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REVIEW ESSAY

Disarmament Revisited: Is Nuclear Abolition Possible?

T.V. PAUL

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Lawrence S. Wittner, **Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement.** *Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press*, 2009. Pp.254. \$55, HB. ISBN 978-0-804-75631-0.

George Perkovich and James M. Acton, eds, **Abolishing Nuclear Weapons.** *Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2009. Pp.337. <www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22748>.

Hans Blix, **Why Nuclear Disarmament Matters.** *Boston Review Books*, 2008. Pp.95. \$14.95/£11.95, HB. ISBN-10 0-262-02644-9.

John Mueller, **The Atomic Obsession.** *New York: Oxford University Press*, 2009. Pp. 336 and notes. \$27.95, PB. ISBN-13 978-0-195-38136-8.

Michael Quinlan, **Thinking About Nuclear Weapons.** *New York: Oxford University Press*, 2009. Pp.184. \$49.95, HB. ISBN 0-199-56394-2.

David Cortright and Raimo Väyrynen, **Towards Nuclear Zero.** *London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 2010. Pp.182. \$19.95, PB. ISBN 978-0-415-59528-5.

The six books under review here comprise some of the prominent works in recent years on the relative merits of total nuclear disarmament, or what is now called ‘global nuclear zero’. These

studies also consider the steps that are needed to obtain the goal in the near and medium terms. They reflect a growing interest in nuclear disarmament not only in academic circles but more specifically among US policymakers, especially in the wake of the arrival of the Barack Obama administration in 2009.

In this essay, I first outline the main arguments in the books under review and then present the strategic and normative logic on the part of the advocates of nuclear disarmament, especially those enthusiasts in the United States. The strategic rationale is based on the fear that a small nuclear arsenal is a 'great equalizer', allowing weaker powers to deter intervention by more powerful states. The normative rationale suggests that the long tradition of non-use will make any nuclear war less likely over time. Some scholars even argue that the use of nuclear weapons is prohibited by a taboo and hence there is very little chance that they will ever be used. Although I do not share John Mueller's belief that nuclear weapons are 'irrelevant', I argue that these weapons have become less valuable as a result of globalization. While they are still useful for limited general deterrence, they are less valuable for other purposes such as compellence and brinkmanship. They also have become dangerous instruments in theaters of enduring rivalry such as South Asia and the Middle East, where nuclear possession has emboldened weaker states to challenge stronger adversaries. Regional challengers such as Iran and North Korea have found nuclear acquisition as a means for regime survival, while Pakistan values it for waging an asymmetric war with India. These states are unlikely to abandon nuclear weapons until their strategic goals change or their leaders are replaced by more internationally-oriented political elites who are open to non-nuclear relationships with other states.

In a dramatic shift in American policy, the Obama administration made a major proposal in 2009 designed to make global nuclear disarmament a reality. Through a series of interim steps, the administration expressed its hope of achieving the goal of the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. As a first step, the administration signed an extensive arms reduction treaty with Russia for deeper cuts in strategic arms. In addition, the administration launched a new campaign to expedite the conclusion of a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In September 2009, the President chaired a session of the United Nations (UN) Security Council which adopted a major policy initiative which would also make it harder to convert civilian nuclear programs to weapons making purposes.¹

¹Clifford J. Levy and Peter Baker, 'U.S.–Russia nuclear agreement is first efforts in broader efforts', *New York Times*, 6 July 2009, <www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/world/europe/07prexy.html?_r=1>; David E. Sanger, 'Security Council adopts nuclear

These efforts follow the concerted advocacy by some key US scholars and ex-policymakers in favor of nuclear disarmament during the past four years. Four former prominent policymakers – George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn – published an article on disarmament in the *Wall Street Journal* in June 2007, triggering much discussion in global arms control circles.² President Obama's pledge in Prague in April 2009 had been one of the high profile statements on the issue. These efforts, however, are not new. Previous initiatives at global nuclear disarmament included the much publicized Acheson/Lilienthal Plan, the Baruch Plan, and the Soviet counter proposals (all in 1946). Until the early 1960s, the 18-nation disarmament forum in Geneva conducted a series of negotiations which were meant to achieve global zero.³ These efforts were abandoned as soon as the superpowers adopted a more limited arms control agenda and began bilateral negotiations. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as proposed in the early 1960s by countries like Ireland and India, was designed to achieve global zero, although the final version became an instrument for horizontal non-proliferation. The treaty created two classes of states – nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapon states – leaving the former's right to build weapons intact.

During the 1980s there was quite a bit of momentum towards nuclear disarmament through the efforts of a variety of international actors. The most prominent ones were the short-lived verbal statement by Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan at their Reykjavik meeting in 1985, the Rajiv Gandhi Plan (proposed by the former Prime Minister of India in 1988), and the five continents initiative in which Rajiv Gandhi again assumed a lead role. Gorbachev's passionate endorsement of nuclear disarmament helped to bring the issue to global salience during the 1980s. The peace movements demanded 'freeze now' in response to Reagan administration officials' loose talk of a winnable nuclear war. Momentum also came from forums such as The Australia group, Pugwash, and Project

arms measure', *New York Times*, 24 Sept. 2009, <www.nytimes.com/2009/09/25/world/25prexy.html?_r=2&hp>.

