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STABILISING POWER BALANCES IN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM THROUGH ARMS CONTROL: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Liberal reformers have often attacked the theory that power can be balanced to preserve world peace, order and security. Instead, they have advocated the biblical prescription that states should beat their swords into plowshares. The destructiveness of modern weapons has inspired many scholars and analysts once again to take this tenet of liberal theory seriously but this approach is not solely a liberal preserve. Many realists also see arms limitation as a way of stabilising the balance of power. In fact, most policy makers who have negotiated such agreements have been realists who perceived these treaties as prudent tools to promote the country's security. This paper examines the relevance of arms control in attaining balance of power and its inherent weakness in the international political system.

Introduction

The term 'arms control' and 'disarmament' are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Arms control refers to agreements designed to regulate arms levels either by limiting their

growth or by restricting how they may be used. This is a far more common and less ambitious endeavour than disarmament, which aims to reduce or eliminate weapons (Kegley, 2007:501). Controlling war by reducing weapons inventions is hardly a novel idea. Yet until recently, few states in the international system have negotiated disarmament agreements. To be sure, some countries in the past did reduce their armaments. For instance, the Chinese states in 600 BC, formed a disarmament League that produced a peaceful century for the League members. Canada and the United States disarmed the Great Lakes Region through the 1817 Rush Bagot Agreement. Nonetheless, these kinds of achievements have been relatively rare in history.

Most disarmament programmes have been involuntary, the products of reductions imposed by the victors in the immediate aftermath of a war, as when the Allied Powers attempted to disarm a defeated Germany after Ward War I (Kegley, 2007:512). For the purpose of this discourse, the paper is structured into three parts. The first part examines the differences between arms control and disarmament by differentiating arms control through bilateral agreements and arms control through multilateral agreement. The second part takes a look at the problematic future of arms control and disarmament as tools of stabilising balance of power for global peace. The third part is the conclusion.

Bilateral Arms Control and Disarmament

The Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States never degenerated into a trial of military strength. One of the reasons was the series of more than twenty-five (25) arms control agreements Moscow and Washington negotiated in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis. Beginning with the 1963 Hotline Agreement, which established a direct radio and telegraph communications system between the two governments, Soviet and American leaders reached a series of modest agreements aimed at stabilising the power (military) balance and reducing the risk of war. One of these bilateral treaties lowered tension and helped build a climate of trust that

encouraged efforts to negotiate further agreement.

Perhaps the most important agreements between these powers were the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) of 1972 and 1979, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) of 1991, 1993 and 1997 and the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) of 2002. The first two agreements stabilized the nuclear arms race and reduced the weapons in each side's inventory. When the Cold War ended in 1991, the United States had more than 9,500 nuclear warheads and Russia had about 8,000.

This agreement pledged to cut their combined arsenal to about 6,500. Even more dramatically, the agreement also limited the kinds of weapons each country could possess. Under its terms, Russia and the United States gave up all the Multiple Independent Targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRVS) on their land based intercontinental ballistic missiles and reduced submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) warheads to not more than 1750 (Diehl, 2000:105).

After decades of building the number warheads in their arsenals, the United States and Russia, through a series of disarmament agreement, pledged to cut the number of nuclear warheads in their stockpiles. This has inspired most of the other nuclear powers not to increase the number of warheads they have deployed. Since 1986, the size of the two great power's nuclear arsenals has declined by nearly 90% and it declined further by 2012, as a result of the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT). However, fears that disarmament will not continue arose and were provoked by two concerns. One issue was the U.S. commitment in 2005 to store rather than destroy its remaining cold War warheads and to develop its star war Missiles defence plans. The other war Russia's proud announcement in 2005 that she has deployed its new Bolava Ballistic Missile, a weapon that not a single other nuclear power has. This to the minds of the Russians will ring bell for the Americans and forced Washington to reassess its estimates of Russia great power status (Diehl, 2000:107).

The next major step occurred in May 2002 when President George Bush and Vladimir Putin signed the SORT. This brief

document pledged the two countries to cut their combined numbers of strategic nuclear warheads by two third within ten years. Still both parties were left with enough fire power to retain the deterrent threat of mutual assured destruction. In addition, the treaty contained no requirements to destroy warheads taken out of service and permitted either side to withdraw from the agreement with three months notice by acting "a supreme national interest". Hence, while this treaty signaled a step toward nuclear disarmament, it was regarded as mostly symbolic in importance (Mendelsohn, 2002:165). That said, the success recently achieved by Russia and the United States inspired hopes that negotiation can be expanded to include other states.

Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament

History provides many examples of multilateral arms control and disarmament efforts. As early as the 11th century, the second Lateran Council prohibited the use of cross bows in fighting. In 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration prohibited the use of explosive bullets. In 1899 and 1907, International Peace conference at The Hague restricted the use of some weapons and prohibited others. The leaders of United States, Britain, Japan, France, and Italy who signed treaties at the Washington Naval Conference (1921 1922) agreed to adjust the relative tonnage of their fleets. Nearly 30 Major multilateral agreements have been signed since the Second World War (Vasquez, 2003: 95).

These include:

(i) The Antarctic Treaty of 1959, with forty-five countries as signatories. The treaty was aimed at preventing the military use of the Antarctic including the testing of nuclear weapons;

(ii) The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 involving 135 countries as signatories to prohibits nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater;

(iii) The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 with 130 countries as member, aimed at outlawing the use of outer space for testing or stationing any weapons as well as for military maneuvers;

(iv) The Treaty of Thatelolco of 1967 with 33 countries as parties, aimed at creating the Latin America nuclear free zone by prohibiting the testing and possession of nuclear facilities for military purposes;

(v) Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty of 1968 with 189 parties. The treaty prevents the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons production technologies to nonnuclear weapon states.

(vi) Seabed Treaty of 1971, having 116 countries to prohibits the deployment of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons on the seabed beyond a 12 nautical miles coastal limit;

(vii) Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention of 1972 with 170 countries as parties, prohibiting the production and storage of biological toxins and calls for the destruction of biological weapons stockpiles;

(viii) Protection of Nuclear Material Convention of 1980 with 116 countries as signatories which obligates protection of peaceful nuclear materials during transport on ship or aircrafts;

(ix) Inhumane Weapon Convention of 1981 with 105 countries as parties, aimed at prohibiting the use of such weapons as fragmentation bonds, incendiary weapons, bobby traps and mines to which civilians could be exposed;

(x) Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 with 184 countries as signatories. The treaty requires all stockpiles of chemical weapons to be destroyed;

(xi) Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty of 1996 with 177 countries as parties. It bans all testing of nuclear weapons; and

(xii) Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference of 2005 with 123 countries as signatories. This conference produced a final communiqué and voices approval to continue support for the NPT treaty, among others.

Of these, the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)

which prohibited the transfer of nuclear weapons and production technologies to non nuclear weapon states stands out. This 2,400 words treaty is historically the most symbolic multilateral arms control agreement with 189 signatories. In 2005, painstaking negotiations sought to review and preserve the NPT, which promotes the non proliferations that had stopped the spread of nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMD), until 1998 when India and Pakistan broke the NPT's barriers to become nuclear weapon states. This set the precedent for North Korea and Iran which had remained outside the NPT to join Israel and others who some believe have already secretly produced nuclear weapons (Vasquez, 2003:110).

The final consensus documents to the 2005 NPT renewal conference are considered politically binding thus giving a boost to nonproliferation. But the heart of the contract seems to grow weaker year by year. Defaulters are found on the inside, nuclear bomb on the outside. Some states that signed the original agreement are wondering whether the deal they were handed by the nuclear club on 1968 was a raw one. They observed the failure of the original nuclear powers to honour their pledge to disarm, the US talk of building newer nuclear weapons and using them against non-nuclear states and the US rejection of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the original NPT goals to prevent nuclear catastrophe (Allison, 2004:116). Thousands of nuclear devices remain in existence today and more and more countries are acquiring the means to produce them. There are even evidences that Al-Qaeda has every intention to produce them. The 46 countries that launched the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation Negotiations in 2005 to severe the link between nuclear energy and nuclear proliferations was a step towards arms control. But further nuclear non-proliferations remain much in doubt.

Similar problems plagued other multilateral agreements. The 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), for example, required all stockpiles of chemical weapons to be destroyed within ten years. However, the agreement lost some of its authority in 2001 when the Bush administration refused to accept the enforcement measures. This erosion of support for arms control caused the UN Secretary

General, Kofi Anan to warn that "Much of the established multilateral disarmament machinery has started to rust" (Kegley, 2007:202).

The Problematic Future of Arm Control and Disarmament

The obstacles to arms control and disarmament are formidable, critics complain that these agreements frequently regulates obsolete armaments or ones that the parties to the agreement have little incentive for developing in the first place. Even when agreements are reached on modern, sophisticated weapons, the parties often set ceilings higher than the number of weapons currently deployed so that they do not have to slash their inventories.

A second pitfall is the propensity of limit on one type of weapon system to prompt development in another system. Like a balloon that is squeezed at one end but expands at the other, constraints on certain parts of a country's arsenal can lead to enhancement elsewhere. An example can be seen in the 1972 SALT agreement which limits the number of inter-continental ballistic missiles possessed by the United States and Soviet Union. Although the number of missiles was restricted, no limits were placed on the number of nuclear warheads that could be placed on each missile.

