Disarmament and Arms Control : Superpowers' Deterrence and Arms Race

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Disarmament is one of those phenomena of international politics which are mooted as solutions to problems but instead become problem themselves. The word 'disarmament' may appear as a misnomer in the context of superpowers' role in the post-war arms negotiations. The point perhaps would be illustrated better by a conceptual difference between 'disarmament' and 'arms control'. Disarmament and arms control are generally complementary to each other, but they are not the same. Disarmament seeks to facilitate mutual reductions, destruction or elimination of armaments or of national instruments of war. Arms control concerns matters such as appropriate military deployments, communications during political-military crises, inspection programmes, and guarantee systems. There can be disarmament which is not controlled and there can be control which does not involve a reduction of armaments. Arms control may even mean agreeing to increase the quantity or quality of weapons in order to buttress deterrence. Despite the expressed desire of both the

superpowers to press ahead with the ideal of disarmament, the pattern of their arms bargaining suggests that both are trapped by their commitment to deterrence, with a striving for strategic advantage but both being inevitably led back to an arms race.

Arms control negotiations between the superpowers is a long and complicated process that is enmeshed in their alliance management, domestic politics, national security interests and nuclear strategy, weapons systems and verification technology. This article examines the conceptual linkage between the superpowers' arms bargaining and their doctrinal posture within the broader context of world politics. It suggests a linkage between the arms race and deterrence and it argues that unless the superpowers reverse or modify their present commitments to deterrence the arms race will continue unabated. In addressing itself to the foregoing hypothetical assumption, the paper firstly looks at the type of commitments the superpowers made regarding the regulation of armaments, then surveys their arms bargaining position, touching on the accords reached so far, and finally, evaluates their bargaining outcome in terms of deterrence.

The history of disarmaments is a sad one. Negotiations on disarmament following the First World War achieved virtually no general limitation of armaments, contributed little to permanent peace, and did not prevent the Second World War. During World War II, both the US and the USSR committed themselves, along with others, to seek collective security and to promote international peace 'with the least diversion

for armaments of the world's human and economic resources'. In the optimistic mood of the time, they also agreed on the basic principles for disarmament which were written into the UN charter. The discovery of atomic energy and the use of atomic weapons in 1945 created a new urgency for disarmament. Despite the subsequent competitive strengthening of nuclear arsenals by both the superpowers, they continue to reaffirm their faith in disarmament.

Promotion of peace by means of disarmament has been among the most frequently stated objectives of American foreign policy. Washington sought to project the view that the competitive increase of national armaments constitutes one of the principal causes of international discord. A recognition of this condition and stated desire to remove the threat of war, have led the US in playing a prominent role in disarmament negotiations. The USSR, in similar vein, considers itself in the vanguard for the struggle for disarmament. Disarmament, as seen from Moscow, is the ideal of socialism.

Meanwhile, the United Nations, created to save the mankind 'from the scourge of war', renewed its effort toward disarmament. Starting in 1959 the UN General Assembly pursued proposals for 'general and complete disarmament under effective international control'. It proclaimed the 1970s and 1980s respectively as the First and Second Disarmament Decades. It also had two special sessions (in 1978 and 1982) devoted to disarmament and reaffirmed that the UN 'has a central role' in the field of disarmament.

It would now be appropriate to turn to the pattern

of deliberations that followed. The creation in 1946 of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) by the UN General Assembly indicated the urgency attached to the question of disarmament. In the first meeting of the AEC in June 1946 the US called for the creation of an international authority entrusted with all phases of the development and use of atomic energy (the so-called Baruch plan). It suggested that once system of control and sanctions was effectively operating, further production of atomic weapons would cease, existing stocks would be destroyed and all technological information would be communicated to the authority. The US even called for a strengthening of collective security; asking for abolition of the veto power in the UN Security Council. Perceiving its political-military weaknesses at the time, the USSR insisted on retention of the veto, proposed the immediate outlawing of atomic weapons. and last wanted each power to assume responsibility for preventing its citizens from violating the agreements (the so-called Gromyko Plan).