²George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, 'A world without nuclear weapons', *Wall Street Journal*, 4 Jan. 2007, A 15. More importantly, the G-8 heads of state and government at their July 2009 meeting in Italy stated: 'We are all committed to seeking a safer world for all and to creating conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the NPT.' L'Aquila Statement on Non-Proliferation, 8 July 2009, <www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2009laquila/2009-nonproliferation.html>.

³Alva Myrdal, *The Game of Disarmament* (New York: Pantheon Books 1982).

Ploughshares, which made several proposals for achieving a nuclear free-world. Scholars and activists such as Jonathan Schell wrote about the steps that would lead to a nuclear-free world.⁴

What is new today is that unlikely sources have accepted this goal; for the first time since the ill-fated Baruch Plan of 1946, a US administration is seriously talking about nuclear abolition. This is a big change from the George W. Bush administration, which adopted a posture that allowed for the expansion of nuclear use and challenged the so-called nuclear taboo.⁵ The Bush administration's serious consideration of preventive and preemptive nuclear attacks was a major jolt to the disarmament cause.

The books under review touch on different dimensions of this complex issue. Michael Quinlan's book, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, offers a comprehensive history of the nuclear age, the theory and practice of deterrence, the ethics of nuclear weapons, and the management of nuclear arms in the context of proliferation. He also deals with the national nuclear policies of Britain, India and Pakistan. In the final section he delves into the abolition issue, offering a cautious path on specific disarmament measures and the political pre-conditions necessary for abolition to occur. To Quinlan, much of the demand for nuclear weapons today arises from regional powers engaged in rivalries, and such rivalries must end before nuclear abolition can occur. Quinlan does not deal with the status or prestige drive that may also be a reason for some of the existing nuclear powers like the UK and France holding on to their nuclear weapons, even though they are not engaged in any serious rivalries. Also missing is a specific discussion of a viable disarmament mechanism, a major problem with many of the proposals that are emerging on abolition.

The Perkovich–Acton volume, *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons*, offers many chapters for the creation of such a distinct mechanism. The political pre-conditions, verification mechanisms, management of nuclear industry in a world without nuclear weapons, enforcement mechanisms, and the hedging and management of nuclear expertise in the transition to zero and after are major themes addressed in the Perkovich–Acton volume. A long list of scholars from different countries including Japan, US, China, and Pakistan deal with various national positions as well as viewpoints in the path to make zero feasible. The book has a wealth of ideas and they need to be taken seriously by proponents and opponents of nuclear abolition. It is also one of the rare attempts to collectively engage officials and scholars on this crucial question. This alone makes the book valuable.

⁴See Jonathan Schell, *The Abolition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1984).

⁵T.V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP 2009); Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo* (Cambridge, UK: CUP 2007).

Cortright and Väyrynen's easy to read book, *Towards Nuclear Zero*, also offers interesting proposals for disarmament and the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons. The most refreshing part of this book is an examination of the reasons why countries that could have acquired or retained nuclear weapons have decided to forgo them and if their restraint led to insecurity or not. These lessons, although not fully replicable in every context, tell us that nuclear possession is a rare phenomenon, that non-acquisition is the norm, and that we could get to abolition more quickly if only elites in the existing nuclear powers and aspiring nuclear states realized these basic facts. The book also offers some insights into the non-military foundations of building comprehensive security. Anyone interested in nuclear abolition needs to look at these ideas more carefully in order to buttress their case.

The short book by former UN official Hans Blix, *Why Nuclear Disarmament Matters*, appears to be based on a speech or paper. It makes a strong plea for seeking global nuclear disarmament but it hardly contains any substantive new materials or arguments. In the end, Blix outlines some steps toward nuclear disarmament. This book would have been a better product had the author devoted a bit more attention to the difficulties he encountered in disarming Iraq, as well as the conditions for disarmament under coercive threat versus normal situations where multilateral consensus is obtainable. It also shows the weaknesses of quick writing and an inability of some in the ex-officialdom to read or comprehend existing works on a subject that cannot be dealt with through wishful thinking. There is a reluctance here to engage academic works and this shows up in the sketchiness of the book itself.

Wittner's *Confronting the Bomb* is perhaps the best of all the books under review here as it is well-written and grounded in considerable amount of research. Wittner's work is a shortened version of his three-volume series on popular movement toward abolishing nuclear weapons. The main thrust of his argument is that anti-nuclear activists from a variety of movements have influenced policy discourse over the past six decades. Major peace activists have also come from the policy world and their views have been shaped by mass movements. This is indeed a compelling argument, though some national leaders ignored mass protests and built up their nuclear forces during different periods of the atomic age. It would be interesting to analyze more clearly when and under what conditions anti-nuclear movements have made a difference in national policies. Do we need structural changes for the anti-nuclear activists to play a bigger role in disarmament discourse? What is unclear is the influence that these movements have been able to exert in the current debate surrounding nuclear disarmament. In many respects, the peace movements are norm entrepreneurs, a point that

Nina Tannenwald and I discuss in our books, *The Nuclear Taboo* and the *Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons*, respectively.

