

Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Strengthened Non-Proliferation

Dr. Hans Blix

Speech at UN Forum, 12 June 2010, London

hosted by the UN Association of the UK

The UN system, the non-use of force, the laws of war and, disarmament

As we all remember, the first lines of the UN Charter express the determination of members to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. So, how do we seek to eliminate the use of armed force or at least, reduce it or mitigate it? Part of the answer is that with the UN Charter the international community is developing in ways that are somewhat similar to those that over time led most national communities to become peaceful societies.

- First as national laws limit the citizen's right to use force largely to the case of self-defense the UN Charter lays down rules that restrict the use of armed force by states to the case of self-defense against armed attacks and cases where the Security Council has authorized such action.
- Only a few days ago the Obama administration declared in the new US National Security Strategy that it is the aim of the US under his leadership to "*seek to adhere to standards that govern the use of force.*" Coming after the war on Iraq in 2003 that ignored these standards the new statement is as timely as it is welcome.
- Second, in modern states the citizens are disarmed and the possession and use of arms is largely the monopoly of state authorities. In the international community there is no such monopoly. Nevertheless, a central UN organ, the Security Council is empowered to authorize peace enforcement action on behalf of the international community – as it did in the case of Iraq in 1991.
- Furthermore, while the international community is not actively seeking to disarm its individual members, these members have concluded a large number of treaties on arms control and disarmament between themselves– agreements that prohibit or limit the testing, use, deployment, production or possession of various weapons.

I have started with these comments because I wanted to show that in halting and fragmentary ways our international community is slowly developing rules and structures that may help it to minimize the use of armed force – the scourge of war. The UN and the Charter is at the heart of this development.

I shall now focus on arms control and disarmament

During the Cold War people feared that a nuclear duel between the superpowers could be mankind's quick collective suicide. They marched in the streets in protest against the stocks of some 55.000 nuclear weapons.

Today there are perhaps some 25.000 nuclear weapons in the world but if people are marching in the street, it is against the risk of a slow global suicide through the emissions of greenhouse gases.

I think people are essentially right. We should recognize with relief that horrifying risk of a nuclear war between the superpowers disappeared with the end of the Cold War. We should be encouraged by this development and mobilize all our forces to do away with the remaining 25.000 nuclear weapons. We must also, I think, drastically reduce the staggering sum of

1.400 billion dollars in world annual military expenses – some 45 % on the US, some 5 % on China and the UK and some 4 % on Russia.

It is not only that vast expenditures are involved but also that they pay for vast inventories of conventional weapons with tremendous lethal effect. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were obliterated by nuclear weapons but Tokyo, Hamburg and Coventry were destroyed by conventional and incendiary weapons. And today, most people killed in conflicts are victims of small caliber weapons.

When we focus on the duty of states under Article 6 of the NPT to ‘pursue negotiations’ toward nuclear disarmament, we often forget to mention that the article also lays down a duty to negotiate toward ‘a treaty on general and complete disarmament.’ Throughout the existence of the NPT that goal has seemed even more distant than that of nuclear disarmament. Yet, the need for disarmament in the sphere of conventional weapons is strong. Indeed, some nuclear disarmament may not be achievable without disarmament in the conventional weapons sphere.

A revived détente between the big military powers after the cold peace of the last fifteen years should allow not only nuclear disarmament but also drastic reductions in conventional arms. For instance, a revival of the now dormant 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe could both increase mutual confidence and allow the transfer of billions to the defense of our climate.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference

Last week the 2010 conference reviewing the functioning of the Non-Proliferation Treaty concluded its work in New York by adopting a declaration that marks a common determination to make stronger efforts to achieve the central aims of the treaty. Against the background of the acrimonious review conference in 2005 this is particularly welcome. Much of the credit for the change goes to the Obama administration.

