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The Importance of Framework Conditions

Abolishing Nuclear Weapons is certainly the most comprehensive and well-thought-out paper on nuclear abolition I have read. Even so, I have two major "macro-arguments" on which, it appears to me, the authors have not put enough emphasis, even though traces of both can be sensed in their narrative. The first one is the overwhelming need to create and maintain cordial great-power relations. This is an extra-disarmament, extra-proliferation political consideration that affects the mere possibility of moving toward abolition in any promising way.

The second is the path-dependency of the process of disarmament. The actors in a disarmament process will change the conditions of the basis on which they act as they go along. The last steps will occur—if and when the path up to then has been successfully walked—in a vastly different environment from the one in which the journey started. Neglecting this social dynamic in the disarmament process leads, on the one hand, to overconfidence in predicting or prescribing specifics of the end stage from today's vantage point. On the other hand, it tends to define obstacles for this last phase, which, by the time it arrives, might have gone away.

These two thrusts of criticism address various elements of the Adelphi Paper's framing, premises, and suggested ways around obstacles.

The Need for Great-Power Concert
We can conceptualize an abolition process in three stages: The first would revive the basic principles and instruments of nuclear arms control and

multilateralize them as appropriate in order to establish stability and predictability among the nuclear-armed states; create upper levels for their weapons holdings; install, step by step, transparency to enhance confidence that such upper levels are indeed observed; and keep, throughout this initial process, trust in states' second-strike capabilities. The second stage would reduce arsenals to very small numbers, possibly around one hundred or slightly below. Sophisticated strategies of deterrence and nuclear use would shrink to "existential deterrence." Transparency would apply incrementally to the entirety of the nuclear weapon complex. The risk of sudden attack would be further reduced by significant measures of de-alerting (of which we might see some in the first phase as well). The third and last phase, then, would mean going from there to true abolition.

Throughout the process, progress would depend on two prerequisites: first, a basic—and increasing—confidence among the nuclear-armed states that there was no malevolent intention of one against another within their group. The phrase we have heard frequently over the past ten years—that the great powers are enemies no more—must obtain actual meaning and be bolstered by tangible changes of policy and strategy. Second, progress would depend on the capability of the international community to deal with spoilers—either the case of a single nuclear-armed state that does not abide by its undertakings or, alternatively, a non–nuclear-weapon state embarking on a nuclear weapon program. In either case, the process toward abolition could be continued only if the nuclear-armed states (and non–nuclear-weapon states with, or close to, great-power status) were to maintain political unity in effectively confronting the rule-breaker and take determined steps to prevent the process becoming derailed. (If the rule-breaker were a nuclear-armed state, the others would have to rally unity against it). These steps might, *in extremis*, include joint military action.

Obviously, neither prerequisite can be met if there is deep conflict among the great powers or if they have reason to distrust the intentions of their peers. That would be the case if the great powers were engaged in a serious power competition, based on the fear that their rivals would not accept either their equal status or even their vital security interests. Given that we are probably in the course of a power transition from the transatlantic area to Asia, this risk is particularly high.[1] In such an environment, nuclear weapons would probably be seen as necessary to protect national security against unpleasant surprises and probably also as instruments to bolster strategic positions around the world. It is also obvious that the unity of purpose in dealing with rule-breakers could not prevail. Great powers would eagerly look around for allies, and would-be

proliferators might be ideal bridgeheads to use against great-power competitors. By the same token, an attempt by one of them to bring the rule-breaker to terms through force might be counted as geopolitical gain but also would provoke opposition to such action to preserve the integrity of the spoiler. In other words, the security environment heavily affects the circumstances under which compliance and enforcement policies, as discussed in the Adelphi Paper, could succeed.

It is thus urgent to provide a security environment, one that is strategic as well as institutional, to prevent the repetition of great-power rivalry in the classical sense. One such environment is the Great Power Concert, modeled after the Concert of Europe, which kept peace among the great powers in Europe for more than a generation after the Napoleonic wars.[2] The concert relies on relatively simple principles:

- All participating powers recognize each other as equal.