John Mueller makes several bold assertions in *Atomic Obsession*. Mueller argues that nuclear weapons have been acquired, deployed and maintained by countries based on assumptions which may be utterly wrong. He is skeptical of the claims of both hawks and doves, and argues that the obsession with nuclear weapons really does not have much logical basis; the twentieth century would have turned out much the same even if they were never invented. According to Mueller, nuclear weapons have only marginally affected world politics, despite the immense effort and money spent on their possession, deployment and maintenance. Moreover, the obsession to control proliferation has led to unbelievable human suffering, especially in countries like Iraq. Proliferation of nuclear weapons is not the earthshaking event that many believe. Nuclear possession does not necessarily make a country stronger and most countries have realized the futility of acquiring them. He calls on the United States and other nuclear states to abandon the obsession with nuclear weapons. Mueller's logic suggests that abolition will not succeed until countries and leaders abandon the false assumptions that nuclear weapons confer political power to nuclear states and keep the peace among them by strengthening mutual deterrence.

None of these books deals with the issue of timing of the current enthusiasm for nuclear abolition. Why now, all of a sudden, are US leaders and others in the strategic community, many of whom were earlier proponents of nuclear weaponry, seeking nuclear abolition? What are the key driving forces behind the change of mind in the US administration on nuclear disarmament? In this essay, I hope to accomplish this task. First, I contend that these logics derive largely (although not exclusively) from structural and normative changes. Second, I outline the complexity of deterrence in the current international system, making nuclear weapons a difficult instrument to manage for war prevention strategies. Third, I present the constraints in achieving the global zero goal from the perspective of international order. Specifically, two issues will be discussed: the utility of nuclear weapons for rising powers such as China and India, and the asymmetric deterrence that nuclear possession would bestow on insecure regimes such as North Korea and Iran which value nuclear weapons as a guarantee of regime survival and deterrence against external intervention. Finally, I sketch some steps that might lead to a nuclear-free world.

The Driving Forces

What are the driving forces behind this new-found enthusiasm for nuclear disarmament? I argue that two dominant classes of

explanations — one normative and the other structural — can be presented to explain the new thrust toward global disarmament.

Normative Arguments

One of the major demands of non-nuclear states at the NPT and the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) forums has been in the direction of reshaping the unequal world nuclear order. They want nuclear weapon states to fulfill their part of the bargain contained in Article VI of the NPT with regard to nuclear disarmament and eventual abolition. Such a demand has been a major feature of the NPT negotiations from the 1960s onwards and the 1968 NPT explicitly makes this connection, stating that non-nuclear states will give up their nuclear weapons option in return for a promise from nuclear weapon states to ‘pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control’.⁶

During the Cold War era, the nuclear powers generally ignored this aspect of the bargain even when they were paying occasional lip service to it. In recent years, non-nuclear states have become more assertive on this demand. Failure of the 2008 meeting of the NPT Preparatory Committee to agree on a joint statement revealed the deep-seated unhappiness among non-nuclear states regarding the inability of nuclear states to fulfill their side of the bargain. These states agreed to extend the NPT in perpetuity in 1995 with the understanding that nuclear weapons states were serious about nuclear disarmament. The 2010 NPT review conference would have failed without serious discussion about nuclear disarmament. President Obama has made the argument that the US and other established nuclear powers cannot preach disarmament unless they follow by example.⁷ The Obama administration wants to focus on arms control through strengthening of the NPT, CTBT ratification, conclusion of the FMCT, and by providing guarantees that nuclear weapons will not be used against non-nuclear states.

A second source for the normative argument is related to the ‘tradition of non-use.’ The tradition has emerged since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in particular in the aftermath of the hydrogen bomb tests in the South Pacific in the 1950s. It is based on a near consensus view

⁶Article VI, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (New York: United Nations 1968), <<http://disarmament.un.org/TreatyStatus.nsf/44e6eeabc9436b78852568770078d9c0/4cf7fb1d2f9d06dd852568770079dd97?OpenDocument>>.

⁷Remarks by President Barack Obama, Prague, 5 April 2009, <<http://prague.us.embassy.gov/obama.html>>.

that nuclear weapons shall not be used for anything other than existential deterrence. In recent years, the tradition has been challenged (although not broken) with the arrival of new and aspiring nuclear states, terrorist groups trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and nuclear states' strategic formulations for preemptive and preventive strikes against states or entities holding chemical or biological weapons. These have generated some concerns about the breaking of the normative prohibition by nuclear powers or non-state actors. Hence the need for working toward nuclear abolition as a means to prevent a nuclear war, or in some ways to maintain and strengthen the tradition of non-use.⁸ Finally, the normative predispositions of President Obama, who has been known for his sympathetic position on nuclear abolition, and the officials that he has assembled in the non-proliferation arena seem to prefer radical steps in the nuclear disarmament direction.