Consequently, both sides developed Multiple Independently targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRVS). In short, the quantitative freeze on launchers led to qualitative improvements in their warhead delivery systems. Also, reducing faith in future meaningful arms control is the slow, weak and ineffective ability of the global community to ban some of the most dangerous and counterproductive weapons. Consider the case of Anti Personnel landmines (APLS) which cannot discriminate between soldiers and civilians. More than 300 million landmines are believed to be scattered on the territories of more than 70 countries, with another 100 million in stockpiles. It is estimated that about one mine exists for every 50 people in the world and that each year, they kill or maim more than 26,000 people almost all of them civilian (Kegley, 2007:254). In 1994, not a single state endorsed a prohibition on these

deadly weapons. It took a peace activist, Jody Williams to organize the International Campaign to ban land mines, which opened for signature on December 1997 (The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and their Destruction). For her efforts, William received the Nobel Peace Prize. But the United States, Russia and other great powers stubbornly resisted the APL Convention until a coalition of NGO peace group mounted sufficient pressures for them to produce their epic treaty (still without U.S. acceptance). The challenge of enforcing the ban, now signed by 152 states and the task of removing APLS remain staggering (Moller, 1992:106).

A final problem facing those advocating arm control and disarmament is continuous innovation. By the time limits are negotiated on one type of weapons, a new generation of weapons has emerged. Modern technology is creating an ever-widening range of novel weapons increasingly smaller, deadlier and easier to conceal. But why do states often make decisions to arms that apparently imprison them in the grip of perpetual insecurity? On the surface, the incentives for meaningful arms control seem numerous. Significant arms control would save money, reduce environmental hazards, and diminish the potential destructiveness of war. However, most countries are reluctant to limit their armament because of the self help system that requires each state to protect itself. Thus, states find themselves caught in a vicious cycle summarized by two basic principles. (a) "Do not negotiate when you are behind. Why accept a permanent position of number two? and (b) "Don't negotiate when you are ahead. Why accept a freeze in an era of military competition when the other side has not kept up with you" (Barnet, 1997:68).

Here, policy makers read from the script of Realism, which insists that national security is best protected by developing military capability and not by reducing armament or military spending. Realists regard treaties to be dangerous in an anarchical world in which the promises of self interested rivals cannot be trusted. They counsel against putting faith in arms control treaties, because deception and broken promises are to be expected by ruthless leaders

in the global jungle. Thus, instead of holding commitments to arms control agreement that cannot be enforced, realists advice reliance on unilateral self help through military preparedness (Barnet, 1997:112).

The realists mind set was very evident during the first five months of the Bush administration. In January 2001, it announced that it would not send the treaty for establishing the International Criminal court to the US Senate for ratification, followed by the decision on March 28, 2001 to abandon the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming, the May 1, 2001 decision to abrogate the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty, the July 21, 2001 withdrawal from a U.N. Conference to impose on illegal trafficking of small arms, and the July 25, 2001 rejection of proposed enforcement measures for the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. Bush showed his realists colours by rejecting faith in treaties. He was not alone in this regards, of course. But as a leader of the global hegemony, his disregard for arms control set a standard for other states to follow. Especially troublesome to American Allies was the U.S. repudiation of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, regarded by many as the cornerstone of nuclear arms control.

That announcement was the first time in modern history that the United States has renounced a major international accord, and it ignited fears that a global chain reaction of massive repudiations by other states of arms control agreements would follow. Jack Mendelsohn, a U.S. delegate to the SALT I and SALT II treaty negotiations, complained in October 2002 that the Bush administration has been stunningly mute on the future of arms control and clearly believes that it has completed its arms control agenda. By playing make-believe arms control, the Bush administration has sacrificed the sincerity of structures and predictability for the putative virtues of flexibility and unilateralism (Mendelsohn, 2002:167).

Conclusion

The tendency of states to make improving their weapons a priority over controlling them is high. The seven known nuclear states have conducted a total of 2,056 nuclear explosions in 24 locations since 1945 an average of one test every twenty days. Both China and United States regularly conduct so called zero-yield nuclear experiments and are suspected of conducting explosive tests so small that they cannot be detected. Moreover, the partial test ban treaty of 1963, which prohibited atmospheric and underwater testing but not underground explosions, did not slow the pace of testing. Three fourth of all nuclear test took place after the ban came into effect.

In sum, arms control remains a murky policy area and the past records suggest that we should not exaggerate its potentials. As long as aggressive national leaders exist, it would be imprudent to disarm. Limits on weapons may confine the rivalry between states, but they do not remove the underlying source of the conflict. Arms, after all, are less causes of war than symptoms of political tensions. As Hans Morgenthau had pointed out people "do not fight because they have arms, they have arms because they are afraid and deem it necessary to fight" (Morgenthau, 1985:201).

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