limited, but nevertheless historic development; 139 states voted in favour of the proposal. The US was alone in voting against it, but the Obama administration has subsequently indicated that it will support negotiations for such a treaty (Amnesty International 2009).

Impediments to progress will remain for some time, but there is no doubt that the issue of arms control has evolved over time to the point where we are now beginning to see questions raised even about the (legal) arms trade and the extent to which the world can continue to tolerate the almost unfettered manufacture and distribution of conventional arms by sovereign states.

One of the reasons for this is that **human rights** and humanitarian issues have come to prominence in international relations in the past two decades and have affected the traditional agendas of politics, security and 'business as usual'. So while the 'human cost' element was raised even in early studies of arms control, we might argue that this issue is only now gaining significant attention in debates on how states may conduct themselves in warfare. The Ottawa Landmines Treaty, one of the first to focus on non-WMDs, was propelled by humanitarian concerns. For the first time, the report of the 2010 Review Conference of the NPT mentioned the link between nuclear weapons

BOX 12.1: TERMINOLOGY

Small arms and light weapons

Small arms are weapons designed for individual use, such as pistols, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons are designed to be deployed and used by a crew of two or more, and include grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank and missile launchers, recoilless rifles and mortars of less than 100 mm calibre. This working definition is taken from the website of the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, www.fco.gov.uk.

and **international humanitarian law** (the law of war). The SALW program of action, together with the proposed new Arms Trade Treaty, attempts to stop arms transfers if they are likely to be used for violations of international human rights or humanitarian law, or if they will negatively affect sustainable development. All this means that we are beginning to see even the normal sovereign 'rights' of states to produce and export conventional weapons coming under an unprecedented level of scrutiny.

Arms control and international relations theory

How might we view the ideas and processes of arms control at a conceptual level? Which theories of international relations can help us to understand the motivations and objectives of those state leaders and, increasingly, civil society groups, who participate in such processes?

Arms control, as noted at the outset of this chapter, is intrinsically tied up with conceptions of international and domestic security and how these might best be achieved. Typically, since 1945, security issues have been dominated by the **realist** school of thought in international relations. With its emphasis on self-help in an anarchical world, the need for military preparedness, and its contention that ongoing security dilemmas will always affect strategic calculations, we might conclude that for realists, arms control and disarmament matter very little. Cooperation with an adversary can never be as effective as unilateral, independent and unfettered action.

We can also see, however, that even for realists, the need to cooperate with an adversary can be overwhelming and can bring security benefits, in terms of stability, transparency and at least an element of predictability. Most early writers on arms control approached the subject from a hawkish perspective, but nevertheless understood the benefits, especially in the nuclear age, of exercising restraint (Bull 1961; Schelling and Halperin 1961). In this sense, we might even argue that such cooperation was an early variant of what has subsequently come to be known as '**common security**', a condition in which states recognise that achieving their own security requires consideration of an adversary's security concerns also (see Palme Commission Report 1982). It can be argued, then, that the practice of arms control and disarmament is actually an area where realists and liberal **institutionalists** can agree. Against such an interpretation, we do have to note the continuing relevance of assertions of independence of action, and the risk of defections from arms control regimes. The approach to arms control taken by the US from the late 1990s up to 2008 reminds us that, ultimately, sovereign rights cannot easily be dismissed in the search for compliance. The US, in this period, withdrew from a major arms control treaty (the 1972 ABM Treaty) and refused to sign or **ratify** various other significant treaties. Other large states occasionally act in a similar way (China, for instance, has not ratified the CTBT) but it has been the US which has been the most visible actor resisting the growing momentum for controlling weapons.

Yet while these independent or rejectionist approaches might remind us of the anarchical structure of our world, it is also important to note that the vast majority of states have indeed signed up to, and abide by, a wide range of arms control agreements. Here we might apply a **liberal**, and especially a liberal-institutional, conception of world politics, whereby there is a recognition that while conflict might be a permanent feature of our landscape, nevertheless it can be managed by confidence-building measures, recognition of human rights, cooperative agreements,

and the institutionalisation of these through **international law** and organisations. Related here is the **English School** of international relations **theory** that posits an **international society** bound together by a raft of rules and **norms** that together make for a functioning and orderly international system. The co-chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament has aligned himself with such a perspective, even going so far as to label the contribution of states such as Australia to disarmament treaties as 'good international citizenship' (Hanson 2005). Of further interest are the questions posed by **constructivists**, who explore the origins and development of ideas and norms in international relations. They might well ask questions such as: how has the nuclear taboo arisen? (Tannenwald 1999); or, why is it that humanitarian issues and legal norms are increasingly imposing themselves onto strategic calculations? Importantly here, we can see that ideas about legitimacy, the moral responsibility of the state and duties to **humanitarianism** are changing and that there is no longer an *a priori* 'right' of states to arm themselves with particular weapons or to engage in unrestricted warfare.