Structural Causes

I believe the larger and more fundamental reason for the change of heart for the nuclear powers is structural. Without some strong structural pressures, it is unlikely that the erstwhile proponents of a powerful US nuclear deterrent would endorse nuclear abolition as a goal now. Contained in the structural perspective are two arguments based on the notions of 'great equalizer' and 'great nuisance' as a result of the proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional actors.

The 'Great Equalizer' Argument

A near-unipolar world order emerged after the Cold War, with the US as the most powerful military power followed by a weakened Russia, China and middle ranking powers like the United Kingdom and France. In the meantime, India has been emerging as a state with major power attributes and a nuclear capability attested by its nuclear tests in 1998. Other 'regional influentials' have emerged as well, including non-nuclear Brazil and South Africa as key economic and political actors. However, the weakening of the American economy and the two simultaneous wars that Washington has been waging in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused considerable anxiety about America's relative decline. China in the meantime is poised to become the leading economic power by the middle of the twenty-first century, to be followed by the US and India. This impending systemic change has been complicated by the arrival of transnational terrorism as a new unpredictable and uncontrollable force to reckon with as the latter

⁸See Paul, *Tradition of Non-use of Nuclear Weapons*.

tend to mushroom in the failed or failing states of the world. Some such terrorist groups harbor a desire to acquire nuclear weapons and engage in nuclear terrorism.⁹ Although a limited yet meaningful politico-military depreciation of nuclear weaponry has occurred among the great powers since the end of the Cold War, deterrence has become very complex due to the structural indeterminacy engendered by the rise of multiple state and non-state actors; the uncertain distribution of power and power relationships among major powers and the goals, ideals, and issues that they hold dearly. Deterrence operates best when there is clarity on these issues, while ambiguity makes deterrent relationships complex, both in the realms of theory and policy.¹⁰

While these factors are unsettling, the absence of an intense enduring rivalry after the Cold War made nuclear possession less important for great powers. Today they maintain a 'recessed general deterrent' which serves as a hedge in case of the onset of future rivalry among them. The nuclear powers also view their nuclear possession as status symbols, although over the years this notion seems to have eroded, partly because of the difficulties in using nuclear weapons as instruments of compellence or coercion. The acquisition efforts by regional challengers are complicating the unequal nuclear order and it is indeed the main basis for the structural argument. Nuclear possession by weaker regional powers can act as a source of 'a great equalizer' of major-minor power relations and thereby blur the distinction between major and minor powers to a certain extent. The expectation that the most destructive weapon is the exclusive preserve of the major powers is challenged by this development.

More specifically, 'the great equalizer' argument is based on the following considerations. First, the ability to punish minor powers militarily without suffering an attack in kind on its homeland territory has been a hallmark of major power status.¹¹ This structural inequality could be challenged if smaller powers acquire nuclear weapons and appropriate delivery systems. A minor power with nuclear weapons can deter a more powerful adversary through asymmetric means. North Korea showed that asymmetric deterrence is possible, even in the

⁹On nuclear terrorism, see Charles D. Ferguson and William C. Potter, *The Four Faces of Nuclear Proliferation* (New York: Routledge 2005), 14–105; Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism* (New York: Times Books 2004).

¹⁰See T.V. Paul, 'Complex Deterrence: An Introduction', in T.V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan and James J. Wirtz (eds), *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (University of Chicago Press 2009), 8.

¹¹T.V. Paul, 'Great Equalizers or Agents of Chaos? Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Emerging International Order', in T.V. Paul and John A. Hall (eds), *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: CUP 1999), Ch. 18.

pre-nuclear days, with its conventional capability and posture that could impose significant costs on South Korean and US forces in the region. Pyongyang's acquisition of nuclear weapons has increased the asymmetric deterrent capability of the reclusive leaders vis-à-vis Washington and Seoul.

Smaller powers armed with nuclear weapons could also resist the politico-military interventions by major powers and regional hegemons. Deterrence thus assumes a larger connotation. The smaller nuclear power, confident that military coercion by the stronger power is unlikely, could resist political pressures to make substantial concessions on key security issues that concern the major powers or their regional allies.

In a conventional weapons-only world, the US would retain its dominance as the most powerful military power, as none of the peer competitors is expected to have the actual or potential capabilities to the extent that the US does in the foreseeable future.¹² This does not mean that the US efforts today are not driven by serious concerns about proliferation. The most worrying prospect is the spread of nuclear weapons to a few regional powers which hold revisionist ambitions and have active conflict relationships with the US and its allies.

There are at least four related consequences produced by the new round of nuclear proliferation. First, further nuclear proliferation among regional states would entice neighboring states, even allies of the US, to seek nuclear weapons because of their fear of abandonment in a crisis. Extended deterrence could assume more significance in order to forestall regional arms races and inadvertent escalations. The US efforts to reassure extended deterrence to Japan and South Korea in the aftermath of the North Korean nuclear tests are a result of this fear.¹³ Additional extended deterrence commitments also mean that the US is likely to entrench itself in new theaters as the nuclear protector of regional allies.

