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Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World

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TOWARDS A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE WORLD

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It is a sobering reflection that an entire generation of people has grown up under the shadow of the mushroom cloud. Though some perhaps might have dreamt of the wide blue skies beyond the cloud, for most people the nuclear reality was an inescapable element of the strategic landscape. In the l980s there was an intensive and widespread call in much of the Western and nonaligned world for justifying the strategy of nuclear deterrence. In the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War[1], not just a bunch of trendy intellectuals but a broad cross-section of concerned citizens have become deeply dubious of the ethics, military necessity and political wisdom of constructing defence policies around "the bomb." The worldwide outrage and disbelief provoked by the French decision to resume nuclear testing in 1995 confirmed both the public revulsion against nuclear weapons and their associated infrastructure, and the general belief that they are problems left over from the history of the Cold War (Thakur, 1996).

The main thrust of my argument is that on balance, the regional and global security risks posed by the acquisition or retention of nuclear stockpiles exceed any security gains that can reasonably be anticipated from such postures. I thus implicitly acknowledge that nuclear weapons can confer security benefits, but demonstrate that these benefits are outweighed by the political and security costs. The argument is developed through eight propositions.

The Military Utility of Nuclear Weapons is Extremely Limited

The death and damage inflicted on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 was comparable in scale to the destruction visited upon Dresden, Hamburg and Tokyo during the Second World War. But there was one important difference: Hiroshima was destroyed by a single bomb.

From one perspective, the advent of nuclear weapons meant that war, far from being a continuation of policy by other means, would in fact be the breakdown of policy resulting in mutual annihilation. Yet nuclear weapons have not deprived wars and the threat of wars of all utility. Most international conflicts involve non-nuclear states. Several of the more important conflicts of our time have seen non-nuclear nations fighting nuclear adversaries (e.g. the United States in Vietnam and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan). The use of nuclear weapons in such wars is limited by the fact that their political and moral costs would be greater than the desired military and political objectives. Finally, in theory, even nuclear powers can engage in wars between themselves without using nuclear weapons. In practice, however, this has not occurred, not the least because of the danger that wars once started are difficult to keep limited to pre-determined levels of intensity. They tend to acquire a self-perpetuating logic of their own.

The enormous destructiveness of nuclear weapons produced four major changes in military strategy. First, modern delivery systems mean that there is no protection against nuclear bombs.

On their most successful day in defending London against German "buzz bombs" in the last war, on 28 August 1944, the British shot down 97 of 101 rockets. Had the four bombs that got away been nuclear, London would be a historical curiosity of rubble. The only defence against nuclear weapons is to be certain of destroying every enemy missile and bomber. Such certainty is not available today nor likely in the foreseeable future.

Second, nuclear weapons have not just made old fashioned defence impossible, they have also destroyed the gallantry of olden days which pitted soldier against soldier and left non-combatants alone, if not in peace. The historical trend towards blurring the line between military and civilian sectors, already in evidence in the two world wars, has been completed by nuclear weapons. It is now possible to destroy the enemy society without defeating or even engaging enemy forces. While strategists bicker among themselves as to whether civilian populations should be primary or unintentional targets, the fact remains that civilians are the major targets of nuclear weapons.

Third, the destructiveness of nuclear weapons and the speed of their delivery systems mean that wars will no longer be protracted affairs. Nuclear war could be over in days or even hours, denying leaders a chance to think again and change their minds. Because of this added obstacle to political control over nuclear war, the "fighting" could start even before alarms are discovered to be false.

The fourth factor derives from the implications of "nuclear winter" hypotheses for strategic doctrines. Through the destruction of global agriculture in particular, nuclear winter effects, whose probability is considered to be finite--that is, greater than zero (impossible) but less than one (certain)--would be much worse than the short-term-blast, radiation, fire and fallout of nuclear war (Sagan and Turco, 1993: 369-70). The most immediate lesson at first glance is that the possibility of a successful preemptive first strike recedes even further into the distance. The catastrophic climatic consequences that could make the human species extinct can be triggered by the use of nuclear weapons beyond the safety threshold by just one side. A major first strike could be an act of national suicide, even if no retaliation occurs.[2] Therefore, a first strike can be self-destructive even where the enemy's capacity to retaliate has been destroyed. Logically, then, second strike retaliatory capability need not be the only basis for deterrence; the nuclear winter scenario introduced an element of self-deterrence to enhance nuclear stability.

The surprising thing is how little benefit has been conferred by the possession of nuclear weapons. History refutes the thesis that Soviet expansionism was matched to the Soviet nuclear arsenal. The most spectacular Soviet territorial and political advances were made during 1945-49, when the Americans had a monopoly of atomic weaponry. Conversely, the disintegration of the Soviet Union occurred after they had attained strategic parity with the United States. The nuclear equation has been irrelevant in determining the outcomes of regional conflicts. Nuclear weapons were as unusable for the US in Vietnam as for the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The one type of armament that has been quite superfluous to either fighting or managing the conflict in Bosnia is nuclear weapons. They are of no utility to India in dealing with its myriad of enduring low-intensity insurgencies. Conversely, the Gulf War showed that a massive response with sophisticated conventional weapons can suffice even against a latent, implicit or nascent threat of chemical and biological weapons (Goldblat, 1995: 26).

