1. The future of arms control and international security

Adam Daniel Rotfeld*

I. Introduction

It is a truism that today, with the end of the bipolar world order, the role of arms control and disarmament has changed fundamentally. The international security system based on bipolarity and mutual nuclear deterrence was one of high military threat and at the same time of relatively high stability. As a result, in the cold war period arms control and disarmament were seen as the highest priority in the policies of the global powers. Arms control was considered to be a pillar that supported strategic stability and maintained the balance of power between the superpowers and their respective allies. The predominant goals of traditional arms control theory, as developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was to enhance security, and the major powers shared an interest in avoiding global nuclear annihilation. These twin goals helped the powers to transcend their deep ideological and political differences and engage in a strategic dialogue. Thus the main objectives of arms control were to reduce the risk of nuclear war between the two great antagonists, maintain the equilibrium of forces, reduce the costs of the arms race, and seek to limit the damage should war occur.

Arms control has become connected and interrelated with disarmament. During the First Hague Conference, held in 1899, steps were taken that are regarded as the beginning of arms control in Europe. At that time the issue of disarmament was absent from the security agenda since the contemporary major powers saw armies as not only instruments of defence but also tools of conquest and imperial expansion. Since then the situation has altered radically.

Today, none of the European states is seriously threatened from outside. The quest for territorial expansion that, 60 years ago, was the main engine propelling the European arms race is no longer a determinant of states’ policies. In a nutshell, it is fair to state that interstate territorial conquest no longer determines the essence of conflicts in Europe.


* This chapter is a composite of the author’s preliminary draft and contributions by Ian Anthony, Shannon Kile and Zdzislaw Lachowski. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.
At the same time, however, the use of force to address territorial and border disputes still influences policies at the periphery of Europe and in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

With the profound changes that have taken place in the world, we are seeking answers to the questions: What is the importance of arms control today? To what extent does arms control help shape the international order? To what degree does it meet the challenges of the new reality?

The search for answers to these and other questions was the impetus for the convening of a group of prominent specialists, experienced politicians and negotiators at the symposium on A Future Arms Control Agenda, held on 1–2 October 1999 under the auspices of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and organized in cooperation with the Nobel Foundation. The views presented during the symposium discussions and the SIPRI Arms Control Survey are reproduced in this volume.

II. Arms control: a new scope, new goals

In the cold war period, the specific objectives of arms control were to monitor, manage and regulate the competition between the antagonistic blocs. Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin observed that arms control ‘involves strong elements of mutual interest in the avoidance of a war that neither side wants, in minimizing the costs and risks of the arms competition, and in curtailing the scope and violence of war in the event it occurs’. In practice arms control did not tackle the roots of conflict—whether the central competition between the superpowers or conflicts between other parties. Arms control also assumed that the main actors in international relations and armed conflicts were and would continue to be states.

If, in theory, arms control embraced all types of armaments and all states, in practice it was dominated by discussion of nuclear armaments among a small number of states—and in many cases among only the two superpowers, which were concerned first and foremost with maintaining the stability of the strategic nuclear balance. Thus, participation in the arms control regime was restricted in the number of actors and the scope of discussions. Within the framework of the East–West confrontation, arms control had both a military and a political dimension in that since, where channels of communication were limited, the discussions, negotiations and agreements were often both the thermometer and barometer of the political climate.

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2 The SIPRI Arms Control Survey is reproduced in Part V of this volume. See also SIPRI, The Stockholm Agenda for Arms Control: Report based on the Rapporteur’s Statement at the Nobel Symposium on A Future Arms Control Agenda, 1–2 October 1999 (SIPRI: Stockholm, 1999), a publication inspired by the debate at the Nobel Symposium on A Future Arms Control Agenda. A draft of the report was presented by the members of the Nobel Symposium’s International Programme Committee, and all the participants in the symposium were consulted during the preparation of the report. It is reproduced in annexe B in this volume.

Security in the past was based on a balance of power, equilibrium of forces and parity. At the beginning of the 21st century neither balance nor parity exists in Russian–US relations, and this bilateral relationship is no longer the central point of reference for other states in the international system. Moreover, the world has seen the proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states, and other states are suspected of harbouring ambitions to develop or otherwise acquire them.