¹²It is surprising that it took nearly two decades for the U.S. security planners to figure this out. The best opportunity for global nuclear disarmament would have been in the early 1990s when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended and a short window opened up when disarmament and non-proliferation were on the global agenda. The unipolar moment was fleeting, but the Washington pundits seemed to have thought of it lasting for a long time to come. If only nuclear disarmament was achieved at that time, perhaps America's unipolar position would have been maintained for a longer period through its overwhelming conventional superiority compared to peer-competitors.

¹³Timothy W. Crawford, 'The Endurance of Extended Deterrence; Continuity, Change, and Complexity in Theory and Policy,' in Paul, Morgan, Wirtz (eds), *Complex Deterrence*, Ch.12.

Second, a revisionist new nuclear power could be emboldened to engage in a highly ambitious strategy in a regional theater. Pakistan's initiation of the Kargil offensive in 1999 (less than a year after conducting its nuclear tests) and its continued support of asymmetric war against India point to this phenomenon.¹⁴ A revisionist state – be it driven by ideological or territorial goals – may believe that nuclear weapons guarantee its existential security and that the adversary would not have the capacity to respond militarily to its limited provocations. Indeed, the biggest fear with Iran is that the acquisition of nuclear weapons may accentuate its revisionist tendencies in the Middle East/Persian Gulf region, encouraging it to engage in ideological and territorial revisionism vis-a-vis neighboring states that are too weak for self-defense. The Iranian leaders' rhetoric about their intentions, capabilities, and objectives toward neighboring states has been taken at their face value by regional states, particularly Israel.

Third, there is strong apprehension among policy and intellectual circles that deterrence may not work with rogue or revisionist powers. Deterrence is based on 'instrumental rationality,' the idea that state leaders maximize their goals and minimize costs in making their policy choices in the military realm. Rational leaders modify their goals if the costs are higher than the expected benefits. If the leaders of a new nuclear state are driven by 'value rationality', however, the possibility of nuclear war will increase. Value rationality implies the willingness of actors to undertake costly actions for ideological or religious objectives, in the pursuit of which individuals are willing to sacrifice everything even if they do not succeed in their ventures.¹⁵

Fourth, a new nuclear state could take several years and serious involvement in some crises in order to learn about nuclear deterrence, the limits of nuclear weaponry and the great political and environmental costs associated with a nuclear war. This nuclear learning can be functional or dysfunctional, and if it is the latter, much turbulence can occur in the regional order. Thus the risks of nuclear war, advertent and inadvertent, involving the new nuclear states – India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea – do exist, although the first category will decline as time passes by and as these states establish reliable command, communications and control (C3) systems and as they become more advanced in their deterrent relationships. In the near term, however,

¹⁴Paul S. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP 2007).

¹⁵Paul, *Complex Deterrence: An Introduction*, 6. See also Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, Vol. I, (eds) Claus Wittich and Guenther Roth (Berkeley: University of California Press 1978), 24–5.

risks exist because of the vulnerabilities in their deterrent relationships in terms of crisis, arms control and strategic stability and also their lack of highly effective technical and political controls necessary to prevent a possible accidental nuclear war. Moreover, among new nuclear states there seems to be widespread belief in the ‘stability-instability paradox,’ which holds that limited conventional war is more likely if mutual nuclear possession deters both sides from escalation.¹⁶

The ‘Great Nuisance’ Argument

Unlike the great equalizer argument, which is mostly relevant to nation-states, the ‘great nuisance’ argument emerges from a deep concern about cataclysmic terrorist groups acquiring nuclear weapons. Often these groups are driven by value rationality, meaning that they are outside the framework of traditional deterrence theory. Nuclear armed terrorist groups could pose threats not only to their ideological and political enemies, but even to the state that sponsored them initially. If a terrorist group acquires nuclear weapons and succeeds in using them against a nuclear state, the pressure on the latter to retaliate in kind could be high. This contingency, although far-fetched until September 2001, seems not inconceivable in the future. For instance, the Al-Qa’eda network could obtain nuclear weapons through disgruntled Pakistani military and scientific personnel, especially in the far-fetched scenario of Pakistan collapsing as a state with the military losing control of the country and its nuclear arsenal. Once in possession of nuclear weapons, this group may resort to nuclear use against a country or society that it detests (such as India), as the deterrence logic may not apply in such conflict situations. Moreover, there may be circumstances under which the US could be under intense pressure to use small tactical weapons to eject terrorists holed up in specific unreachable locations, especially if there is reliable information that they possess nuclear weapons or radioactive materials.

More ominously, nuclear terrorists could attempt to take over power in the country where they received the original support. The Taliban and Al-Qa’eda for instance have in recent months turned their efforts to control Pakistan and with nuclear weapons they could embolden themselves in this pursuit. There were several reports of Taliban attacks on Pakistan’s nuclear facilities in 2009.¹⁷ These preceded reports of the

¹⁶See for instance, Michael Krepon and Chris Gagne (eds), ‘The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia,’ (Washington DC, Henry L. Stimson Center), Report 38, June 2001.

¹⁷Dean Nelson, ‘Pakistan’s nuclear base targeted by Al-Qaeda,’ *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Aug. 2009, <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/6011668/Pakistans-nuclear-bases-targeted-by-al-Qaeda.html>.

