

Chapter 31

Promoting Nuclear Disarmament and Non-proliferation in Parallel



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Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are two major missions of the global efforts in reducing nuclear dangers, and the international community has obtained significant achievements in these two areas in the past decades.

In the non-proliferation area, a global non-proliferation regime, in which the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a cornerstone, has established. With the comprehensive safeguards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the cooperation between the nuclear member states and non-nuclear member states of the NPT, this global non-proliferation regime has succeeded in slowing nuclear proliferation in this world.

With regard to nuclear disarmament, the United States and Russia have reduced a notable part of their huge nuclear arsenals through bilateral nuclear reduction mechanism. And multilateral co-operations have also made remarkable progress in promoting nuclear disarmament process, in which the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996 marked an important milestone.

Unfortunately, in recent years, we have been encountering pressing challenges and difficulties in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The rapid progress in North Korea's nuclear capability prompted serious tension between this country and the United States. In the meantime, the Iran nuclear deal is facing to be abandoned by the Trump administration. Both cases pose acute challenges to the international non-proliferation regime. With the strained US-Russian relations, there is little prospect for continued bilateral nuclear reductions in the near future.

Another big challenge is related to the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which was concluded months ago. This treaty, supported by over one hundred of countries, reveals the long concerns about nuclear dangers, representing a wish of eliminating nuclear dangers through a rapid disarmament approach. This treaty is also a reflection of severe division between nuclear-weapon states (NWSs)

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and non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWSs) on the issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The increasing tension between these two groups has cast a shadow over the future of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Facing these challenges, what should we do? Here I would emphasize two suggestions.

Firstly, in the non-proliferation field, we should improve and expand existing global non-proliferation regime, and design a more comprehensive initiative in preventing nuclear proliferation. A comprehensive initiative in non-proliferation would include measures not only strengthening the non-proliferation norms, enhancing IAEA safeguards and export control, imposing economic sanctions on proliferation activities, but also promoting diplomatic dialogues, providing economic aids, building security co-operation regimes and so on. Among these efforts, security co-operation arrangements are particularly important, and more attention and efforts are needed.

Decades of history of nuclear proliferation has demonstrated that countries pursue nuclear weapons for security or/and national prestige. Security concern is the primary reason for a country to pursue nuclear weapons. Without addressing security concerns, it's hard to remove the main motivation of developing nuclear capabilities.

Security assurances and regional security cooperation arrangements are desirable and necessary measures in easing security concerns of NNWSs. Unfortunately, the existing international non-proliferation regime lacks of security arrangements. Under the NPT framework, the NNWSs have been pursuing legally binding security assurances from the NWSs for decades, but the NWSs failed to meet these requests. For addressing regional proliferation, some kinds of regional security co-operation arrangements are crucial. But so far there have been no any security arrangements in the concerned regions such as Middle East and Northeast Asia. Undoubtedly, security assurances and regional security arrangements are the most fundamental measures for preventing proliferation. So we need more active efforts in this regard.

Secondly, in the disarmament field, we should further nuclear reductions and multilateral arms control, and develop a step-by-step disarmament road map.

The balance in nuclear deterrence between major powers serves an important role in maintaining international strategic stability, and no other alternative is available currently. Therefore in the foreseeable future, the world still needs nuclear deterrence to maintain international strategic stability.

Actually, the maintenance of strategic stability is not directly related to the amount of nuclear weapons. Strategic stability can be maintained either at a high level of amount of nuclear weapons or low level of amount, with either symmetric nuclear capability or asymmetric nuclear capability. The key is to maintain mutual retaliation capabilities. So, maintaining strategic stability does not necessarily require nuclear reductions. However, the higher level of nuclear arsenal a country has, the higher cost and the more difficulties it will face in maintaining the arsenal. Therefore, it's relatively ideal for nuclear powers to maintain a balance of nuclear

deterrence with small scale arsenals, which means continued nuclear reductions in the world nuclear stockpile are meaningful for the nuclear powers.

In addition, given the serious situation of nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism, and considering the NNWS's dissatisfaction with the slow progress made by NWSs in disarmament, it's necessary for NWSs to continue to make commitments and take actions in disarmament to convince and mobilize more NNWSs to join the global efforts against non-proliferation and anti-terrorism. So we should promote nuclear disarmament process even for non-proliferation purpose.

Of course, nuclear disarmament can't be achieved overnight; step-by-step approach is the only sustainable solution.

A step-by-step approach could include reducing the nuclear weapons that exceed the basic need for minimum deterrence, reducing reliance on nuclear weapons in national security policy, addressing the issues related to missile defense and overcoming other obstacles impeding further reductions.

Because 90% of global nuclear stockpile are possessed by the United States and Russia, these two nuclear powers have the responsibility to lead in the nuclear reductions. It is hoped that the United States and Russia could overcome related obstacles to start negotiations for further reductions beyond the New START.¹

As for the United Kingdom, France and China, as their nuclear arsenals are at level of several hundreds of nuclear weapons respectively, only meeting the need for a minimum deterrence, there is less room for these three countries to reduce arsenals. Nevertheless, they should also join the multilateral arms control and disarmament process. As long as they stick to the minimum deterrence policy, observe moratorium on nuclear testing, and would join the negotiation for a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), they can also make contributions to the nuclear disarmament process.

More than that, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China, as the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (also known as the P5), have responsibility to double their efforts in leading the global nuclear disarmament process in a more concrete and practical way. I would suggest that the P5 make co-operation in this regard by discussing issues related to deep disarmament, such as the approach to maintain strategic stability with low numbers of nuclear weapons, the verification for deep disarmament, and so on. I hope they can design a road map for the step-by-step approach to deep nuclear disarmament.

To summarize, nuclear dangers and threats can't be eliminated in the near future, but can be managed well through global joint efforts. As two major missions in reducing nuclear dangers, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are inter-linked, mutually complementary and mutually promoted, and should be advanced in parallel. Nuclear dangers and risks could be minimized through maximizing global joint efforts in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

¹New START refers to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty which is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. It was signed on 8 April 2010, and entered into force on 5 February 2011.

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