Nuclear weapons: a special case?

Of all the arms control regimes discussed here, the most prominent (and arguably the most shaky) in international relations is that of nuclear weapons. This regime has as its cornerstone the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 (NPT). This treaty is reinforced by a number of related mechanisms and arms control measures, particularly the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The IAEA oversees monitoring and verification of compliance with the NPT, especially through its enhanced safeguards or 'Additional Protocol' programs (although it is unable to monitor or verify activities of the five established nuclear weapon states), the various mechanisms listed above designed to curb the illicit transfer of nuclear materials and technology, and the creation of nuclear weapon-free zones in various parts of the world.

While the world has not seen the military use of nuclear weapons since they were first used in 1945, there is a fear that they will be used in the future, either deliberately or inadvertently by states which possess them, or, in line with recent concerns, by **terrorists** or other sub-state groups. The overwhelming concern that is commonly portrayed is the need to prevent further states and terrorist groups from acquiring these weapons. In other words, the focus is very much on non-proliferation. For others, however, while remaining concerned about proliferation, a concomitant need is to hasten the elimination of nuclear weapons altogether – that is, to move towards full nuclear disarmament.

The NPT was essentially a bargain between the nuclear weapon states (NWS) and the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS): in exchange for the latter promising not to develop or acquire nuclear weapons, the former – the 'acknowledged' nuclear weapon states of the US, Russia, Britain, France and China – have promised to eliminate their nuclear arsenals (although there is no date specified for this) and to assist the NNWS with the transfer and use of nuclear materials and technology for peaceful purposes. These three elements: non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of nuclear technology, make up what are known as the three 'pillars' of the NPT.

All three pillars are now under unprecedented levels of stress. Non-proliferation, while it has been largely successful in that some 183 states have chosen not to acquire

nuclear weapons, is now seen to be insufficiently strong against the desire of some states to acquire nuclear weapons. In addition to the fact that India, Pakistan and Israel hold nuclear weapons (and refuse to sign up to the NPT regime) there has been: the discovery in 1991 of the beginnings of a nuclear weapon program in Iraq; a similar program in Libya, now given up by the Gaddafi regime; the detection in 2004 of the **A. Q. Khan network** which had illegally provided nuclear assistance to various states; the testing in 2006 and again in 2009 of a nuclear device by North Korea, together with the seemingly intractable tensions on the Korean peninsula; and ongoing grave suspicions about the nuclear intentions of Iran which, while it has not rejected the NPT, has nevertheless enriched uranium in a covert manner.

Disarmament remains a slow and tenuous process, as the NWS resist implementing the promise of elimination made by them under Article VI of the NPT and which they reiterated 'unequivocally' at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. While the numbers of nuclear weapons have dropped considerably from the height of the Cold War, and the New START agreement pursued by US president Obama advances this even more, it seems clear that these privileged five states will not move quickly towards the full elimination of their nuclear weapons. The problem here, as many observe (Canberra Commission 1996), is that as long as some states hold nuclear weapons, this will inevitably be an incentive for others to acquire them.

Disarmament and international security

Sergio Duarte

On 5 April 2009, US President Barack Obama addressed a large crowd in Prague and declared: 'I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.' Six months later, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced that he had won the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. Its news release explained: 'The Committee has attached special importance to Obama's vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons.'

Notice that President Obama did not say that he was seeking to establish international peace and security *so that* nuclear disarmament might occur. He was instead making the point that there were concrete security benefits to be obtained from the achievement of disarmament. This difference is significant, because progress in nuclear disarmament has long been frustrated by various conditions that have been prescribed by national leaders or arms control experts from states that possess such weapons or that belong to nuclear alliances.

