

Getting Serious about Nuclear Disarmament

by Jonathan Dean

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Current Situation of Nuclear Disarmament

Next to war itself, nuclear weapons represent the greatest continuing danger to humanity, extending, at least in theoretical calculations, to the extinction of the human species. Viewed objectively, that danger appears to be increasing at this time.

Even those opposed to possible war in Iraq must admit that the Bush administration has energetically pursued the issue of possible proliferation of nuclear weapons to rogue states and terrorists. But the administration has done this unilaterally and at the cost of ignoring or even condoning the nuclear weapons activities of states which already possess nuclear arsenals. There is justified worry about the security of the Russian nuclear arsenal from theft and diversion. It is also a fact that Russia has revoked its no-first-use policy and has repeatedly failed to reach agreement with the United States on transparency exchange of information about the numbers and locations of each government's nuclear warheads. China, France, the UK, two recent proliferants, India and Pakistan, and Israel, a long-time proliferant, have joined the United States in the partnership against terrorism, and their nuclear arsenals are apparently viewed as benign, although, for one, India and Pakistan continue at loggerheads. The administration argues that both Iraq and Iran are moving toward development of nuclear weapons. North Korea has revealed itself as a two-time violator of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Obviously, the state of non-proliferation is not good.

Nor is the situation of nuclear disarmament. In the May, 2002 Moscow agreement, the U.S. and Russia agreed to take several thousand warheads off operational alert and to reduce the levels of deployed strategic warheads to about 2,000 for each country. But there is nothing enduring about this transaction. The reduced warheads will be stored for possible redeployment. There is no commitment to further reductions. Tactical nuclear warheads were not constrained or reduced.

For its part, the U.S. has annulled the ABM Treaty with its limit on the number of deployed missile interceptors, and is energetically pursuing a program of missile defense including ultimate weaponization of space. In the long term, these actions will result in increasing the nuclear arsenals of the other nuclear weapon states. U.S.-Russian negotiation in the Clinton administration to carry out monitored destruction of warheads withdrawn from operational deployment has been dropped. The U.S. has retained its own first-use policy and has lowered the nuclear threshold for possible use of U.S. nuclear weapons: The U.S. nuclear posture review submitted to Congress at the beginning of 2002 threatened use of nuclear weapons in response to the use of chemical and biological weapons and "unforeseen circumstances" and

broadened the circle of potential target states. The administration followed this action with a security doctrine which threatened preemptive attack, possibly including the use of nuclear weapons, on those preparing to attack the United States. In the 2002 Prepcom for the 2005 Review Conference on performance of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Bush administration representative indicated that the administration considered null and void commitments undertaken by the Clinton administration at the 2000 NPT review conference.

Of the eight known nuclear weapon states – U.S., Russia, China, UK, France, India, Pakistan, and Israel – only two, the U.S. and Russia, have accepted specific limits on the size of their deployed nuclear arsenals. The United States has refused to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and appears to be edging toward resumption of nuclear tests to develop earth penetrating warheads. There has been no progress towards a treaty to end production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

The evidence seems incontrovertible that the situation as regards nuclear proliferation and nuclear disarmament has seriously deteriorated and risks becoming even more serious.

Action Needed

If this situation is viewed rationally (rather than from the viewpoint of current political feasibility), then, logically, what is needed to cope with it is international action to get serious about nuclear disarmament while simultaneously tightening the non-proliferation regime for both nuclear and biological weapons. The dangers from chemical weapons appear more under control, given a relatively effective international regime and the very large amounts of chemical weapons needed for strategic attack, though dangers of small-scale, localized, terrorism remain. However, given greatly increased concern over the use of biological weapons, there is little prospect of gaining agreement to far-reaching moves on nuclear disarmament without dealing at the same time with the biological weapons issue by establishing a more effective non-proliferation regime for both types of weapons. At the same time, only serious moves of nuclear disarmament will make politically feasible this second action of tightening the non-proliferation regime.