The institutional framework of these talks changed substantially between 1947 and 1985. Prolonged debate ensued on the 'nuclear problem' in the Atomic Energy Commission until 1952 when it was merged with the Commission for Conventional Armaments, set up by the UN Security Council in 1947. A single Disarmament Commission was created in 1952 to break the impasse. Talks were also carried on at Sub-Committee level in 1954, at the enlarged Disarmament Commission in 1957, 1960, and in 1965. These talks also continued at the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament set up in 1959.

It carried on negotiations until 1962; following an agreement between the superpowers, the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament was then reorganized into Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. This new Committee expanded its membership to 26 nations in 1969 when it became the Conference on Disarmament. In February 1984 it was again enlarged, now to 40, and is seen as the 'single multilateral Disarmament negotiating forum' of the world community.

Apart from these UN mechanisms, there are two other multilateral, non-United Nations forums—the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBZR) talks in Vienna between the NATO and Warsaw blocs and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) which had sessions in Geneva and Helsinki. These forums, having been in sessions during 1972-1975, continued to meet ever since in complementary conferences as part of follow-up process.

Parallel to these multilateral efforts, the superpower have also considered disarmament matters within a bilateral framework. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks began in November 1969 between the US and the USSR in Helsinki and were continued in Vienna in April 1970. Sessions afterwards alternated between Helsinki, Vienna, and Geneva. A new round of talks started in June 1982 in Geneva with a new approach christened Strategic Arms Reduction Talks. These new bilateral negotiations dealt with a complex set of questions concerning space and nuclear weapons, both strategic and intermediate/medium-range missile systems, with all those questions considered and 'resolved' in their

interrelationship. The 'nuclear and space talks', as the negotiations were re-christend in 1985, have been continuing in Geneva, despite periodic reports of setbacks, stalemate, suspensions or withdrawals.

The foregoing disarmament efforts, both multilateral and bilateral, have resulted in a limited number of significant agreements. The multilateral agreements, in which the superpowers have had a leading role, includes the 1959 Antarctic Treaty ; the 1963 partial test-ban Treaty ; the 1967 outer space Treaty ; the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear weapons in Latin America ; the 1968 non-Proliferation Treaty ; the 1971 sea-bed Treaty ; the 1972 biological weapons Convention ; the 1977 ENMOD Convention ; the 1979 Agreement on celestial bodies ; the 1981 Convention on inhumane weapons.

Agreements reached within a bilateral framework between the superpowers over the same period include : the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty ; the 1972 Interim Agreement ; the 1973 Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War ; the 1974 threshold test-ban Treaty ; the 1979 Treaty on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, the so-called SALT II. The last three Treaties have not entered into force, though each side did declare its intention to adhere to the Treaties' substantative provisions as long as the other side does likewise.

While the plethora of talks did certainly reflect the persistence and seriousness in the efforts made by the arms negotiators representing either of the superpowers, the sad reality is that the accords and treaties

have not led to any significant measure of disarmament. In fact, except for the 1972 biological weapons Conventions and some symbolic budget cut-backs and troop reductions, there has been little real move towards disarmament.

Central to this failure is the role of deterrence as the organizing concept of superpowers' military defence. It is because of the commitment to deterrence that most of the agreements signed so far entailed only arms control measures. Furthermore, many of the agreements already signed are in jeopardy, as both powers, concerned about a possible collapse of deterrence, continue to blame each other for non-compliance with the existing treaties. Worse still, the current American Administration, perceiving a threat to US deterrent capability, announced in May 1986 its unwillingness to abide by the terms of agreements reached within a bilateral framework on limiting strategic offensive arms, viz, the Interim Agreement of 1972 and the SALT-II of 1979. For same reason, it also expressed its determination to press forward with research and development of space-based strike weapons, planned as defensive shield under the much-heralded Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), and popularly knwon as 'star wars' programme.

The concept of deterrence has been shaped in the US and the West by the dominant concern of nuclear warfare. The traditional purpose of the nuclear arsenal, wrote Bernard Brodie, has been deterrence. Its presumed object is not to win wars, but to avert them. Deterrence is intended to convince a potential opponent,

by persuasion or threat, that it is simple not rational for it to engage in acts of imposition.