The Non Proliferation Treaty that entered into force in 1970 may be read as a guide to a world free of nuclear weapons. The non-nuclear weapon states parties committed themselves to stay away from nuclear weapons and to accept international verification, while the nuclear weapon states committed themselves to negotiate to do away with their weapons and to share with others the peaceful nuclear technology they had developed.

If all states in the world had adhered and all had fulfilled their commitments there would now be a nuclear weapon free world. However, India, Israel and Pakistan did not adhere and developed nuclear weapons. South Africa followed the same path but later dismantled its weapons and joined the treaty. Iraq and Libya violated their commitments but were stopped and brought back into compliance. Negotiations are now taking place to persuade North Korea to do away with its nuclear weapons and with Iran to ensure that it will not move toward nuclear weapons. This is not success, but the non-proliferation situation could have been much worse. A large number of states that have had and still have the technical ability to make nuclear weapons have abstained from doing so.

If the nuclear weapon states parties have worried about proliferation by states and by non-state actors, non-nuclear weapon states have been critical of insufficient nuclear disarmament. They have not been alone in this view. A few days ago two American experts noted that while in a policy of openness the US has now reported that its nuclear arsenal currently comprises 5.113 weapons, this, they said, was exactly 4.802 more than needed. They reminded us that former Defense Secretary McNamara told the world in 1965 that 1.900 Megatons in explosive power or 311 warheads would have sufficed to destroy ‘one-quarter to one-third’ of the Soviet population and about two-thirds of the Soviet industrial capacity.’

Last week's declaration in New York marks a welcome modest convergence between the parties to the NPT: While refusing to tie themselves to any time table the nuclear weapon states commit themselves to pursue disarmament leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons and support is given to the concept of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East and to procedures leading to a conference on the subject. At the same time the acceptance of more effective IAEA inspection and of a nuclear fuel bank under the IAEA was endorsed by all.

The new atmosphere brought about by the Obama administration is a major hopeful development coming after more than a decade of American disinterest in and even disdain for disarmament. In an article in the Wall Street Journal Mr. Gorbachev rightly regretted "*a failure of political leadership which proved incapable of seizing the opportunities opened by the end of the Cold War.*" (31 Jan 2007).

Mr. Obama's turn-around of American policies in disarmament was preceded and helped by a remarkable WSJ article in January 2007 by four senior US statesmen – two Republicans and two Democrats. George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Bill Perry and Sam Nunn reminded the US and the world

- that Cold War was over in 1990, and declared their view
- that nuclear deterrence was obsolete between the US & Russia,
- that the big risk was proliferation by states and non-state actors, and
- that this risk could only be tackled by the US and Russia taking the initiative to lead the whole world toward nuclear disarmament.

The article had a tremendous echo in the whole world and during the presidential campaign of 2008, Mr. Obama espoused the approach .

After being elected President Obama met with President Medvedev of Russia in London in 2009. In a joint statement they declared that they would move beyond Cold War mentalities and pursue nuclear disarmament leading eventually to a nuclear weapons free world. Somewhat later – in a speech on 1 April 2009 in Prague – Mr. Obama presented a long list of disarmament actions that he wanted to pursue. Realizing how daring this approach must have seemed to part of the US public Mr. Obama said he was against unilateral disarmament and did not think the desired goal of freeing the world of nuclear weapons would be accomplished in his life time.

When Mr. Obama was awarded the Nobel prize for peace some noted ungenerously that he had just been talking: 'He had not stopped war'... In my view, this was unfair criticism. He had succeeded in no small thing – to place disarmament on the global agenda – and he proceeded to take action by doing what was within the power of the US executive branch, for instance:

- He allowed direct talks with adversaries like Iran and the DPRK
- He chaired a Security Council summit and showed thereby his administration's recognition of the role of the UN in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament.
- He rapidly set in motion negotiations with Russia for a follow up to the START I treaty that was to expire.

One year after Mr. Obama's Prague speech we can see that there has been important successes but also that there are severe obstacles.