Nuclear weapons are of limited utility in the types of conflicts engaging our attention today. Wallensteen and Sollenberg (1995) have counted a total of 94 armed conflicts during the six-year period of 1989-94 inclusive. Of these, only four were inter-state. The majority of the internal conflicts were over government (civil wars) or territory (state formation). Wallensteen and Sollenberg divide the parties in the conflict into 68 states and 164 non-government actors. Of the 42 armed conflicts in existence in 1994, 25 were major (defined as having recorded over 1000 battle-related deaths) and 17 minor (defined as having recorded at least 25 battle-related deaths in one year but under 1000 during the course of the conflict). Only seven of the 42 armed conflicts were wars (where battle-related deaths exceed 1000 in one year). *Thus wars, defined in relation to battlefield casualties whether between or within states, are the exception, and armed conflicts are the norm.* The threat or use of nuclear weapons is simply irrelevant in such conflicts.

The Political Utility of Nuclear Weapons is also Extremely Limited

The cumulative impact of the four changes in military strategy produced by nuclear weapons (see above) has been to make nuclear weapons devoid of any military use whatsoever. Their only purpose can be deterrence. But here too strategists are confronted with a fundamental paradox. If one side seeks to deter war by creating the fear that it will use nuclear weapons, then it must convince the opponent of its determination to use them in certain circumstances. If, however, the weapons are used and produce a like response, then the side striking first is very much worse off than if it had abstained. Posing an unacceptable risk to the enemy therefore necessarily poses the same risk to oneself (Carver, 1983). The implications of this paradox are rather disquieting.

The mutual deterrence structure of the Cold War period is now obsolete. The idea of any one of the United States, Russia or China launching a nuclear strike against any one of the others seems too fantastic to be credible. For the next decade or generation, nuclear weapons will have a lesser effect on shaping the nature of relations between Moscow and Washington than at any time since World War II. Nor do nuclear weapons have any relevance to a European war. And when we add up all the forms of security assurances from the nuclear-weapons states (NWS), including those issued to the 180 countries that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), then the use of nuclear weapons is excluded from virtually all regions of the world already. *That is, nuclear weapons need not presently form part of the basic national security doctrine of the NWS. Their elimination would not create a void that would have to be filled by other means.*

The most frequently cited proof of the deterrence pudding is the peace of Europe for fifty years. There has been no major war or expectation of war among the West European powers since the Second World War. But it is problematical to try to attribute a causal relationship between the development of nuclear weapons and the absence of war. Another leading contender for having helped to keep the peace in Europe is economic integration. When French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman announced his plan to unify Europe's coal and steel markets in 1950, he said that the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) would make war between France and Germany not just unthinkable but materially impossible (Nye, 1971: 117). With their economies integrated, the major European powers would lack the means to wage war against one another. In

addition, functional interdependence promotes a sense of common identity or community among members, raises the threshold of tolerance of irritating behaviour by other members because perceived benefits exceed perceived challenges, increases the cost of violent conflict to all members, and provides mechanisms, experience and expectations of "integrative solutions." A third possible explanation for the post-war peace of Europe is that the problem of Germany, the cause of the two world wars, was solved by dividing it into two. By the time Germany reunified, the problem of German power overwhelming European peace had disappeared. The final possible explanation is that war among the European powers has been avoided because, for the first time, all the major European powers were democratic. Democracies do not go to war against one another.

There is a counter argument. Both India and Pakistan are threshold NWS. Yet the knowledge of each other's capacity to deploy nuclear weapons has not prevented a proxy war being waged in Kashmir since 1989. The total number of fatalities in that conflict is now around 20,000. By most common definitions in use among social scientists today, such as 1000 battle-related deaths per year, that is war. Moreover, as the figures above showed, this is the more common type of conflict situation today, not military battles across international frontiers. So we do have a major example of the failure of deterrence. And, following Karl Popper, just one example is sufficient to falsify the theory of deterrence.

As for influence conferred by threshold nuclear-weapons status, consider this. India and Israel are threshold NWS but regional powers. Japan is a non-NWS but a world power. Nuclear brinkmanship wins North Korea neither friends nor prestige. For Britain and France the sole conceivable political utility of nuclear weapons lies in the status symbol it confers. This may satisfy the urge for nostalgia of the former colonial powers. The greater political status symbol is permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. So long as the two are combined, suspicions remain that possession of nuclear weapons is an unwritten but necessary, perhaps even a sufficient, condition of permanent membership of the Security Council. Inevitably, this undermines the moral authority of the United Nations itself as the embodiment of a world ruled by law and reason, not military might. If, therefore, proliferation of nuclear weapons is accepted as being one of the gravest dangers to the national security of Britain and France, then the retention of nuclear weapons by these two European states is a positive inducement to would-be proliferators to do as Britain and France do, not as they preach. That is, in net terms, by retaining nuclear weapons Britain and France undermine rather than enhance their own national security.