- All renounce military strategies resting on superiority and overwhelming offensive power.

- All respect the vital interests of all others and avoid intruding on them. These vital interests include a secure regional environment for each of them.

- All practice permanent consultations on issues of common and global concern.

- All renounce the unilateral use of force.

- All agree that the network of consultation is immediately intensified when crises loom.

- None seeks unilateral advantages in such crises.

In contrast to the classical concert, and with a view to help prevent crises, all participating powers would have to agree to respect the integrity of smaller powers that abide by international law. This is, of course, essential to preclude incentives for smaller powers to acquire nuclear weapons.

The historical concert was successful for a generation because the leadership of the major powers agreed on the rules, practiced them in a dense process of conferences and ambassadorial consultations, and showed

moderation and restraint when it counted most—in international crises, including those that were caused by internal upheaval in smaller states. They carefully avoided stepping on the toes of their peers and developed a considerable degree of empathy for the ways in which their partners defined their vital interests. All this proved possible in a group of states with very different constitutions, ranging from the relatively liberal (Great Britain) to the thoroughly autocratic (Russia).

Today, international relations are a long way from this model. The foreign policies of the Bush administration have destroyed to a large degree the basis for such a concert, which was clearly possible in the years following the end of the Cold War. If any further proof were needed, it was provided by the Russian-Georgian conflict. It is essential that as the first steps are taken in the narrower field of nuclear disarmament, great efforts be made simultaneously to move toward political cooperation among the great powers. It is unlikely that this could be done in the United Nations Security Council anytime soon because of the intrinsic difficulties of bringing its membership up to date, so the best way to proceed might be by enhancing membership of the G8, at least by adding China and India, making the consultation process more permanent, and enlarging the agenda.

These considerations might have consequences for a couple of points made in the Adelphi Paper. For instance, it obviously affects the considerations on "societal verification." While it is right for information stemming from nongovernmental actors to be used by the International Atomic Energy Agency—something that is already granted through the 1992 decision of the Board of Governors—it is quite a different thing to try to institutionalize it. The status of nongovernmental actors is different in full democracies, semi democracies and undemocratic states. To obtain the assent of China or Russia to institutionalize a verification system that recognizes nongovernmental actors is a nonstarter. Burdening the disarmament process from the beginning with such systemic antagonism would obviate the chance to establish the urgently needed concert. It is thus much better to keep things as they are.

The Disarmament Process and Path-Dependency

In social and political affairs, outcomes are not just the product of initial conditions. They depend very much on the process that leads from here to there. The social and the political are in a permanent evolution. As conditions change, so do the structures of opportunity. New options, unthinkable at the beginning, become a serious possibility. The dynamics of such a process were apparent in the last phase of the Cold War. When

the Soviet Union admitted observers to its military maneuvers in a politically binding way for the first time in the Stockholm Document of 1986, every expert noted that this was a momentous change but none predicted, at the time, that it would end in German unification. Yet the process that followed created, step by step in the interplay between political and arms control changes, the conditions in which unification became not only a real opportunity, but the right thing to do and, eventually, a necessity. This process was unusually short considering the seminal change it brought. We conceive of the disarmament process in notably longer horizons—a generation or longer. It is all the more problematic, therefore, to try to be very specific about the last few steps. This concerns various considerations in the Adelphi Paper with particular weight on two points: the issue of "virtual arsenals" and the proposed study by research institutes on the conditions needed for a nuclear-weapon–free world.