Most significant is the START follow on treaty signed with Russia. While the reductions in nuclear war heads and carriers are relatively modest the treaty is a springboard for further – possibly more difficult – agreements and it preserves mutual inspection that is vital to

maintain mutual confidence. The outlook for ratification by the US Senate is hopeful but not certain.

A second important instrument is the Obama administration's nuclear posture review. The review declares that no new types of nuclear weapons will be developed but guarantees that the existing stockpile will be kept in trim and that a large and costly infrastructure of people and facilities will be maintained. As a further compensation for lessening the emphasis on nuclear weapons the continued superiority in the field of conventional weapons side is stressed.

A few days ago the Obama administration's National Security Strategy was made public and, as I mentioned, it takes important steps away from the strategy of the Bush administration in 2002 that stressed a freedom of preemptive or preventive strikes and anticipatory self defense.

Which are now the OBSTACLES to nuclear disarmament?

I can identify three categories of obstacles:

- First, the considerable body of opinion in the US public and even more in the US Congress that wants the US to stay far ahead of all other countries in military power – including missiles.
- Second, after ten years' of growing US military power, missile construction and space fighting capability, Russia and China are wary and want to see evidence of US military restraint.
- Thirdly, the developments in the cases of the DPRK and Iran that influence the strategic situation in the Far East and the Middle East will also influence attitudes to disarmament.

The case of the DPRK

On the DPRK let me only say that with Seoul being within artillery reach from North Korea, military action is not an option. Even after the recent torpedoing of a South Korean ship continued economic pressures combined with offers of assistance, diplomatic relations and assurances against attack seem to be the only option pursued – and rightly so.

The case of IRAN

In the case of Iran, as in the case of DPRK, military action is not an option. After the Iraq war it is a bit surprising that no one seems to discuss the legality of an armed action against Iran. In my view, there is no way an attack on Iran could be legal. The Security Council will surely not authorize an armed intervention and no state can contend that alleged Iranian intentions to make a nuclear weapon constitute an 'armed attack' giving a right to armed action in self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

I am not sure these legal thoughts will impress in every capital but I do think armed action will not be taken because it would most likely lead to a conflagration and to a decision by Iran -- if one did not exist already – to produce nuclear weapons.

We must look to a non-military settlement of the Iranian issue.

It is true, as insisted by Iran that parties to the NPT have a right to enrich uranium but they certainly have no duty to do so! It would be entirely open to Iran to reach an agreement about

the suspension of its enrichment program, as demanded by the Security Council and many states.

To have a chance to solve the issue we must ask why Iran so adamantly refuses to suspend a program that can be neither economic nor necessary to assure the country of fuel for its nuclear reactors. What could make the Iranian cost benefit analysis of the program tip in favour of suspension?

If perceived threats to its security once led Iran to start a uranium enrichment program that would place it closer to a bomb and if this remained a main rationale, it ought to be possible to find a solution. The threat from Iraq that must have been strongly felt in the 1980s, when Iran's program started, disappeared in 1991. If guarantees against attacks and subversion from the outside were offered – which strangely does not seem to have been the case – it is hard to see that Iran would have military reasons to acquire nuclear weapons or to place itself closer to an option.

If factors like injured pride or internal politics were behind Iran's rigid position it would be understandable. The tone of the outside world has often been condescending or worse. President Bush included Iran in his 'axis of evil'. For several years Iran was offered talks about various offers that could be made – but only after Iran had suspended its enrichment program. Which negotiator surrenders his trump card as a precondition to play?

The resolution that was adopted this week in the Security Council adds some – mainly economic – pressure on Iran to show readiness to negotiate. If such readiness were forthcoming, direct talks should start again – without preconditions. The way to learn whether or not positions and lines are immutable is through negotiations. The question of nuclear fuel for the Triga reactor is a separate one. An agreement on it would ease tensions somewhat but it would not provide a solution to the main controversy that is about the continuation of Iran's enrichment.