Legal and Moral Doubts of Nuclear-Weapons

The stockpiling, threat and use of nuclear weapons cannot perhaps be *proven* to be immoral or illegal. But there are sufficient doubts about them for us to conclude that there is at least a case to be answered.

Legal Doubts

The case to outlaw nuclear weapons begins with the biological and chemical weapons conventions which have outlawed these two classes of weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons, it is contended, are worse in the severity, scope and duration of their destructive effects. In a popular analogy, the situation is likened to making drugs illegal but exempting heroin from the ban.

The United Nations General Assembly is the closest approximation that we have to the authentic conscience of humanity. For over three decades, a majority in the Assembly has pronounced the use of nuclear weapons to be a crime against humanity. The 1995 debate and vote again affirmed that belief.

Nuclear deterrence cannot evade the requirements of just war doctrines. Thus deterrence, if it were to be legal, must satisfy the principle of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants: civilians are immune to direct attacks. Yet such discriminatory deterrence would not work. The "balance of terror" rests fundamentally on threatening large-scale attacks on civilians. That is, the principle of discrimination cannot be satisfied by the strategy of nuclear deterrence.

Second, deterrence must follow the rule of proportionality with respect to provocations and objectives. The first requirement forbids the targeting of populations as nuclear hostages. The second places limits on the extent to which installations can be targeted, for even unintended damage may not justly exceed the evil to be avoided or the good desired to be achieved. Targeting of "military related" enemy industry and utilities would inflict death and misery on millions of enemy citizens as "collateral" damage, and is therefore illegal on the just war doctrine.

The use of nuclear weapons would also violate the rights of neutral states through the widespread dispersal of radioactive fallout. The widely-held belief that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is illegal has led to the present hearing at the World Court for an advisory opinion on the subject (Mendlovitz and Weiss, 1996). Most of the interest in the World Court's opinion has centred on the legality of nuclear weapons because of the unstoppable, unpredictable and indiscriminate health and environmental effects. Moreover, the toxic radioactive products of nuclear explosions affect the health of other species, and they would continue to do so well into dreamtime.

The court may decide that it should not rule on the matter. In that case the doubts will persist. If the court does take up the case substantively, it could rule nuclear weapons to be legal in all circumstances. While such an outcome would clear the weapons completely, it seems the least likely. A conditional clearance of the legality of nuclear weapons, that they might be permissible under some circumstances, would do very little to still the clamour to outlaw them.

Moral Doubts

There are several strands in the moral case against nuclear weapons. First, nuclear deterrence openly contemplates--indeed must be directly based on--the deliberate killing of people in the millions. In their famous pastoral letter of 3 May l983, the Catholic Bishops of America expressed firm opposition to strategies of deliberate attack on large populations, and strategies that would result in catastrophic loss of life as an "unintended consequence" of weapons aimed at military targets. In the "butchery of untold magnitude" caused by a nuclear war, it would not be very comforting to know that one had died an innocent victim of "collateral damage." The Catholic Bishops' "strictly conditional moral acceptance of deterrence" was consistent with Pope John Paul II's statement to the United Nations in 1982: "In current conditions, "deterrence" based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable" (Russett, 1984: 41). There is also something distasteful about the way in which strategists talk of a nuclear war as a "nuclear exchange," as though it was a commonplace transaction in the village market.

Second, most of the people killed would be innocent non-combatants. Provocations grave enough to warrant nuclear strikes are likely to come from dictatorships, not democracies. By definition, ordinary citizens lack much say in the affairs of dictatorships. Indeed, the citizens of such regimes are persecuted victims of their own governments. That being so, is it not immoral to visit nuclear punishment upon innocent people for the sins of their leaders? And it is most certainly immoral to destroy peoples in neighbouring countries through radiation, and arrogant of the human race to destroy other species because we could not manage our own affairs.

Third, the only goal of nuclear retaliation when deterrence has failed would be revenge. Many religions and moral systems have difficulty reconciling vengeful killings with proper conduct. The disproportionate and indiscriminate scale of nuclear retaliatory vengeance can surely not be reconciled with any self-respecting moral doctrine.

Nuclear deterrence also poses a number of other moral challenges to our conscience. Deterrence rests on the threat to wage nuclear war. If a particular act is evil, then the threat to do it must also be immoral. If nuclear war is evil, then threatening and preparing for such war is also morally wrong. "Threaten No Evil" as a moral stricture is written into the United Nations Charter: "All members shall refrain from the threat or use of force" (Article 2.4; emphasis added). The United Nations Charter expresses the global consensus about certain ethical values and norms of behaviour in international relations.

How can nuclear deterrence be reconciled with the immorality of fighting a nuclear war? Deterrence to be credible must convince the opponent that nuclear weapons will be used when put to the test. The threat to use nuclear weapons therefore needs to be backed up by contingency planning and preparations. A country cannot underwrite nuclear deterrence with an open policy of not using them. Nuclear weapons lose all deterrent power if it is known in advance that they will not be used, although paradoxically they still retain ultimate usability. A policy of "possession without use" can thus easily be parodied or ridiculed as a policy of "warmongering but no war."

