"Which Logic for Further Nuclear Disarmament?"

Benjamin Hautecouverture

Introduction

Contrary to what is asserted by the advocates of Zero, that is the abolitionists, nuclear disarmament still needs to be a process directly linked to the evolution of the strategic context. This idea is stated by the 2010 NPR in the same terms: “even as we seek a future world free of nuclear weapons, we are realistic about the world around us, recognizing that this goal will be a long-term effort, not the work of one Administration”\(^2\). Even the so-called “Gang of Four” recognized it in their last op-ed published in the March 7, 2011 issue of the Wall Street Journal (WSJ), entitled “Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Proliferation”: “a world without nuclear weapons, they wrote, will not simply be today’s world minus nuclear weapons.”\(^3\)

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\(^3\)http://www.nti.org/c_press/Deterrence_in_the_Age_of_Nuclear_Proliferation.pdf
My purpose is to put nuclear disarmament in perspective, according to the title for our roundtable: “opportunities and gaps”. What are the current opportunities? How deep are the gaps? My purpose is to draw a picture of the current situation in order to answer this question: what is the logic for further nuclear disarmament? Is it possible to share a common understanding of nuclear disarmament as a useful concept to understand the reality of interstate relations?

1. Current opportunities for nuclear disarmament

Fortunate coincidence, three news related to nuclear disarmament delivered last week by the media provide an interesting snapshot of the topic, two years and a half after president Obama gave his famous speech in Prague⁴:

- First, the Astana International Forum for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World ended Wednesday 12 of October 2011 issuing a declaration that provides the most updated list of measures to be taken in order to move forward in the implementation of the disarmament action plan endorsed by the 8th Review Conference of the NPT in May 2010.⁵

- Second, as reported to the First Committee on Wednesday 12 of October 2011 by JarnoSareva, deputy secretary general of the CD, the 2011 session of the CD ended without a single success and failed to carry out any substantive discussions, in particular as regard to the opening of negotiations on a Fissile material Cut-off Treaty despite the agreement reached to that end in 2009.

- Third, 65 House Democrats, led by Representative Edward Markey, on Tuesday 11 of October 2011 sent a letter urging the 12-member bipartisan committee “to cut $20 billion a year, or [$] 200 billion over the next 10 years, from the U.S. nuclear weapons budget.”

Interesting backdrop indeed:

⁴April 5, 2009
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague-As-Delivered/
The Astana declaration provides a list of actions in a very traditional way for that kind of gathering: entry into force of the CTBT, opening of negotiations on an FMCT, moratoria on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and on nuclear testing, the importance of the NPT and its three pillars, irreversibility and verifiability, support to the establishment of a WMD Free zone in the Middle East, and so on and so forth.

On the contrary, the continued stalemate at the CD illustrates that good will, wishful thinking, brilliant op-eds and inspiring speeches are useless per se.

Last, budgetary necessities and deficit reduction could become an important lever for nuclear disarmament over the next years, what it has been already.

2. **Unbalanced efforts between States (China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea)**

As far as gaps are concerned when it comes to nuclear disarmament, a very simple question seems to be something like a taboo within western states civil society and the disarmament community: who has been talking about nuclear disarmament in the real world for fifteen years but in the United States, in the UK, in France, and to some extent in Russia?

Has anyone ever seen a real Indian anti-nuclear movement? Public awareness of nuclear issues in India has been very low since the “peaceful nuclear explosion” of 1974. According to a poll conducted by the Delhi –based *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies* (CSDS), 54 per cent of the population surveyed had even not heard of the nuclear tests of 1998.⁶

The same goes for Pakistan, Israel, or China for different reasons, North Korea being obviously irrelevant in that regard.

When it comes to States policies, if one considers that the nuclear world consists of 8/9 States (5 NWS according to article 9 of the NPT and 3/4 de facto NWS), 50% or more than 50% of

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http://www.idsa.in/idsacommens/AnIndianAntiNuclearMovement_jsarkar_280711
them, depending on the place of North Korea in the field, have been maintaining or increasing their arsenal and do not show any real sign to reverse the trend.

As to China, as far as recent quantitative data on warhead numbers are concerned, there are different estimates about the arsenal. There are few signs indicating that the number of warheads has increased. However, the modernization of delivery systems is described as “the most active in the world,” according to the 2009 NASIC report (missile size and range). Associated with the ongoing development of the naval component as well as with current speculations about a determination to master MIRVed technology, the modernization of China’s nuclear deterrent makes it probably unlikely that the current warhead numbers of the arsenal will remain as such. As regard to fissile material, everybody knows that Beijing is known to have stopped its production of highly enriched uranium (HEU) in 1987 and its production of plutonium in 1990. However, Beijing has not yet formally announced a moratorium on such production. Since 2003, China encourages the start of negotiations for the conclusion of fissile material cut-off treaty at the CD, but this process remains blocked by Pakistan, which fuels doubts about China’s actual diplomatic position.