Virtual arsenals, if meant as a fixed end state of disarmament, are a bad idea. The concept is a response to the current concerns of today's nuclear-armed states. Yet no one today could have any idea whether these concerns will exist in the final phase. By fixating on virtual arsenals as an end state, two little monsters would be created that would ultimately prevent abolition. First, virtual arsenals reinforce the mentality that nuclear war is possible at any time. This mental state is poisonous for the development of a "security community,"[3] a relationship between the major powers in which the idea of a struggle for primacy—which necessarily involves the permanent risk of war—is replaced by one of joint stewardship for world security, in which war between great powers is considered unthinkable. The belief in the possibility of war means strong hedging against other players cheating. This, in turn, necessitates maintaining the ability to move very quickly from virtual to real arsenals and could precipitate a race in hedging moves that, step by step, would destroy the social fabric of trust on which abolition must be based. Hedging races can become highly unstable if parties suspect that their rivals are one turn of the screw closer to usable weapons. The risk of a first strike might loom larger in this dynamic than it ever did during the Cold War. Second, virtual arsenals need arsenal-keepers, as the Adelphi Paper rightly notes. As is known all too well, these keepers are not disinterested technical experts, but rather form a social entity with its own interests—and these interests are contrary to abolition. The keepers would demand more resources, push for the hedging race, and probably favor a return from virtual arsenals to real ones. Based on what we know from past and present nuclear complexes,[4] this would be a predictable feature of the final phase if virtual arsenals are part of the picture.

Virtual arsenals, thus, should never be conceived as the end state. One may explore whether they would be a useful transitory stage on the way to a more genuine zero. This would certainly require a clear and unambiguous plan for how virtual arsenals would be built down at the end.

The suggestion to create a study project conducted by a group of research institutes on the conditions of a nuclear-weapon–free world is, for reasons that should by now be obvious, an impossible task and probably not a very good idea, even though as the director of a research institute with related expertise I sympathize with it. We would work on the basis of our present environment. All of us in research institutes are creative, so we would probably draft more daring and foresightful schemes than anybody else would. Nevertheless, we would still be the captives of our experience and present conditions. This, in turn, might lead to ideas and prescriptions that reflect our cautiousness—something that might be quite appropriate under present circumstances but that would work as a barrier under future circumstances that could be markedly different. At best, any thoughts would be pushed aside as hopelessly obsolete; at worst, they would be used by foes of disarmament progress to block the way forward.

Conclusion: What Next?

I take "What next?" to be a question directed not at the political practitioner but at the expert and research institute manager with a view to developing the knowledge and ideas that are needed to help the abolition process advance. I see four major issues where some work might be useful to help policy makers find ways forward:

- Exploring the relationship between establishing a solid, universal verification system for a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and preparing the basis for nuclear archeology of fissile material production in countries that lack adequate safeguards. This might also present an inroad into the difficult problem of how to deal with existing stocks in a FMCT.

- Devising ways to handle tactical nuclear weapons, especially addressing the double difficulty of taking into account the security concerns that induce Moscow to rely more on substrategic weapons while recognizing the anxieties of a group of NATO members (Turkey, the Baltic States, and Poland) that want to stick to existing defense arrangements to alleviate their own concerns.

- Developing suitable "capping" concepts for the arsenals of the smaller nuclear-armed states that help to create a multilateral framework for future nuclear-arms reductions while addressing their national security concerns.

- Devising limits to missile defenses (including space weapons) that respect the need for secure second-strike capabilities for the time being, and exploring the technical, legal, and economic possibilities of moving from national to universal missile defense.

For the midterm, I see the possibility of looking far ahead but without spoiling the process by fixing strategies that should be subject to continuous adaptation because of changing circumstances. I would build on the authors' idea of an investigation by research institutes but would try to change the approach. I suggest that two standing groups be established (at best their structure would be double-tracked): one on verifying a nuclear-weapon–free world, and one on compliance and enforcement. The groups would remain in place for the whole abolition process (probably with changing membership) and would work on "rolling texts" that would be changed as appropriate, given changing conditions. This kind of arrangement would permit permanent work to proceed on blueprints that point into the future, while avoiding the risk of freezing a concept bound to particular, obsolete historical circumstances.

Notes

1 Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke, Allan C. Stam III, Carole Alsharabati, Mark Andrew Abdollahian, Brian Efird, and A. F. K. Organski, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

2 Carsten Holbrad, *The Concert of Europe* (London: Longman, 1970).

3 Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

4 Janne Nolan, "The Next Nuclear Posture Review?" in Harold Feiveson, ed., *The Nuclear Turning Point: A Blueprint for Deep Cuts and De-Alerting of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999); Hugh Gusterson, *People of the Bomb: Portraits of America's Nuclear Complex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).