Controversy, however, still ranges on whether deterrence is based on a presumed rational calculus of 'Mutual Assured Destruction' (MAD) or whether it really provides an urge to acquire a nuclear war-fighting and war-winning capability, either to dissuade an opponent from starting a war or, in the event that war does occur, to be able to fight and win it.

Many Western analysts suggest that the USSR has been determined to achieve a superiority in both offensive and defensive weapens which would enable it to fight and win's nuclear war. Some argue that Moscow understands and values deterrence as a 'minimum' guarantee of Soviet security, it seeks to go beyond this minimum level and to maximize its security by the acquisition of war-fighting capabilities. In the US there is a concern that deterrence will be undermined by unilateral Soviet acquisition of pre-emptive first strike capability. American theory holds that the US would like to dominate, not be war, but through their possession of superior forces, tactical as well as strategic, and therefore it must deploy greater forces test the 'free world' be dominated. In fact, some American policymakers insist that 'the policy of deterrence has stood the test of time', and that the natural compliment of deterrence is arms control and that deterrence is but a substitute for a policy of defenee.

Moscow is also preoccupied with deterrence in the sense of protecting the perceived Soviet interests; it seeks to advance those interests and to promote Soviet

influence over other countries, if possible without the use of force. By deterrence, to put it differently, Soviet policymakers mean not just war prevention but the power which determines the conditions of peace – which grows out of war-fighting strength. It is also perhaps a reflection of the enduring Soviet doctrine that war can occur and must be rationally prepared for. It leads Soviet military science and doctrine to search diligently and continuously into the possible nature of future war or wars in order to anticipate this scope and damage for purposes of planning in the face of technological and strategic realities.

In the early years of the nuclear era, both the superpowers adopted 'damage limitation' measures first as part of their deterrent concept. Later, as schemes for protection against nuclear attack, both began to centre on pre-emptive nuclear strikes against the opposing side's nuclear forces and the prospect of counterforce warfare entered the US-USSR strategic rivalry. It has remained a factor in this rivalry ever since. It could be argued that damage limitation and counterforce are almost inevitable countervalue aspects of deterrence and of destabilizing arms race. Deterrence is thus a combined arms thinking in the broadest sense for both the global combines.

Analysts such as E.P. Thompson, George F. Kennan, and Jonathun Schell have all written at length on the ethical inadmissibility and moral deficiency of deterrence. Deterrence in its current context and as seen from disarmament perspective, would seem to represent the perversity of the nuclear world. For deterrence rests heavily

on the conviction that the real, best and, indeed, the only reliable measure of military power is the expected performance in war. Deterrence thus contains a perceptual drive of addiction.

Indeed, the superpowers have become more trapped in illusions of power than ever before as a result of their commitment to dererrence. Oblivious to the apocalyptic consequences of nuclear use, even of the threat of devastating nuclear winter, they remain overly concerned with a discussion of weapons and strategies or an analysis of coupling and decoupling, 'windows of vulnerability', launch-on-warning, etc. In their bargaining over strategic nuclear weapons, war-heads, delivery systems, the superpowers argued about offensive and defeneive weapons, parity and combat equality, nuclear balance and strategic superiority. For these are supposedly the essential components of mutual deterrence. Strategic analysts on both sides plan scenaries, juggle the acronyms, calculate delivery accuracy and counterforce capability, expound pre emptive strike versus worst case and occupy their mine and skills for an untested and unpredictable nuclear war. Both the superpowers have been striving to close some presumed gap while at the same time, each sought to stabilize the nuclear deterrent balance through multilateral and/or bilateral arms control process. While sitting at the bargaining table, they continue to tighten respective command and control systems and to perfect detonation and delivery systems to gain strategic superiority in an ever-escalating arms race.