In that context, isn’t it weird that China be the most vocal proponent of abolition among the 5 NWS of the NPT?

As to India, the country is part of the NWS the arsenal of which is under development, as it is the case for Pakistan and China. This development is linked to the Indian quest of a nuclear « triad » even if to date, the Indian nuclear forces are mostly airborne-based, sustained by short range ballistic missiles. Estimates in terms of fully assembled nuclear warheads have varied in open literature since 2010, from around 60 to 80 according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists 2010 and the SIPRI Yearbook 2010 to 80 to 100 nuclear weapons for the 2011 edition of the SIPRI Yearbook. Estimates are based on calculations of the country inventory of weapon-grade plutonium plus the number of operational nuclear-capable delivery systems. It is generally agreed that these estimates are about to increase in the future. In terms of doctrine, the increasing trend option is made possible by the Indian asserted will to adapt its nuclear forces to its size and to its strategic positioning in the region and in world affairs. Indeed, the concept of credible minimum nuclear deterrent is quite variable and cannot be quantified precisely. (It must be said that the ambiguity of this strategic concept goes for everyone).

As to Pakistan, the country reaffirmed last week at the United Nations General Assembly First
Committee its opposition to negotiations on a FMCT at the CD, arguing that “no country can be expected to compromise on its fundamental security interests”, and adding very explicitly that the 123 agreement between India and the United States in 2008 had “accentuated the asymmetry in fissile material stocks in [the] region.” While Pakistan continues to block the start of FMCT negotiations at the CD, new estimates suggest that the country now has over 100 warheads, according to articles published in the Washington Post and the New York Times, both based on US intelligence sources, dating January 31, 2011. The expansion of the Pakistani arsenal is not a surprise. In its 2009 estimate, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists already indicated that Pakistani nuclear forces were on the increase: “Although Pakistan’s arsenal is clearly increasing, several factors suggest that it may not have reached 100 warheads quite yet.” The estimates of the annual SIPRI report (Summer 2011) also suggest that the arsenal is expanding. Regardless of the real expansion level of the Pakistan nuclear arsenal, it is likely that it is today larger than India’s. This is said to be a deliberate move by Islamabad in the context of what one must call an arms race in South Asia, at a time when there is an increasing imbalance in India’s favor with regards to conventional weapons and system sophistication. In any event, what this suggests is that key strategic nuclear questions have definitely moved to Asia since the end of the cold war.

As to Israel, public data about its alleged nuclear arsenal are very approximate. Historically speaking, Israel is believed to have produced enough plutonium for 100 – 200 warheads, the total amount of the Dimona reactor being estimated to 700 to 800 kg of weapon-grade plutonium, which would be theoretically enough to the production of 130 nuclear warheads, at a rate of 5 kg per warhead. The development of a nuclear-capable SLCM based on the US-made Harpoon missile for its fleet of three Type 800 dolphin class diesel-electric submarines purchased from Germany is officially denied but the idea has been more and more asserted in open literature. If speculations were true, it would indicate a will to develop a second strike capability. In any case, there are no criteria to date for the existence of a nuclear disarming process in Israel.

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8 Ibid.
9 Malgré la mention d’Israël comme Etat possesseur dans de nombreux ouvrages, ainsi que dans les rapports du CRS pour le Congrès, Israël persiste dans une posture officielle d’ambiguïté. Selon Shimon Pérès, s’exprimant en décembre 2006, “Israël n’a pas à dire ou ne pas dire si nous disposons de l’arme nucléaire, il suffit que l’on craigne que nous la détentions et cette crainte constitue elle-même un élément de dissuasion”. In Désarmement, non-prolifération nucléaires et sécurité de la France, Rapport du sénat, 20 , http://www.senat.fr/rap/r09-332/r09-3326.html
As to North Korea, even if it is maybe still too soon to talk about a *de facto* NWS, the regime withdrew from the NPT in 2003 in order to become a NWS. Two nuclear test explosions were carried out in October 2006 and in May 2009. Doubts remain about whether North Korea has the design and engineering skills needed to manufacture a functional nuclear weapon. To date, the North Korean ballistic arsenal is made of KN-02, derived from the SS-21 missile, of Scud B, C, D, of No Dong 1 and of Musadan (former No Dong 2): mobile missiles, and of Taepo Dong 1, missiles destined for fixed structures (the Taepo Dong 2, a test of which was conducted in April 2009 would not be operational). Anyway, the weaponization of a nuclear warhead would hypothetically refer to Scud B, C, D, as well as No Dong 1 for the moment.

Eventually, and as far as open literature is concerned, it can be argued that Iran is approaching the nuclear threshold, whatever the final will of the current regime in place. Olli Heinonen recognized it in an interview for *The Spiegel* last summer, stating that “it’s undeniable that Iran’s nuclear program is far more advanced than it was in 2003”. He added: “Iran always told us it was only interested in the civilian uses of atomic energy. I’ve always had my doubts about that, more so now than ever.”