Deterrence based on hitting population centres ignores the moral distinction between ends and means. The position seems analogous to terrorists taking innocent bystanders hostage as a means

of protecting themselves against capture. We would rightly consider it immoral for the government to deter murder by threatening to kill any murderer's children. If this is not acceptable as proper public policy, why should nuclear deterrence be any more acceptable as proper foreign policy? Deterrence is nuclear terrorism by another name.

A related means-ends dilemma concerns one's own society and people. Those entrusted with the command of nuclear weapons--not just the military leadership but also the top echelon of the civilian command--must make compromises with their conscience in order to live in comfort despite holding the world to ransom. Nor are moral qualms stilled with the knowledge that the ruling elites of the nuclear powers build deep shelters and airborne command posts for themselves while offering their citizens as hostages. All this in the name of a policy which is supposed to guard citizens against enemy attack? A policy enunciated and devised by officials bearing the primary responsibility for protecting their citizens. What sort of morality can allow the privileged elite to be sheltered while leaving their wards unprotected?

At the same time, the very destructiveness of nuclear weapons means that a garrison state will be created in order to avoid the risk of such weapons falling into criminal hands. This being so, what are the values for the defence of which Western society is being asked to make fundamental moral compromises?

Technological and military reality imposes yet another constraint on nuclear morality. Because the decision to retaliate must be instantaneous if deterrence has failed, there is no time for ordinary citizens or responsible officials to engage in thoughtful moral reflection before making the transition from nuclear deterrence to nuclear war. In other words, deterrence places a premium upon immorally casual decisions in its time of greatest need, and therefore amounts to moral abdication. Given the short lead-times before retaliatory weapons must be unleashed under automated launch-on-warning strategies, one may well ask: what price such computer-based morality?

The final moral difficulty involves the relationship between nuclear weapons and world poverty. It has been argued that policies of nuclear deterrence have entailed such heavy expenditure on arms that they amount to stealing from the poor.

Benefits of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World

There has occurred a relative shift in the 1990s in the balance between nuclear weapons acquisition and non-proliferation. In the old security agenda, many states were interested in seeking security through nuclear weapons. Now, most seek security from nuclear weapons. A record number of countries--178--had become party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by the time that it was renewed indefinitely in May 1995. The NPT has the widest membership of any arms control agreement in human history. It is also the centrepiece of the global non-proliferation regime which codified the international political norm of non-nuclear-weapons status. Given the possibility of wars, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can justifiably be posited as one of the greatest security problems facing the post-Cold War world. But today we

are talking largely about horizontal proliferation. We fear such proliferation because of its destabilising consequences:

It feeds the expansionist ambitions of regional hegemons;
It heightens regional tensions and multiplies regional crises;
It raises the human and material cost of regional wars;
It increases the ability of regional actors to threaten to spill conflict outside the region;
It constricts the ability of outsiders to impose peace and order on regional conflicts;
It multiplies the risk of accidental or inadvertent war;
It undermines other regional and international arms control-disarmament regimes.

Nuclear-Weapons-States

The five NWS must assess the security gains of their nuclear weapons against the costs, risks and alternatives. In particular, they must weigh the costs of the political chain reaction of nuclear-weapons status against the likelihood of the usability of nuclear weapons. Because the United States insists on retaining nuclear weapons, Russia cannot reduce its stockpile to zero. So long as Russia and the United States will keep nuclear weapons, China cannot be asked or expected to eliminate its stockpile. Because China is the principal long-term security threat to India (but also because the United States has impinged adversely on Indian security interests in the past), India cannot be expected, despite repeated requests and commands, to surrender the option of acquiring nuclear weapons. Without Indian renunciation, Pakistan will not buckle to outside pressure or reason. The circuit-breaker in this countervailing nuclear-weapons capability spiral is the United States. Exhortation and coercion need to be supplemented by the force of example.

In a speech to the National Defense Academy on 27 October 1995, CIA Director John M. Deutch noted that there are at least twenty countries trying to develop weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile delivery systems. "We want to understand what makes their intentions and motivations to be proliferators," he said (USIS, 1995: 8). The curt response is that he could begin by looking at the intentions and motivations of the United States in acquiring and wishing to keep nuclear weapons. By eliminating its stockpile of nuclear weapons, the United States would prove that national security and foreign policy independence can be preserved without nuclear weapons capability. Other NWS could then follow, and potential proliferators would be most impressed by such a levelling down of the security field. Conversely, the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries would erode the US advantage as the world's dominant power, and multiply the number of potential trouble spots where the United States might be called upon to intervene (Panofsky and Bunn, 1994: 3). Or, in simple terms, where is the moral high ground when the United States with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads--or even the UN Security Council with the NWS as the five permanent members--demands of North Korea that it must not produce a single nuclear bomb?