Disarmament has failed tragically because the superpowers, having abandoned the idea of collective

security, opted for deterrence. Over forty years have elapsed since the disarmament negotiations in the Atomic Energy Commission, yet nuclear weapons are still national instruments of both the superpowers. Thus, despite the disarmament commitments the superpowers made and almost routine efforts that followed in the UN and beyond the framework of the world body, disarmament by the methods of restriction, curtailment or destruction remained an unattainable goal or would appear at best as a pious wish.

However, the superpowers go on talking about disarmament or limiting nuclear arms, as they are talking now at Geneva. This is certainly useful up to a point, because it keeps the communication channel open. But the intention behind the talks is questionable. While the arms negotiators remain busy, the obstacle to progress is that the superpowers have got themselves into such a kind of mutual suspicion that they could not divest themselves of a single missile even the International Year of Peace. Little surprise that much of the apparent progress made in the field of arms bargaining by the mid-1970s offered merely dubious prospects for disarmament. In fact in the decade ahead, despite the scores of accords signed, in some sector of nuclear arms race between the the superpowers armament systems multiplied almost threefold, Most of the superweapons of mass destruction in the world, and about 96% of strategic forces, are owned by the superpowers themselves. More alarming still, a large portion of these weapons and forces are now fully deployed. These are based in their territory, on and off-shore, or

deployed in the territory of their allies. (See Table 1.1). Prospect for the future is still more bleak. While the Soviets, in the secrecy of their system, must remain very alert to the missile defence problem, the US remains committed to a vastly increased programme of research and development for ballistic missile defence, claiming, that Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) will be replaced with 'mutual assured survival' (MAS).

Effective disarmament would entail, as a 1962 study suggests, reductions in military budgets, curtailment of further developments in weaponry, and destruction and elimination of the existing stocks. The superpowers bear particular responsibility for progress in this direction. Given nuclear context of deterrence, nuclear weapons and their consequences, one thing emerges clearly: deterrence has no relevance for disarmament; rather it has become the doctrine of escalation. It may be true that the superpowers have so far been able to deter each other from attack; but they could not deter an arms race either between themselves and their local and regional clients. Neither are the superpowers deterred politically from launching vertical intrusions or asymmetric interventions into the affairs of small, third world nations. Thus, as the arms race goes on, technology of war has been on the rise. As a result, the world witnessed more wars and saw four times more war-deaths in the 40 years since the Second World War as in the 40 years preceding it.

No one knows the future course of the nuclear arms race. Unlike all other arms systems prior to

actual use, nuclear missiles have never been tested in battle. Wars develop in ways that are unpredictable. In a nuclear war, when multiheaded nuclear missiles are likely to be flown over the magnetic poles, the entire decisionmaking apparatus and deterrent posture with its concomitant rational bias could fall into chaas. These unknowns should warn the world community against taking announced doctrines and strategic scenaries on faith. Yet the superpowers remain committed to a course of retaining and advancing their nuclear weaponry. Under the guise of deterrence, both remain committed to ensuring national security by strategic superiority. The very nature of nuclear weapons no doubt makes them inherently unsuited for use a military instrument ; yet they do remain weapons themselves since they are likely to be used if deterrence fails, and military organizations on both sides continue to develop plans for their use. It is this prospect of terminal gloom and finality, reinforced by predictions of a 'nuclear winter', that leads scholars and analysts to renew their concern over a continuing nuclear arms race and to question the relevance of deterrence as a strategic doctrine.

The essence of contemporary strategy "is the indispensable bridge between arms and policy". To bridge effectively, policymakers must seek to build consensus, coordinate political objectives and interests, and provides support and commitment. Policymakers in both Washington and Moscow must realize that doctrine represents an ideal. To the extent that it has been empirically formulated, the ideal tends to correct past

errors and indicate the way to improvement. The current arms control agenda leaves much unaddressed. Arms control must produce positive results in the form of fair and equitable treaties that enhance the seeurity of both the superpowers ; otherwise the attempts to build a coherent, long-term linkage policy in support of arms control will not be worth the effort. Instead of acquiring credibility for their deterrent posture, both the global combines must realize that the only credible threat to their security or their territory resides in the nuclear arsenal of the other.