Interesting backdrop here again. Now the question is: what nuclear disarmament does mean in that global context? What still is its logic?

3. **Understanding Article VI of the NPT**

It must be assumed, once and for all, that there is no link between non-proliferation obligations of the NPT (articles 1 & 2) and nuclear disarmament under article 6 of the Treaty in a strategic way. To put it very simply, eliminating more nuclear weapons in a global fashion will never convince Non Nuclear Weapon States not to pursue a nuclear weapon program if they assess that they need to in a regional security context. The very recent nuclear history demonstrates this very clearly: nuclear proliferation was not controlled in Asia or in the Middle East when so much progress was made on nuclear disarmament during the 1980’s and the 1990’s by the United States, USSR then Russia, France and the United Kingdom. One

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10 *Spiegel Interview with Former Nuclear Watchdog, “The Iranians ‘tricked and misled us”, June 10, 2011 http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,790042,00.html*
just has to look at the figures: exemplarity is definitely not an argument when it comes to security of States.

Then the question is: can nuclear disarmament be an effective diplomatic tool in order to foster non-proliferation efforts on a global scale? My understanding is that this was the bet made by the Obama administration, endorsed as it is by the department of State for nearly three years. When formulating in a very new way the historical bargain between NNWS and NWS as “sound” in his Prague speech, that is “Countries with nuclear weapons will move towards disarmament, countries without nuclear weapons will not acquire them (...).», president Obama wished to ease the problematic link between non-proliferation and disarmament within the NPT regime. According to this argument, NWS and NNWS have endorsed from the very beginning reciprocal obligations the sum of which should lead to the actual abolition of nuclear weapons, thanks to nuclear disarmament for the former, thanks to non-proliferation for the latter. And indeed, this very new stance obviously helped to the success of the last Review Conference of the Treaty in May 2010, along with other factors. But can it be assumed that this ambitious position helped achieving anything else in the real world? This is deeply debatable for a few complementary reasons:

- The first one deals with leadership. As president Obama put it: « as a nuclear power, as the only nuclear power to have used a nuclear weapon, the United States has a moral responsibility to act. He added: We cannot succeed in this endeavour alone, but we can lead it. ».

- So the real question is: Why the United States have stayed pretty alone with their ambition so far? Firstly, in my opinion, because of this argument that Article VI of the NPT is devoted to nuclear disarmament only and to NWS as if they were NWS only: the obligation for disarmament actually concerns all States parties because it is multidimensional, including the cessation of the arms race and general and complete disarmament. Which means that States actions in favor of biological, chemical and conventional disarmament must be considered as full part of their article VI record. The link between nuclear disarmament, other WMD disarmament and conventional disarmament is obviously a key for nuclear disarmament on the path to zero. There has been a link between nuclear and conventional arms since the very beginning of the Cold war. This link has been emphasized and focused on two challenges since the
beginning of the decade: modern conventional weapons and anti-ballistic systems. They have been raising critical questions that could become in the near future the very heart of nuclear disarmament as a challenge if they are not already. For instance, Russia made it very clear that any future agreement following on New START would have to take into account missile defense and long-range precision conventional weapons. US Ambassador in Moscow Michael McFaul confirmed this yesterday\(^\text{11}\).

- The second reason why nuclear disarmament on a path to zero as a diplomatic tool to foster the non-proliferation regime has been ineffective so far is simply the fact that most of the NWS have not been convinced by abolition as a security guarantee. I talked about Asia but this is also true concerning Russia where the role of nuclear weapons in its defense policy has been increased in the past 20 years. And this is true for France where governments still think first that nuclear weapons are essential to the security of the nation, second that going to zero would not create a safer world.

**Conclusion**

Finally, I would like to insist very quickly on the various significations given to nuclear disarmament as a concept: nuclear disarmament can be seen as a challenge for practitioners, as an objective or as a process for NWS, as an argument in diplomatic forums for many NNWS, particularly among the non-aligned countries, as a policy for governments (for its leverage effect in a context of budgetary restraint for instance, or as a diplomatic support in multilateral arenas), as an ideal for arms controllers or as an ideology for many abolitionists. To some extent these different meanings are not mutually exclusive but still it must be stressed that the concept of nuclear disarmament covers very different realities depending on the context and the speaker. Is it possible to share a common understanding? I don’t think so and I would easily add that this is quite all right.

I am among those who deeply think that nuclear disarmament can only be the result of a peace process or at least of eased tensions, even if that condition is necessary but not sufficient. Then every international, regional or even bilateral forum between States where discussing what should be the conditions for the abolition of nuclear weapons would be very welcome: a subsidiary body dealing with nuclear disarmament at the CD, the 2012 Conference on a

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\(^{11}\)MondayOctober 17, 2011
WMD free zone in the Middle East, bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan for instance.

To sum up, is there any logic for further nuclear disarmament? I would answer yes if at least one of these three conditions has been fulfilled:

- Progress in the process of democratization of States
- Progress in the resolution of major regional conflicts
- Never forget other weapons…