Al-Qa'eda network under the leadership of Osama bin Laden attempting to buy nuclear weapons and materials from various sources. Bin Laden's group has laid claims on Pakistan's nuclear weapons on the basis that he had supported the Pakistani tests in 1998.¹⁸ The fear of nuclear terrorism has been accentuated because of the concerns of the steady inroads Al-Qa'eda and Taliban have made in Pakistan. In spring 2009 Taliban forces controlled around 30 percent of Pakistani territory, in the northwest areas, as well as Waziristan. They made major inroads into the Swat valley, a mere 100 miles from the capital, Islamabad. In June 2009 the Pakistan Army managed to partially eject these forces, but it seems they still remain in those territories. The location of many of Pakistani nuclear installations near Taliban-controlled areas generate considerable fears of the prospects of the bombs or bomb-making materials falling into the wrong hands.

These arguments make nuclear disarmament desirable at least from the point of view of status quo powers, and especially the United States. The natural follow up question is whether such a move is in fact feasible.

How Feasible is Global Zero?

From a structural perspective, a fully verifiable, comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament treaty may be very difficult to obtain, even if persuasive normative arguments can be made. Nuclear zero is a highly ambitious agenda and President Obama himself agrees that complete nuclear disarmament may not happen in his lifetime. Why?

Disarmament will succeed only if states do not fear that giving up nuclear weapons will make them permanently insecure. Actors are unlikely to cooperate if they are extremely worried about uncertainty in a world of nuclear zero, but cooperation might emerge if the future appears less ominous.¹⁹ Many of the contributors of the books reviewed here believe the conditions needed to reduce uncertainty and fear are slowly emerging, or that they need to be created through concrete policy engineering. Perkovich and Acton's introduction makes a powerful argument for abolition. Cortright and Väyrynen also look at the steps necessary for achieving nuclear disarmament. However, they do not talk much about the impediments.

¹⁸Bin Laden's group is reported to have succeeded in gaining nuclear materials from Pakistan and may have gained components for some form of a 'dirty bomb'. Philip Webster and Roland Watson, 'Bin Laden's nuclear threat', *The Times* (London), 26 Oct. 2001.

¹⁹Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books 1984).

In the next section I highlight several structural impediments to the goal of zero nuclear weapons. The absence of an enduring rivalry among the great powers may be the most important positive dimension for talking about global nuclear disarmament. However, this does not tell the whole story.

Structural Impediments

Structural barriers may still get in the way of well-meaning nuclear disarmament efforts. Even though the Obama administration may be interested in achieving global nuclear zero, the declining great power Russia, the rising global power China, and the rising great power India are unlikely to forgo them easily even though they all may make proclamations supporting global zero.

Russia's attitude is crucial here. Moscow still views possession of nuclear weapons as an important alternative to its conventional weaknesses vis-à-vis the West. It also views nuclear weapons as a source of great power status and a bargaining instrument with the US. If the US seeks to build a missile defense system in Europe (although recently scaled down, the plan can be resurrected under a future Republican administration) and Asia, it may compel Russia to develop new missile systems that can transcend the American shield. Russia's lingering dreams of rebuilding its global power status may require a nuclear component without which it is unlikely to be taken seriously by Western powers. Russia also views nuclear possession as a necessary deterrent against Western intervention in its former Soviet space and conflicts with Georgia or even internal conflicts like Chechnya.²⁰

Second-tier nuclear powers like Great Britain and France are perhaps the most potentially feasible candidates for adopting nuclear zero if others are seeking the goal. Britain is more likely to forgo nuclear weapons as there has been occasional willingness to consider this option among the Labour Party.²¹ The cost of the deterrent has also been a factor in Britain's calculations. France may be less apt to support global zero given its historical affection for the *force de frappe* and the penchant to pursue an independent defense policy for status and

²⁰On the changes in Russian nuclear doctrine, see 'Appendix A: Russian Federation Military Doctrine,' in Alexei Arbatov, 'The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons Learned from Kosovo and Chechnya', The Marshall Center Papers No.2, July 2000, <www.marshallcenter.org/site-graphic/lang-en/page-pubs-index-1/static/xdocs/coll/static/mcpapers/mc-paper_2-en.pdf>.

²¹On the changing British policy, see UK Government, *Lifting Nuclear Shadow: Creating Conditions for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons* (London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2009).

prestige. In fact, among all the second-tier nuclear powers, France has been the least enthusiastic about the Obama goal as it believes that it has taken 'unprecedented decisions in dismantling its nuclear weapon-testing site and fissile production materials, while the other nuclear powers have not followed suit. France thus sees a disjunction between rhetoric and actual behavior of other nuclear powers.'²²

Rising power China has been a supporter of global disarmament at least rhetorically.²³ It has maintained a no first use commitment ever since it acquired its nuclear capability, and it has only produced a small number of nuclear weapons in accordance with its limited deterrent strategy. However, given that it is conventionally inferior and is seeking global power status (with a peaceful rise strategy), will it support a global ban and give away its deterrent easily? The Chinese desire for peaceful rise is somewhat against historical experience as most power transitions in the past were preceded by war. In fact, an argument can be made that China has been able to focus on its economic growth in the shadow of a nuclear deterrent and guarantee that a preventive war will not take place. The economic globalization that is helping China and India is facilitated by systemic stability that is provided partly by nuclear deterrence.