For reasons that were discussed above, "The reality is that the United States would find it virtually impossible to resort to the use of nuclear weapons in almost any contingency short of a direct attack with weapons of mass destruction against its territory or against its armed forces" (Blechman and Fisher, 1994-95: 82). That sole contingency would be ruled out, or at least its

probability reduced almost to zero, with the achievement of a nuclear-free world. The likelihood of "nuclear breakout" can be decreased, even if not eliminated, by abolishing not just nuclear weapons, but also the whole infrastructure underpinning the manufacture and possession of nuclear weapons, including research, deployment, delivery, command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) systems, and nuclear doctrines. Then invest the new nuclear-free regime with optimum transparency and verification, including "any time any place" right of inspection, by an international authority. We could then have in place interlocking systems of global and regional control and verification machinery. (Regional efforts can be more sensitive to local nuances of security requirements and arms control potential, address the issues at their roots and put in place the building-blocks for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to global security.) Moreover, all the regimes must be continually widened with the goal of universal adherence, and they must be invested with the requisite political will, fiscal means and intelligence support. Developing countries need to be drawn into their management bodies; otherwise the normative consensus on non-proliferation will decline.

Threshold Nuclear-Weapon States

A threshold NWS is one that does not claim possession of nuclear weapons, has not forsworn the nuclear-weapons option, produces significant amounts of its own nuclear material or equipment, and refuses to accept international control over them. The three most commonly cited threshold NWS are Israel, Pakistan and India. For purposes of illustration, the following analysis looks at India and Pakistan. The regional dynamics of the Middle East region are not all that dissimilar.

Despite sustained pressure over several years, Washington has failed to persuade India and Pakistan to sign the NPT, open their nuclear programs to inspection or take part in regional talks on arms control. Even the US has effectively moved away from getting them to sign the NPT, or to cap a non-weaponised deterrence relationship between them (Perkovich, 1993). The goal of rolling back and eventually eliminating their nuclear-weapons capability is being held in check until the emergence of a more favourable political climate at a later date. To the extent that the security interests of both countries can be met without the acquisition of nuclear weapons, their actual deployment is unnecessary.

The most salient security threats to South Asian countries are rooted in internal social and economic problems, rather than external military enemies. The prospect of nuclear proliferation is worrying to outside well-wishers because it could launch India and Pakistan into an unstable nuclear arms race, drain scarce and valuable resources from economic development, and further entrench the Cold War mentality among the two countries' elites.

Advocates of the nuclear option argue that nuclear weapons would enhance India's international status, ensure its strategic autonomy, erode great-power hegemony, reinforce India's leading role in the Third World and the nonaligned movement, expand its diplomatic choices in global affairs and stabilise relations with China and Pakistan. However, opponents fear that nuclearisation would trigger a fresh round of conventional arms escalation in the region and unleash diplomatic and military forces with unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences. India would simply be buying into insecurity at higher levels of military sophistication and expenditure vis-à-vis both China and Pakistan. Its political credibility would be damaged in the nonaligned world and its

search for Western-linked economic and technological growth would suffer reverses. There would be opportunity costs for development projects. Its relations with other South Asian countries would also be seriously aggravated. The regional security environment would deteriorate greatly, accompanied by a rise in levels of fear and distrust. The nuclear option could also prove to be a major cost-multiplier if India found itself competing with the nuclear powers in building up significant nuclear arsenals, modern delivery systems and survivable basing, command and control systems. Moreover, the arsenal would have to be underpinned by an intellectual apparatus of deterrence that has so far been notably missing in India.

Non-Nuclear-Weapon States

Those who do not have nuclear weapons would gain from the creation of a level security field and from the attenuation of worries about horizontal proliferation. The elimination of all nuclear weapons would end fears of vertical proliferation among the NWS. As with horizontal proliferation, the main reasons for the open or clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons would have been removed--national security vis-à-vis regional rivals, status and emulation. The example of the Soviet Union shows another benefit of a nuclear-free world. The implosion of the Soviet Union led to nuclear proliferation through the fragmentation of an existing NWS. All dangers of this would also be removed.

So all nuclear anxieties would be assuaged. Nuclear-weapon-free policies can assist with the establishment of conditions that are more conducive to peaceful change than would be with a world of nuclear weapons. Governments are more reluctant to withdraw support from a leadership that has lost domestic support totally but still controls nuclear weapons (Chauvistre, 1995: 301).

We Need to Consolidate the Gains

Arms control and disarmament efforts cannot be separated from political problems. Even while arms control agreements would improve political relations, the achievement of such agreements is also hostage to a moderation in tense relations. Peaceful relations make it possible to control the arms race, rather than the other way round. Soviet-American dialogue and agreements in the 1960s and 1970s built up a structure of cooperation which embodied the world's hopes for an avoidance of nuclear war. As the process of detente ground to a halt by the end of the 1970s and suffered reverses in the 1980s, the fruits of earlier cooperation began to decay and the two superpowers abandoned their postures as responsible managers of the world order. As Moscow and Washington reconstructed a structure of confrontation, they lost virtually all claim to be regarded as the nuclear trustees for mankind.

