

## UNIFIED APPROACH NEEDED FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

By Jayantha Dhanapala \*



KANDY, SRI LANKA, Jan (IPS) The only viable normative approach regarding nuclear weapons is their total and universal elimination under strict verification. This cannot be achieved by incremental steps but only by the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention as advocated by the UN Secretary-General.

Today, there are some grounds to hope for a reconciliation of the broken marriage between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Both US President Obama and Russian President Medvedev have repeatedly indicated their support for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. We may be heading for a new age of de-proliferation, a reversal both of the spread of these weapons and of their perpetuation and further improvement.

The concept of nuclear-weapon 'proliferation' has two dimensions: horizontal (geographical spread) and vertical (improvements of existing arsenals). The nuclear-weapon states (NWS), supported by states in NATO and others under the 'nuclear umbrella', have long stressed the importance of preventing the former while promoting the latter.

Here's how it works. The NWS express alarm over the prospect, real or imagined, of new nuclear-weapon states. This leads them to engage in desperate efforts (such as the illegal invasion of Iraq) to prevent this from happening, hence the need for ever-increasing controls against horizontal proliferation.

Yet this contrived foreign threat has a dual-use: it also serves the NWS as grounds for rationalising the improvement ('modernisation') of their nuclear arsenals, and the indefinite postponement of disarmament.

The selective narrative of the NWS has even further obfuscated matters with the conspiracy of silence over the undeclared nuclear-weapon capability of Israel, which some of them have assisted. Moreover, an arbitrary distinction has been drawn between 'good' and 'bad' proliferators. The 1995 Resolution on the Middle East -without which the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) would not have been achieved- has been ignored.

Thus India, a longstanding holdout of the NPT but a 'good' proliferator, has been rewarded with supplies of technology and material under its nuclear co-operation deal with the US. Likewise the stationing of US nuclear weapons in five European countries despite the objections of the public in some of them is justified as 'nuclear sharing'.

A new dimension is the possible acquisition and use of nuclear weapons by terrorist groups, which, while being frighteningly real, is another form of proliferation that the NWS have seized upon to distract attention from their own nuclear weapons -which, of course, have no conceivable military value in combating terrorism. The fundamental issue is that nuclear weapons are inherently dangerous in anybody's hands.

This upstairs/downstairs division of responsibilities between nuclear have's and have-not's is also pernicious in masking the reality that disarmament and non-proliferation are two faces of the same coin. They have to be mutually-reinforcing parallel processes.

The emergence in the 20th century of nuclear weapons as the most destructive weapon of mass destruction and terror marked a watershed. This weapon proved to be vastly more

destructive of human life with long-lasting ecological and genetic effects. Thus the elimination or control of nuclear weapons became the priority of the UN and the international community.

Bilateral treaties between the two largest NWS (US and Russia, which hold an estimated 95 percent of these weapons) and multilateral treaties banning nuclear tests (the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty or CTBT) and proliferation (NPT) have sought to regulate their vertical and horizontal proliferation. So have the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties forged by non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). It is estimated by SIPRI (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) that today there are more than 23,300 nuclear warheads in the world and that the US, Russia, UK, France, China, India, Pakistan, and Israel have 8,392 deployed warheads ready to be launched within minutes.

The normative structure with regard to all weapons has two aspects. One is to seek universal bans on inhumane weapons or particular categories of weapons for humanitarian and collective security reasons. The other is to seek arms control in terms of levels of arsenals or prevention of new possessors. Disarmament requires verifiable destruction of existing weapons, cessation of production, sale, storage, transfer, or acquisition.

Thus the outlawing (as distinct from limitation or reduction) of biological and chemical weapons, anti-personnel land mines, cluster munitions, laser weapons, and other categories has been achieved globally even though the multilateral treaties negotiated for these purposes may not be universal and their verification is not always reliable.

The one treaty which attempts a combination of disarmament and arms control is the NPT, which is the world's most widely subscribed to disarmament treaty. It openly accepts two categories of state parties -- the NWS and the NNWS.

NWS are obliged, as treaty parties, to negotiate the reduction and elimination of their weapons. NNWS are totally forbidden to acquire such weapons and the International Atomic Energy Agency is empowered to enter into arrangements with them when peaceful uses of nuclear energy are involved.

As far as arms control is concerned, NWS are permitted to retain their weapons with the restraints that apply through other bilateral and multilateral treaties. But instead of fulfilling their obligations under the NPT, the NWS are trying to impose more restrictions on the NNWS in preparation for the May 2010 NPT Review Conference by seeking to limit the Article X right to withdrawal and to impose new conditionalities for the Article IV right to their peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The discovery of Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapon programme in the early 1990s; the withdrawal of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from the NPT and its subsequent nuclear weapon tests; the acknowledgment and rectification of Libya's non-compliance; the persisting questions about a reported Syrian nuclear reactor destroyed by Israel; and the continuing tensions over Iran's nuclear programme have certainly weakened the NPT as a non-proliferation instrument.

At this juncture, only a reunification of the disarmament and the non-proliferation approaches can save the treaty. – © COPYRIGHT IPS

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