India is yet another rising power and has made a number of historic statements calling for abolishing nuclear weapons. It has also committed to such an endeavor and has promised to follow suit if the global treaty is non-discriminatory. The question is will it agree to abolition without its arch-rivals Pakistan and China committing to such a goal? It was India's long-standing position that the NPT was not going to be effective and that the efforts should be in global disarmament and that the international community should create a non-discriminatory treaty. In some sense, the nuclear powers are finally accepting these Indian positions. However, when it comes to details, will India agree to such a treaty? If China and Pakistan and other nuclear powers are genuinely committed, India might be willing to forgo its nuclear weapons. But with their territorial disputes festering and the power rivalry intact, it is unlikely that these three Asian states will come up with a verifiable compromise formula for regional disarmament. The lack of trust is a major impediment in achieving nuclear disarmament in this region.

²²Bruno Tertrais, 'France and the Nuclear Abolition: The Odd Country Out?' (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 3 Sept. 2009.

²³Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Expounds on China's Policy on Nuclear Disarmament at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, 12 Aug. 2009, <www.chinaembassy.org.in/eng/zgbd/t578645.htm>.

The third-tier nuclear powers Israel, Pakistan and North Korea suffer from very deep-rooted existential insecurity, especially in the latter case, regime survival. In the past, Israel has supported a nuclear free zone in the Middle East once it reaches a comprehensive peace settlement with all Arab states. However, such a peace settlement today is as elusive as ever. Even those countries that signed peace agreements with Israel are still continuing their hostility toward the Jewish state by maintaining a cold peace, largely due to the Palestinian problem. It is unlikely even a peace settlement with Israel will stop Iran from acquiring nuclear arms as the Islamic leaders attach great value to nuclear weapons in their struggle with the West, especially the US. The Iranian aim is to attain dominance in the region and nuclear possession may well be part of the power calculations of the Iranian leaders. All these suggest that nuclear disarmament in the Middle East may be a very difficult goal to accomplish.

Similarly, Pakistan also has a nuclear strategy based on a deterrent against a conventionally superior adversary, India. It is very unlikely to give up nuclear weapons until there is a substantial termination of rivalry with India. Pakistan views nuclear possession as a 'great equalizer' and given the structural and ideological asymmetries between the two states, it is very hard to see Pakistan abandoning its weapons. Pakistan may have to forgo the whole strategy of 'parity' and 'balancing' via-à-vis India in order to contemplate a nuclear free status.

The newest member of the nuclear club, North Korea, is unlikely to give up its weapons easily. The North Korean governing elite seem to have acquired nuclear weapons for regime security. The prospects for denuclearization are probably better with North Korea if an appropriate security and economic package can be offered and the regime is assured of its survival.²⁴

The 'great nuisance' argument also raises problems for advocates of nuclear zero. There is no assurance that non-state actors are going to oblige to this goal. In fact they may find a great opportunity in disgruntled scientists who lose their jobs in a situation of global zero. They may also attempt to sell their nuclear wares on the global black market. This contingency was raised following the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991. Only the sustained efforts by the US to employ Russian scientists (through the Nunn-Lugar program) stemmed these prospects from materializing.²⁵ The A.Q. Khan network suggests that

²⁴Tania Branigan, 'North Korea willing to reenter nuclear disarmament talks,' *The Guardian*, 18 Sept. 2009, <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/18/north-korea-nuclear-disarmament-china>.

²⁵Amy F. Woolf, 'Nuclear Weapons in Russia: Safety, Security, and Control Issues', CRS Issue Brief for Congress, 15 Aug. 2003, <<http://fas.org/spp/starwars/crs/IB98038.pdf>>.

scientists in an ideologically-oriented country like Pakistan may pursue nuclear transfers even if there is a global agreement to prevent such deals.

Concluding Questions: What Will Replace Nuclear Weapons?

Efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament will flounder as long as states believe that nuclear weapons are strategically useful. As a result, the dilemmas of strategy in a world of global zero are likely to remain speculative for some time. Nonetheless, disarmament advocates could make a more compelling argument if they thought about such questions ahead of time. For instance, liberal theorists argue that the world will become more peaceful. After the global spread of democracy, international institutions, and economic interdependence. We should ask if they are spreading fast enough to assure that a nuclear-free world will be a war-free world. Other theorists argue that peace may emerge following a normative change globally with respect to the perceived utility of military force, including nuclear weapons. Quinlan's book discusses the need for thinking through the necessary disarmament mechanism and the political preconditions for obtaining the goal of nuclear abolition. He warns of the likely temptation for technologically advanced countries to break out of their commitment if they fear their adversaries would require such weapons.²⁶ This is indeed the crux of the problem – how to seek nuclear abolition and guarantee that states will abide by it. As Wittner points out, political conditions similar to what we witnessed during the waning years of the Cold War proved to be fleeting.²⁷ It is perhaps in the interest of these movements to vigorously engage political elites to pursue disarmament when such a rare opportune moment arrives. More broadly, strategists should begin to consider the implications of a nuclear-free world for the international order. Will regional powers feel more or less secure if they cannot possess a small nuclear arsenal? Will great powers become more or less aggressive towards smaller rivals?