That has changed since the late 1980s. Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan began slowly but steadily to rebuild cooperation in nuclear arms control and disarmament agreements, leading to the dramatic INF and START deals. The indefinite extension of the NPT in May 1995

reflected faith in the reversal of the nuclear arms race since the end of the Cold War. But this was combined with a declaration on principles and objectives through which the nuclear powers undertook to exercise the "utmost restraint" in nuclear testing pending the entry into force of a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT). All parties, including the nuclear powers, committed themselves (a) to the conclusion of a CTBT no later than 1996; (b) to the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations on a convention banning production of fissile material for nuclear weapons; and (c) to the determined pursuit of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons. All this was an acknowledgment of the genuineness of widespread concerns that the nuclear powers have not fully fulfilled their side of the NPT bargain.

The NPT is Discriminatory

The NWS that established the NPT regime are trapped in the fundamental paradox that while they justify their own nuclear weapons in national security terms, they seek to deny such weapons to anyone else for reasons of global security. Nuclear weapons are apparently okay in the hands of civilised Europeans but not in the hands of blacks, browns and children under sixteen. With the refusal of the potential proliferators to accede to the NPT, its most important political consequence was to legitimise the possession of nuclear weapons for those who had it before 1 January 1967. The continued existence of NWS within the NPT regime, by institutionalising an international nuclear "apartheid,"[3] undermines the foundations of the non-proliferation normative order. It also gives rise to demands for a legally binding international instrument prohibiting the threat or use of nuclear weapons against non-NWS.

The NPT was a double bargain. In return for intrusive end-use control over imported nuclear and nuclear-related technology and material, non-NWS were granted access to nuclear technology, components and material on a "most-favoured-nation" basis. The second bargain was in Article 6 of the NPT contract, whereby most states renounced the nuclear option in return for nuclear disarmament by the NWS. The problem was that there was a marked imbalance of obligations between the two parts of the bargain. The non-nuclear-weapon status was immediate, legally binding and internationally verifiable and enforceable. But there were no intrusive safeguards for the NWS in their roles as suppliers of critical technology and components. More importantly, their commitment to disarm was not time-tabled, nor precise, nor binding. (The duality of obligations was carried over into the IAEA as both controller and promoter of nuclear energy.)

Civil society rests fundamentally on the acceptance of the legitimacy of the social and political orders by the overwhelming majority of the population. The coercive apparatus of the state can then deal adequately with the minority of transgressors of the law. Similarly, most states honour treaty obligations because of their acceptance of the legitimacy of the international order, and not because they fear the consequences of being caught cheating. The first bargain of the NPT has more or less exhausted its potential. The legitimacy of the NPT regime as a whole will be progressively eroded if the second bargain continues to be ignored. Defections from the NPT will then occur.

Proliferation is not an isolated problem; nor is it simply opportunist behaviour; nor is it pursued only by so-called rogue states whose leaderships have evil motives. We need to be careful of the view that weapons are legitimate in the hands of some, but are proliferation in the hands of others. India remains the most prominent NPT rejectionist. It is a crucial rejectionist because it is the only country to have exploded a nuclear device outside the exclusive club of the five established NWS, and also because its rejection in turn fuels the historic rivalry in South Asia.

The proliferation process in South Asia is driven by a combination of historical antagonism and genuine security fears. The acquisition of a deterrent weapons posture is regarded by policy-makers as a rational response to perceived threat. There is a broad national consensus supporting India's need for a missile-based nuclear deterrent. There are strong strategic, political and technical incentives to maintaining a nuclear option. With respect to Pakistan, India's indigenously-developed missiles will transform the traditional battlefield by their reach and firepower. More importantly, India perceives the nuclear option as a cost-effective "political force multiplier" against China's nuclear-weapons status and conventional superiority. The destabilising effects of India's nuclear option on relations with Pakistan are regarded by New Delhi as a regrettable but acceptable "collateral damage."

US officials are irritated at the Indian "rhetoric" of NPT discrimination. Indians are irritated at the US failure to grasp the self-evident reality of NPT discrimination. Especially with the end of the Cold War, strategic threats to the US are uncertain. Yet Washington, with the world's most powerful military arsenal at its disposal, insists on the right to deal with its diffuse and uncertain threats with nuclear weapons. But it insists that India and Pakistan must forgo the option, despite both facing clearly identifiable threats to their security (India to Pakistan, China and Pakistan to India).

If nuclear deterrence does work, then its benefits should be spread universally and immediately to all countries without fear or favour. If deterrence does not work, or cannot be guaranteed to work for every contingency in perpetuity, then the possession of nuclear weapons should be prohibited for all countries, be they ever so mighty or ever so humble.

The Security Calculus of Nuclear-Weapons-States

We are at an interesting cross-roads in the international strategic situation. The threat of nuclear war between Moscow and Washington has receded. They are meant to be reducing their strategic arsenals to around 12,000 warheads by the year 2003, a goal that seems less likely in 1996 than it did a couple of years ago. In May 1995 the international community agreed to the indefinite extension of the NPT, despite many reservations, because of the demonstrable progress made in nuclear disarmament negotiations. The resumption of nuclear testing by France, and continuation of the Chinese testing program, brought charges of betrayal from many who had agreed to the NPT's indefinite extension in good faith. Preparations by India for a possible second "peaceful nuclear explosion" would not have been possible if China and France had joined and maintained the moratorium on testing.