I have worked on disarmament for almost half a century and must say that Alva Myrdal got it right in 1976 when she wrote *The game of disarmament*, which described how nuclear disarmament has been postponed indefinitely through this very old game of linkage politics. This result has followed from an insistence on various preconditions that must be achieved to make disarmament possible. Some commentators say: we must first achieve world peace. Others say: we must first solve the problem of war. Indeed, an entire cascade of such arguments is easy to observe: we must first eliminate all proliferation risks from all types of weapons of mass destruction; we must first reduce to zero all risks of terrorism involving such weapons; we must first settle all regional disputes; and we must first solve even the wider problem of armed conflict itself. And the conditions go on and on, *ad infinitum*.

Not surprisingly, in light of this game, more than 20 000 nuclear weapons still reportedly exist, fully forty years after the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) committed its parties to 'negotiations in good faith' on nuclear disarmament. Such negotiations have not occurred, and not one nuclear warhead has been physically destroyed as a result of a treaty commitment. So the weapons persist, along with the endlessly proliferating preconditions for disarmament.

Some of these conditions are identified more clearly than others. On 31 January 1992, at its first summit meeting ever, the UN Security Council reaffirmed 'the crucial contribution which progress in these areas [disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation] can make to the maintenance of international peace and security'. Yet on 24 September 2009, the Security Council held its first summit meeting specifically on disarmament issues and adopted Resolution 1887; its preamble stated that the Council was '*resolving* to seek a safer world for all and to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons'. In short, the 1992 statement recognised that security was a beneficiary of disarmament, not a precondition for it to occur, as suggested in the 2009 resolution.

For its part, the General Assembly has long emphasised the contributions of nuclear disarmament to international peace and security. The preamble to the Final Document of the General Assembly's first Special Session on disarmament stated in 1978 that the General Assembly was '*convinced* that disarmament and arms limitation, particularly in the nuclear field, are essential for the prevention of the danger of nuclear war and the strengthening of international peace and security and for the economic and social advancement of all peoples'.

On 26 October 2010, the First Committee adopted a resolution on 'united action towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons', with its preamble '*recalling* the need for all States to take further practical steps and effective measures towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons, with a view to achieving a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons, and in this regard confirming the determination of Member States to take united action'. This was approved by an overwhelming majority, with the DPRK (North Korea) as the only dissenting vote.

The case for nuclear disarmament relates largely to its benefits in preventing the use of such weapons. This was emphasised in the consensus Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, which stated that the Conference '*reaffirms* that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons'.

The alternative ways of 'preventing use' – such as by nuclear deterrence, the balance of power, threats of preemption or first-use, missile defence, and other such measures – have long been viewed with great scepticism in the world community, especially at the UN, because of the risks associated with each approach and the lack of any guarantees of their effectiveness. Accidents, miscalculations and wilful use remain real threats with each of these alternatives – and the mere absence of a nuclear war does not prove that they have worked.

Instead, the world is not only united on the basic goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, but has also agreed on certain multilateral criteria that must be satisfied in achieving it. These include: *transparency* of warheads, fissile material and delivery

systems records; the *verification* and *irreversibility* of disarmament commitments; the *binding* nature of those commitments; and the need for *universal* adherence. These are not conditions, but standards to use in identifying genuine progress in achieving disarmament.

Thus, the world has come to support nuclear disarmament not as a mere hope or dream. By satisfying these rigorous standards, disarmament has enormous contributions to make in strengthening international peace and security. It has received this support not simply because it is morally correct, but also because it is more effective in eliminating nuclear-weapon risks than any other option. In short, it is the right thing to do, and it works.

Sergio Duarte is the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament. He is a career diplomat and holds the rank of Ambassador in the Brazilian Foreign Service, where he has served for 48 years, including appointments as Ambassador to Nicaragua, Canada, China and Austria. He has served as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the IAEA, and was President of the Seventh Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2005.

The third pillar of the NPT, the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, is also undergoing stress as current and widespread concerns about energy resources propel more states to contemplate the use of nuclear energy. Apart from concerns about the safety of such energy programs, there are fears that recourse to this third pillar – which lacks adequate international safeguards and controls – will make nuclear weapons proliferation easier for a growing number of states.

The relatively weak nature of the NPT is a primary concern for advocates of arms control and disarmament. Moreover, the conflation, after 11 September 2001, of the ‘war on terror’ with an aggressive counterproliferation policy by the US, and that state’s allegations of WMDs in Iraq as a reason for invading and occupying that country in 2003, have complicated and made an already difficult task – that of upholding non-proliferation and moving towards disarmament – harder than ever before.