The NPT conference did not deal with the substance of the Iran issue but endorsed a future discussion of a Middle East Zone free of nuclear weapons. Such a zone was the arrangement through which Iran and Arab states used to seek the elimination of Israeli nuclear weapons. It would not, by itself remove threats perceived from enrichment programs – in Iran or elsewhere. To do so the zone arrangement would need to be supplemented by an agreement to exclude enrichment and reprocessing in the whole region, at least for a prolonged period of time. If the peace process were to be resumed and move on, perhaps Israel would be ready to do away with its nuclear weapons capacity to secure that all other states in the region, including Iran, stayed away from weapons and the capacity to make them?

Other factors that may impact on the outlook for disarmament.

Skeptics in the US and elsewhere charge that the end goal of eliminating nuclear weapons – the Global Zero – is naïve. It is a pity but perhaps inevitable that attention is focused on this point, while the actual political challenges today have regard to issues like the entry into force of the comprehensive test ban treaty and the negotiation of a cut off of production of fissile material for weapons.

Well, is the aim of a Global Zero naïve? It occurs to me that between 1910 & 1950 there were two world wars and one collapsed world organization. The world will change much between 2010 and 2050. Interdependence will continue to accelerate – in climate, finance, diseases... A world without nuclear weapons will not be today's world minus nuclear weapons!

When we discuss disarmament – nuclear or conventional – we must, of course, weigh what are today the risks of war? Wars used to be about borders, territory, religion or ideology. Between the big powers it is hard to see such conflicts any longer. China and India, I trust will continue to handle their border differences pragmatically.

We can expect civil wars in some places and it may come to armed conflicts in a few regions – Africa and the Middle East. There are also some flashpoints that touch the interests of big powers – Taiwan, Kashmir. However, they will hardly ignite world war... Could competition about oil and gas or other commodities and pipelines trigger war? It seems more likely to me that such frictions will play out in prices?

Despite this hopeful outlook, many military officials and people dealing with military strategy in US and elsewhere urge their governments to maintain enormous military machines. The recent US Nuclear Posture Review – coming out of Pentagon – is holding on to the importance of deterrence, a position that must be premised on the view that the risk of armed conflicts between P5 states is still real. Is this view justified?

The four elder US statesmen doubt it and say nuclear deterrence is obsolete between the US and Russia and of decreasing relevance elsewhere. I agree.

So why does the world continue an annual allocation of some 1.400 billion dollars for military expenses? The reason must be that for now the cautious – or overcautious – voices are prevailing in US as elsewhere. The price for this prudence is high.

Can we accelerate acceptance of movement toward nuclear disarmament?

I think so and I think the recipe is diplomacy and deepening of détente. We need to continue resetting many buttons.

The US measure to move missile shield links from Poland and the Czech Republic to locations further South East may not have been taken just to please Russia. However, I doubt that the new START agreement could have been reached had this modification not occurred.

We need more constructive thinking! Let me give a few examples.

- If the missile shield it is not meant to protect against Russia and China but against reckless governments, why not develop it cooperatively between the US, Europe, Russia and China?
- In Europe, nuclear weapons under NATO command are relics of the Cold War. Why not simply withdraw them, as urged by many?
- Did the war in Georgia show that Russia is bent on revanchism? East European suspicions may be understandable and Russia has no veto against the security arrangements of its neighbours. We should also understand, however, that détente and disarmament will be impeded by a revival of the policies of containment that were right to counter Communism during the Cold War. Russia and the countries around it need develop good neighbour policies. Russian-Finnish relations strike me as a good pattern. The European Union should help.
- Meeting today's big global challenges – sustainable development, global warming, financial stability and disarmament – calls for accommodation, cooperation and the full use of international organizations with the United Nations at the center. Accelerating international interdependence will drive the world in this direction and UN associations and civil society has an important role to help the process.
- Let me end by citing Mr. Hammarskjöld, who once said that the UN 'might not take us to heaven but it might help us to avoid hell.'