In the new circumstances, what might arms control come to mean? Whereas in English the term ‘arms control’ is interpreted to mean managing, administering or steering military capacities, in other European languages—French, German and Russian—the term is associated with increasing levels of knowledge about military capacities through verification, inspection and monitoring. At its broadest the term covers different forms of cooperation among states in military matters, particularly in the field of the limitation, elimination or reduction of weapons, their use and verification of arms-related agreements.

An important element of arms control in this broad sense seems certain to be transparency, that is, better knowledge and understanding of the true state of military capabilities in the world and their distribution. Outside Europe, many basic questions about the size and structure of national armed forces, the way in which they are organized and the economic resources devoted to maintaining them cannot be answered in a satisfactory way. In Europe, where an unprecedented network of overlapping transparency and confidence-building measures is in place, there are certain subregions where levels of information are inadequate. As the military capacities of non-state actors have become a more significant element of the discussion of international security, so has the realization that levels of knowledge about armed formations of this type are even more inadequate.

A second element of arms control is likely to involve safeguarding many past achievements. The main merit of previous arms control agreements was that they created a situation that facilitated peaceful transformation in Europe and in the rest of the world. Along with the treaties on the elimination of intermediate-range nuclear weapons and the reduction of strategic nuclear weapons, these agreements include: the system of rules and export controls designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon-usable material, of which the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) forms the legal basis; substantial reductions of conventional armed forces and manpower in Europe (the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe—CFE Treaty—and the 1992 CFE-1A Agreement); the system of confidence- and security-building measures, including the 1992 Treaty on Open Skies and the advanced inspection and information exchange mechanisms; the total elimination of chemical weapons (the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention); and the elimination and prohibition of anti-personnel landmines (the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mines Convention).

These and other agreements have enabled the elimination of more than 60 000 heavy conventional weapons in Europe and in the Asian area of the
former Soviet Union on the basis of accords reached in peacetime, not imposed by the victors on the vanquished. In recent years, a total of 20,000 nuclear warheads have been dismantled; thus their number was reduced from some 58,000 to 38,000. The process of destroying chemical weapons has been launched, although, because of the costs, it will last longer than expected.

Despite these accomplishments, there remains much ‘unfinished business’ on the arms control agenda.

First, with the exception of the NATO and European Union (EU) member states, the security of the territories extending ‘from Vancouver to Vladivostok’ is not based on a collective, common or cooperative security system. Threats and armed conflicts have moved to Europe’s peripheries (the Balkans and the Caucasus) and to Central Asia.

Second, neither the continuous step-by-step reduction of nuclear weapons in those states that possess them nor diminishing the likelihood that new nuclear weapon states will emerge can be ensured at present.

Third, the legally binding ban on nuclear explosions has yet to enter into force, amidst signs that the no-testing norm codified in the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty is not universally accepted.

Finally, the level of confidence in the implementation of treaties and agreements to eliminate biological and chemical weapons remains low in many quarters.

Different approaches to arms control

Against this background, it is possible to discern three broad approaches to arms control, as reflected in the discussions at the Nobel Symposium. One group of analysts and practitioners has argued that fundamental changes in the existing arms control framework should be avoided. Radical changes could put at risk existing processes that are not yet completed without any assurance that a new framework can be constructed to substitute for them. In the view of this group, the future of arms control will consist of implementing, strengthening and further developing existing agreements and processes.

A second group of analysts and practitioners accepts the objectives of the current arms control agenda but argues that these objectives cannot be realized through existing agreements and processes under the present conditions. An extension of this view is the argument that focusing narrowly on existing agreements in conditions where political relations are strained may diminish security by amplifying disagreements. The impact of the debate over the relationship between the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) and missile defences on relations between China, Russia and the USA could be pointed to as an example. For this second group, arms control processes need

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4 There are of course other views of arms control which were not represented at the Nobel Symposium. See, e.g., Schlesinger, J., ‘The demise of arms control?’, *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2 (spring 2000), pp. 179–91.
to be supplemented by other types of political, economic and even, under certain conditions, military initiatives if the objectives of arms control are to be achieved.