All this sits against a background of long-standing calls for the nuclear weapon states to eliminate their arsenals (Blackaby and Milne 2000; Canberra Commission 1996). The reasoning here is compelling: nuclear weapons have little or no utility in resolving modern conflicts, and unless the NWS are seen to be practising the nuclear abstinence that they insist others adopt, it is hard to persuade would-be nuclear proliferators to desist (Hanson 2002). Additionally, the reasoning goes, if chemical and biological weapons have been banned – a ban accepted by all the NWS – why is it that the third kind of WMDs, nuclear weapons, remain permitted under international law, and then only to a select group of states? To complicate matters further, even those states once condemned for joining the nuclear ‘club’ in 1998, India and Pakistan, are now cultivated as strong allies by the US in its war against terrorism. This has been compounded recently by the US, which now assists India’s civilian nuclear program, despite the fact that India has never signed the NPT. Thus an environment of deep inequality in international security continues (Perkovich 2005).

Figure 12.3 Nuclear weapon test Romeo on Bikini Atoll, March 1954



Source: US Department of Energy/NNSA Photolibrary.

Initiatives to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime

Most states, however, are not ready to give up on the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Among these are many small states and ‘middle powers’ such as Australia, Japan, Norway and New Zealand, which have developed strong records in promoting arms control and disarmament, and which can be termed ‘advocacy states’ (Hanson 2010). This is notwithstanding any close association with their main ally, the US, which, at least during the George W. Bush years, moved away from cooperative arms control and disarmament measures.

A key initiative to promote disarmament was the Australian government’s convening of the Canberra Commission to consider the utility of nuclear weapons and to propose a program for the elimination of these weapons. The Commission released its report in 1996, and remains a key reference point in the ongoing campaign for elimination. Importantly, the Commission included prominent military and political leaders, all of whom lent their weight to calls for a phased and balanced program of disarmament by the nuclear weapon states. Such calls remain strong today and have been recently echoed even by notable conservatives within the US such as Henry Kissinger (Shultz

et al. 2007). Recent initiatives reiterate these calls, especially the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), co-chaired by Australia and Japan, and the Norwegian government's Seven Nation Initiative, which aims to foster practical action towards a nuclear weapon-free world. All these 'advocacy states' were active in the landmark Review Conference of the NPT in May 2010, at which small but significant progress was made towards the long-term goal of elimination of nuclear weapons. Additionally, most states have readily embraced UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which tightens the controls on exports related to WMD manufacture.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a general overview of arms control and disarmament practices and the ideas that inform these, and has focused on the problems facing the nuclear non-proliferation regime in particular. It noted that arms control, which during the Cold War primarily involved only two states and focused on WMD issues, has broadened out subsequently to involve a much larger number of actors, including on occasion **non-government organisations**, and has also moved to regulate certain conventional weapons.

This conclusion suggests that while there remain some substantial obstacles to further advancing arms control and disarmament, much is continuing in this field and the majority of states are taking their obligations seriously and accepting new controls on weapons proliferation, such as the program on small arms and light weapons, UN Resolution 1540, and the Arms Trade Treaty. While much will depend on the activities of the nuclear weapon states, when we calculate the probabilities of disarmament or further nuclear proliferation we can take some heart from the fact that the majority of states in our **international society** readily embrace existing and new measures designed to reduce the likelihood of war and to protect human life. This broad and habit-forming culture of compliance cannot guarantee an absence of defections, but neither should its **normative** and cumulative power be underestimated.

QUESTIONS

1. How important is the process of arms control for mitigating the security dilemma?
2. In what ways do contemporary arms control and disarmament efforts differ from the processes witnessed during the Cold War era?
3. If the possession and use of chemical and biological weapons have been legally banned, why hasn't such a ban extended to nuclear weapons?
4. Can the nuclear non-proliferation regime survive intact if Article VI, requiring the nuclear weapon states to disarm, remains unfulfilled?
5. Is it correct to say that humanitarian and legal factors are overtaking factors of strategy in the contemporary process of controlling arms?

FURTHER READING

Burns, Richard Dean 2009, *The evolution of arms control: from antiquity to the nuclear age*, Praeger. Useful overview of the historical antecedents which inform current thinking on arms control; also examines many oft-neglected background issues such as processes