The gravest nuclear danger now is not war between Russia and the United States, but the spread of nuclear weapons technology and materials to others beyond the five NWS. But the danger of horizontal proliferation cannot be contained indefinitely by maintaining the status quo of five NWS. For the threshold NWS to move towards non-nuclear-weapons status, and for the latter group to remain so, the existing NWS must take concrete steps towards a time-tabled elimination of their nuclear stockpiles.

In other words, we have already achieved about the maximum possible in limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. But this is a dynamic equilibrium, not a static equation. Without concrete disarmament on the part of the NWS, the world will slip back into real dangers of horizontal proliferation. So the choice is between progress and reversal, not between progress and the status quo. "Minimal deterrence" will not do. The possession of nuclear weapons by Israel and the United States did not deter Iraq from, but instead spurred it into, trying to acquire its own bomb by clandestine means. The two policy options, therefore, are a progression down to zero for the existing NWS, or the spread of nuclear weapons to many other states.

The idea of India and Pakistan becoming full-fledged NWS has become entrenched in the security discourse of both countries. The threshold nuclear-weapon status has been effectively stabilised for a considerable time in the Indian subcontinent. The stance has been politically sustainable because it appeases the nuclear hawks without arousing the ire of the nuclear pacifists. It has been militarily sustainable because it is viable as a policy of minimum deterrence based on calculated ambiguity--which is a neat reversal of the standard deterrence theory which rests on the credible certainty of nuclear retaliation.

On 15 December 1995, the New York Times reported, on the basis of Western intelligence information, that India could be preparing to conduct another nuclear test to follow its "peaceful nuclear explosion" of 1974. Pakistan promised that where India led on the nuclear path, it would assuredly follow. New Delhi began by dismissing the report as high speculation, and then subsequently rejected the charge. Yet doubts persist as to how close India came to detonating a second nuclear device.

What might have changed to disturb the stable equilibrium underpinning India's threshold status? Internally, the ruling Congress Party was under serious challenge from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which openly declares its intention to "exercise" the nuclear option. (The Congress Party's position has always been to "retain" the nuclear option.) The BJP has thrown up populist-nationalist challenges to the Congress Party. It was the BJP state government that first revoked, and then renegotiated, the Enron deal in Bombay. The eleventh general election was scheduled to be held in the first half of 1996. A second nuclear test, or even hints of preparations for a second nuclear test, could have been a political ploy to finesse the BJP's chauvinist credentials.

But there is also an external point of reference. India has grown increasingly tired of the West's double standards on nuclear weapons. The US reaction to the possibility that India might test once more is much sharper than to the six actual French tests in 1995-96. A second nuclear explosion, without necessarily abandoning the threshold status, would convey India's sense of frustration and grievance with the NWS.

In the event, the BJP emerged as the single largest party after the general election of May 1996, but without a parliamentary majority. Although given two weeks to form a government with a proven majority in the Lok Sabha (the lower House of the People), the BJP failed in this task. Instead, India now has a highly unstable coalition government. The focus of rejecting international pressures on the nuclear issue has shifted from the NPT to the CTBT. Around mid-1995, it began to dawn on Indians that a CTBT would render the nuclear option practically meaningless. The fact of minority status for all significant political groupings, and the high probability of early elections when the inherently unstable coalition government disintegrates, makes it politically impossible for any party in India to accede to the CTBT without linkage to a time-tabled, legally binding commitment to nuclear disarmament by the five NWS.

The policy question for the United States is not, therefore, how to get India to sign the NPT. Rather, it is to try to understand the logic and politics of proliferation pressures, and then to encourage the forces resisting the calls for proliferation while dampening the opposite tendencies. In this equation, Washington simply stirs up anger and resentment by lecturing India while insisting on its own right to retain nuclear weapons indefinitely. The BJP spokesmen openly dismiss a world of "nuclear apartheid." However ill-applied the pejorative label might be in logic, it is politically unanswerable and therefore very effective. If on the other hand the five NWS were to announce that they had worked out a fixed time-table for the dismantling of their own nuclear stockpiles, then the balance of political pressures in India would swing decisively away from proliferation.

There is the Need to Seize the Moment Now

The reason to move now towards a nuclear-free world is that the lead-time in reaching that distant goal will be long. The threats of proliferation will multiply from this point on. The NPT has just about exhausted its maximum potential.

At the start of the year, commentators could have been forgiven the hyperbole in claiming that 1995 could well be the most important year in the history of arms control. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was due to come into force. Efforts were promised towards strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and towards negotiating a CTBT plus a fissile material cut-off agreement. This was also the first year of implementation of the framework agreement to denuclearise North Korea. There had been progressive harmonisation in the membership of the different multilateral regimes for the control of proliferation of materials, equipment and technology for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and missile delivery systems. Most importantly, the NPT was up for review and indefinite extension. That having been accomplished, the momentum on arms control and disarmament must not be allowed to flag. Instead, it must be taken advantage of in pressing for still further progress on nuclear disarmament.