The answers to these questions are not immediately clear. Thus, even if momentum builds toward nuclear abolition, global zero advocates need to think about the steps needed in order to prevent turbulence in the international system. From a purely disarmament perspective, the following sequence provides some general guidance on how to manage strategic instability during the transition processes.

First, existing nuclear powers could remove nuclear weapons from alert status immediately. This can generate confidence among great

²⁶Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*, 158–61.

²⁷Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb*, Chs.8 and 9.

powers that they are no longer locked in an intense rivalry and that they need not fear a first strike.

Second, they could declare a no-first use policy and conclude a no-first use convention. This would encourage a least some of the non-nuclear states to remain in that status and offer a good argument to their public that nuclear states have no intention of using them against non-nuclear states and that they do not need to acquire these weapons for deterrence.

Third, nuclear powers should all ratify the CTBT and conclude the FMCT on a non-discriminatory and verifiable basis.

Fourth, the United States and Russia should make substantial cuts to their arsenals: together they possess about 70 percent of all the world's nuclear forces. Some authors, including Cortright, Väyrynen and Perkovich, consider the retention of small number of weapons in the range of 100 or so for minimum deterrence as a vantage point for further reduction by the US and Russia.²⁸ These cuts should be preceded by a verifiable treaty that no state would break its provisions or bring back weapons in a crisis time.

Fifth, second and third-tier nuclear powers should conclude a treaty to cut their numbers radically. Without nuclear powers such as China, France, UK, India, Israel, and Pakistan onboard, the top-tier nuclear states, are unlikely to forgo theirs.

Sixth, the NPT should be amended to include vertical proliferation, meaning limits on the expansion of existing nuclear arsenals.

Seventh, international nuclear fuel banks should be set up with new types of fuel and reactors that cannot be used for weapons purposes and should be made available to states on a non-discriminatory basis.

Eighth, states should prohibit virtual nuclear arsenals and the ability to bring back nuclear weapons quickly by those who possess the technology. The final step is abolition with a powerful international authority to verify compliance and impose sanctions on those who would violate such an agreement. In addition, a proper mechanism is needed to prevent such materials falling into the hands of terrorist groups, though Mueller suggests that this concern is exaggerated and that it should not get in the way of arms control. According to Mueller, the prospects of nuclear use by terrorists is highly unlikely because of constraints on terrorists'

²⁸Cortright and Väyrynen, *Towards Nuclear Zero*, 146. For a similar position, see also, David Holloway, 'Further Reductions in Nuclear Weapons,' in George P. Shultz, Steven Andreasson, Sidney D. Drell, James E. Goodby (eds), *Reykjavik Revisited: Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press 2008), 1–45.

technical capability and political will to assemble a bomb and deliver it against a viable target.²⁹

These steps outlined above are almost all disarmament mechanisms, and they are not related to the political conditions necessary for abolition to occur. If these pre-conditions are not properly developed, it is unlikely that states will part with nuclear weapons. And even if they make substantial cuts, they will still maintain 'virtual arsenals' by maintaining fissile materials and the technology for assembling weapons quickly if the need arises. Perkovich and Acton argue that such virtual arsenals may be necessary during the long process of disarmament because they provide a hedge against the nuclear ambitions of one state or the other.³⁰ However, in the long run, such a hedging strategy may prove to be counter-productive as cooperation based on trust becomes difficult. The absence of a foolproof guarantee of defection by even one nuclear power or a new state could create considerable stress in the international system. Are beleaguered regional powers like Israel, Pakistan and North Korea ready to give up nuclear weapons? What guarantees exist for terrorist groups abiding by nuclear abolition agreements between states?

All these suggest that political pre-conditions have to be created for an effective denuclearization strategy. Proponents of global zero need to pay more attention to politics and strategy as disarmament is not just a purely normative or technical issue. They may also need to work hard to resolve enduring conflicts that generate a propensity among some states to seek nuclear weapons. Even those states in perpetual conflict could be encouraged to learn the limitations of nuclear weapons as coercive instruments and the risks of additional proliferation due to their behavior while existing nuclear states offer concrete guarantees against nuclear use toward non-nuclear states. However, there is some value in continuing the momentum toward global zero and the discussions surrounding it. The most feasible outcome from the current efforts would be a further depreciation of nuclear weapons in world politics and placing them on the backburner only to be kept as an option if rivalries develop and if new technological breakthroughs do not address the security/insecurity problems of the twenty-first century. The books reviewed here offer interesting arguments for nuclear abolition, but much more creative work is needed to understand when and how effective global nuclear disarmament can take place.

²⁹Mueller, *Atomic Obsession*, Chs. 12–15.

³⁰Perkovich and Acton, *Abolishing Nuclear Weapons. A Debate*, 117–125.

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