One might also suggest that a consistent linkage policy will help put arms control process into a rational perspective and make the mutual danger of nuclear weapons more manningflul than ever before. In terms of background linkage, both the superpowers should move away from propaganda-dominated rhetoric, accept political differences and move toward co-existence, solve overriding problems and stress common interests. Both should abandon and renounce the search for strategic superiority basing their policy on military balance linkage, focus on strategic defence as a second step to an accord on strategic offensive weapons ; yet be alert concerning specific event linkage so that crises in an on-going adversary political relationship produce restraint and limit damages to arms control agendas. Finally, in the area of pattern of behaviour linkage both the superpowers should encourage moves toward consensus and confidence-building. Ideological differences apart, both the superpowers share one common goal, not only between them but that includes others as well : the

common goal is survival.

For now and the foreseeable future, however, the superpowers' commitment to deterrence or their strivings for strategic military superiority that the doctrine generates, are unlikely to change. For nuclear weapons are perceived as being important symbols which confer certain distinct advantages on their possessors in proportion to the size and sophistication of the arsenals. Hence conditions such as 'superiority', 'inferiority' or 'parity' would continue to be treated politically as significant symbols, touching on national ego.

Before the onset of nuclear power, war had limits of destruction. Nuclear technology, backed currently by the concept of 'extended deterrence', extends the capacity for mass destruction to infinity. This phenomenon gives the question of disarmament an urgency it never had before. It is indeed fear or the threat to the survival of human race which perhaps could impel motive power in the genuine effort toward disarmament or meaningful arms control. But the decisionmakers in the White House and the Kremlin seem trapped in illusions of power and self-image, ideologies and vested interests. Hence the instrument of motive power is in the hands of public. Perhaps only a vigilant public opinion could reverse or modify the current order of priority in the field of arms bargaining.

Hence, fittingly it is suggested that superpowers' doctrinal commitment to deterrence and to an entangling arms race can only be 'deactivated' by worldwide public rejection. There cannot be any real progress in the area uniil public tolerance of existing policy ends.

When control of arms, leading to disarmament, becomes a goal of the mainstream of a world public opinion consisting of a significant part of the superpowers' populations then it will prevail. Public opinion should be mobilized for the demolition of a structure of strategic theory based on deterrence; demands should continue for a bilateral nuclear freeze, a total ban on all nuclear testing, and above all, for a firm renunciation of the doctnine first strike. When public tolerance of existing policy ends, piling up of an overkill arsenal must stop, because as a leading strategic thinker wrote without acceptance by the public, there can be no sustainable policy. The military needs of the powers must be brought into proportion with the needs of world community. Scholars and thinkers have long argued in favour of a 'peace race' as a substitute for an arms race and pleaded for diverting the immense resources spent by the superpowers to economic development of the less fortunate nations. Such a plea is consistent with the commitment the superpowers and others made in the UN charter. The best way for the US and the USSR to ensure their international advantage is not to seek strategic nuclear superiority, which appears elusive, but to strive to attain moral superiority by successfully competing with each other in assisting the development progammes of the under-developed countries of the world.

Table 1.1 Superpower' Strategic Nuclear Balance: Arms Race and Deployment, 1976-1986[a]

A. Deliverable Warheads. 1976

Warheads	United States	Soviet Union
ICBM	2,154	2,195
SLBM	5,120	785
Bombers	1,256	270
	8,530	3,250

Source: *The Military Balance. 1976-1977* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1976), p.106

B. Soviet-American Nuclear Balance, 1986

Warheads	US Total	US Number Deployed	USSR Total	USSR Number Deployed
ICBM	2,110	1,010	6,420	1,398
SLBM	6,656	640	3,216	944
Bombers	4,080	260	1,080	160
	12,846	1,910	10,716	2,502

Source: *The Military Balance, 1986-1987* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1986,) p. 222

a. The Table gives a comparative view of a *static* aggregation of strategic nuclear warheads of the superpowers for the period 1976-1686. The Table should be usefull in comparing relative force size and in measuring significance of the nuclear deployment of the 1980s; it does not, however, provide information about force effectiveness, as no single measurement can give an accurate impression of the superpowers' strategic nuclear balance.