This is also the period in history characterised by the dominant influence of the major Western powers. Unlikely to remain a permanent feature of international relations, this gives them the opportunity to lead by example as well as through exhortation, persuasion and pressure, while

incurring no security risks of any magnitude. The United States is unique in possessing all the bases of power: abundant natural resources, a huge and dynamic market economy and high technology. It has also been well placed in the 1990s as never before to reap the benefits of its soft power resources: the wide appeal of its society and way of life, and the supremacy of its liberal internationalist ideology in such major institutions as the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Nye, 1990). Nuclear weapons are the great strategic equalisers. Ridding the world of nuclear weapons will lock in the superiority of the Western powers, yet not cut into any of the identifiable security interests of Russia, China or any other NWS. This exceptional strategic correlation of circumstances will not last forever.

The collapse of the Soviet threat and the resulting dominance of Western ideals and institutions has one further consequence that is both interesting and important (Simpson, 1995: 250-51). Much of the disarmament brigade could be dismissed during the Cold War as being under the direction or influence of the Soviet bloc. This attitude extended even to the rhetoric emanating from the nonaligned movement. Now the relevant political divide on arms control and disarmament is not East-West, nor even North-South, but NWS and non-NWS. In the European Union, for example, Britain and France will find themselves ranged against all the other members, as has proven to be the case with the resumption of French nuclear testing in 1995. The same divide will be felt at G7 summits and in the wider industrialised world. And the non-nuclear industrialised world have three great advantages over nonaligned countries in pressing for nuclear disarmament. First, after decades of faithful alliance credentials, their political loyalty is not suspect. Second, their capacity to produce nuclear weapons quickly is also beyond question. If they do not need nuclear weapons, therefore, they can argue that much more persuasively that neither do the existing NWS. Third, their human and material capabilities gives them the technical expertise to engage in a critical evaluation of the NWS' technical arguments for maintaining the status quo, and for providing detailed, practical and scientifically credible maps to getting to a nuclear-weapon-free world. The Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, set up by the Keating Government of Australia in 1995, is an excellent example of this.[4] The net effect will be to diminish the ability of the NWS to handle pressures for nuclear disarmament compared to the situation during the Cold War.

A decision taken now, but implemented over some time according to a fixed schedule of dates, would also have many positive "externalities." It would further delegitimise the role and use of military power, even non-nuclear military power, in international relations. It would strengthen the acceptance of international law as the basis for governing relations between states. And it would enhance the authority of the major powers as the custodians and managers of world order through the tangible demonstration of their commitment to Article 6 of the NPT.

Conclusion

We should seek security from, not in, nuclear weapons. The nuclear security dilemma is this. The NWS will not give up their nuclear capability without first being convinced that their strategic dominance will not be challenged. But the threshold NWS will not give up their nuclear option without seeing proof of a time-tabled move towards a nuclear-free world. The road

towards the nuclear-free destination includes still deeper reductions in the nuclear arsenals of the five NWS. International agreement will be much easier to achieve on a zero than on a low-limit nuclear weapons regime. An agreement which freezes the right of the existing NWS to retain their nuclear-weapons capability indefinitely is simply not politically sustainable. Verification of zero nuclear weapons will also be easier than of low limits on their numbers.

The only guarantee against the threat of nuclear war is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. They are the common enemy of mankind. Like chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons too cannot be disinvented. (Chemical weapons are probably easier to reinvent, given how commonly used their ingredients are around the house.) But like them, nuclear weapons too can be outlawed under an international regime that ensures strict compliance through effective and credible inspection, verification and control regimes. In most contexts, a step-by-step approach is the best policy. But such caution can be fatal if the need is to cross a chasm. In the case of nuclear weapons, the chasm that needs to be leaped across is the mental conditioning of national and world security resting on weapons of maximum insecurity.

Notes

1. I date the ending of the Cold War in the 1989-91 period collectively, taking in the breaking down of the Berlin Wall (1989), the reunification of Germany (1990), the Gulf War (1990-91) and the implosion of the Soviet Union (1991).

2. Stability-enhancing features of nuclear winter scenarios in general are given particular cogency in the case of Indo-Pakistan hostility by features distinctive to their relationship. For example, propinquity and the pattern of population distribution would leave either India or Pakistan vulnerable to fallout from its own weapons used against the other, thereby producing a measure of self-deterrence (Naim, 1987: 260-69).

3. The use of the word 'apartheid' by critics of the NPT is especially unfortunate. The emotive word entails entirely negative connotations. But in fact apartheid referred to a system where a minority imposed its order on a majority by coercion. The NPT has been signed by a majority of the world's countries exercising their free choice.

4. The 1996 general election produced a change of federal government from Labor, led by Paul Keating, to a Liberal-National coalition, led by John Howard. The new government has promised to let the Canberra Commission complete its work. But there is a distinct diminution of enthusiasm in the philosophy underlying the Commission.

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