Neutralizing Nuclear Arsenals

Nuclear disarmament might best be pursued through a program of “neutralizing” nuclear arsenals. Neutralizing nuclear arsenals can be achieved by reducing the national holdings of all known nuclear weapon states to a minimal residual force which is then immobilized by separating warheads from launchers and storing both under international monitoring on the territory of the owner state. The following individual steps are needed:

(1) The U.S. and Russia should agree to reduce their total arsenal of nuclear weapons to one thousand warheads each, this total to include all strategic and tactical, deployed and stored warheads.

(2) The two governments would agree to exchange full information on the nature, types, amounts and location of existing warheads and fissile material, to conclude a bilateral (later

multilateral), agreement to formally end production of fissile material for weapons, to dismantle all reduced warheads under bilateral supervision, and to turn over fissile material from these weapons to the IAEA for monitored secure storage.

(3) These actions would be dependent on agreement by the remaining nuclear weapon states – China, UK, France, Israel, India and Pakistan – to join in a system of nuclear controls, to include no increase agreements and exchange of information on their nuclear arsenals and their agreement to an international treaty ending production of fissile material for the nuclear weapons.

(4) In a second stage, all the nuclear weapon states would drastically reduce their nuclear arsenals to a level of 200 each total warheads for the NPT weapon states – U.S., Russia, China, UK, and France – and 100 each for India, Pakistan and Israel.

(5) Reduced weapons would be dismantled and the fissile material turned over to the IAEA for secure storage.

(6) Remaining arsenals would be placed in storage on the territory of the owner state and placed under multilateral monitoring, either by the IAEA, by mixed teams of owner state nationals, or by a combination of the two.

(7) Delivery systems – missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft – would be reduced and limited in conformity with warhead reductions in order to reduce the danger from concealed weapons.

(8) For the same reason, warhead storage could be in up to ten separate sites on the territory of owner states, which could be hardened and defended by owner state forces, including on-site missile defenses.

(9) Stored nuclear weapons could be withdrawn by the owner state in a situation of national emergency, but not without giving notice. Monitors would not seek to prevent reopening of storage sites, but would warn all other participants in the system if this occurred.

(10) If concern over possible cheating remains high, in order to further protect against the possibility of concealed weapons, each weapon state could be permitted to retain up to three operational warheads with an equal number of single warhead ground or sea launchers, sufficient for damaging retaliation against an offender, but not enough to launch decisive attack on another state.

(11) Weapon state governments would agree among themselves to retaliate jointly against any of their number or any other state or organization which used or threatened use of nuclear weapons.

(12) Also necessary is a more effective non-nuclear proliferation regime, to include compulsory adherence both to normal IAEA safeguards and to the additional (post-Iraq 1991) protocol of the IAEA, acceptance of the right of the IAEA to place sensors of all kinds on the

territory of member states, and agreement among all states parties to the NPT that efforts to avoid these requirements will be met with sanctions by other parties to the treaty, including the use of military force.

This system would make large-scale nuclear surprise attack, and accidental or unauthorized nuclear launch nearly impossible, as well as diversion of nuclear warheads or fissile material. It would be a giant step toward nuclear disarmament, representing the final stage of nuclear disarmament before elimination of nuclear weapons.

(13) This degree of nuclear disarmament would be possible only if there is effective control of biological weapons, including an effective compliance regime. Therefore, it could be accepted only if there were an agreed compliance system, including full transparency, for the Biological Weapons Convention, backed by explicit agreement among member states to take joint military action against violators as an integral part of the compliance regime.

(14) If there still is strong continuing concern about the possibility of non-compliance and concealed weapons after the steps described, it could also be agreed that, in the event there is evidence of non-compliance on either nuclear or biological control agreements, but the UN Security Council cannot agree on a course of remedial action, any five parties to the Treaty may take joint action against the offender. In these circumstances, insistence on retaining nuclear or biological weapon capability would be considered a greater evil than the use of armed force.

These steps and the greatly decreased possibility of use or threat of use of nuclear weapons they will bring will create the conditions, including greater cooperation among nuclear weapon states, dependable transparency, and enhanced effectiveness of the Security Council and the UN system, necessary for final and complete elimination of nuclear weapons.