Finally, a third group of analysts argues that the current objectives of arms control processes are too narrow and fail to address new challenges and problems that represent the primary threat under the new international conditions. For this group, the arms control agenda should be expanded to include more types of weapons (small arms and light weapons), more types of equipment (non-lethal ‘high technology’), more issues (humanitarian issues, economic issues and governance issues) and more actors (international organizations and non-governmental actors). In their view, this widening of the arms control agenda is a paramount task, even if the consequence is that existing processes are scaled back or discontinued to release resources for reallocation.

III. Current problems and new challenges

The different approaches to arms control described above are not mutually exclusive. The task of finding common ground among the groups supporting them will be facilitated if arms control can make progress in solving problems, demonstrate its relevance to the new security environment and adapt itself to new challenges.

The central problems of arms control today

The central problems facing the arms control process at present can be summarized as follows.

Defining the role of the major powers

First, there is the problem of deciding who are the ‘players’ that need to be assembled at the table when arms control is discussed. Arms control traditionally has been the preserve of those states that possess the weapons. It has depended on the ability of major powers to work together in pursuit of particular objectives. The cold war demonstrated that arms control does not require that the interests and policies of these powers are aligned, but there has to be a willingness to cooperate.

The special role assigned to the United Nations Security Council in matters of peace and security and the fact that the five NPT-defined nuclear weapon states are permanent members of the Security Council tended to cement the impression that military power and major power status were two sides of the same coin. However, other states now claim to have a legitimate stake in the arms control process without either being in possession of extensive military capabilities or intending to develop such capabilities. The exclusion of countries such as Germany, India and Japan from a central place in discussions of
issues affecting global peace and security may undermine the credibility of those discussions. While each of these countries will react differently to the fact of its exclusion, no doubt they will all react in some manner.

In addition, there is an important new actor on the international scene for which arms control is a crucial concern. With the establishment of the EU in 1993, a group of states (moreover, a group that is expected to expand in number) are developing, step-by-step, a more integrated approach to foreign and security policy that is likely to become increasingly influential in the future.

Need for a new organizing principle

A second problem arises from the need to consider the organizing principle for arms control in conditions where there is no longer any meaningful balance or symmetry between military capabilities.

Past treaties usually conferred equal obligations and status on participating states in line with the principle of sovereign equality. This often translated into a carefully calibrated balance in numbers of agreed items that were the objects of control. This balance may have been set at zero in the framework of disarmament treaties or at higher levels in other agreements. This organizing principle no longer applies at the global level, given the power of the USA. Moreover, agreements based on parity are not feasible at the regional level. They may not even be applicable at the subregional or bilateral level, where ‘dyads’ at the centre of conflict and instability have very different force structures and force levels.

Responding to non-compliance

A third major problem for arms control is the need to develop responses to unambiguous evidence that some states are cheating on their legally binding obligations and commitments. Cheating does not include inadvertent or accidental failures to implement an agreement or differences of interpretation about the obligations contained in an agreement. These issues are important but manageable within the framework of arms control processes because the good faith of the parties is not disputed. Rather, cheating means that a state promises to take a course of action while at the same time intending to behave in ways known to be proscribed and that violate the basic principle of the agreement.

None of the main ‘compliance crises’ revealed in the 1990s—the Iraqi violation of its NPT commitments, the North Korean violation of its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the Soviet violation of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention—has been fully resolved. This fact remains a serious problem and has contributed to undermining the international community’s confidence in the efficacy of multilateral arms control instruments.
The challenges of the post-cold war period

After the end of the cold war the progressive downgrading of the importance attached to arms control and disarmament reflected the reduced emphasis on strategic and politico-military matters. In the 1990s greater priority has been given to a range of questions in the economic, financial, constitutional, environmental and social spheres. In the absence of a greater recognition that the international security system will not run on ‘auto-pilot’ without engagement from senior leaders, there is a risk that, over time, strategic and politico-military issues will play a negative role in international relations.

The current situation may bring us to the paradoxical conclusion that nuclear weapons are gaining in importance not only in Asia but also in the northern hemisphere. Concerned with the high technology of the Western world and its advantage in conventional weapons, Russia places increasing emphasis on its nuclear potential. This is the leverage by which, as Russia’s new military doctrine and new national security concept of January 2000 bear witness, it seeks to restore its world power status. Members of the Atlantic Alliance and the EU that engage in peace-enforcement operations far from their countries may find nuclear weapons a future guarantee of their security.

The relatively easy availability of nuclear dual-use technologies to non-European states that also seek missiles that could deliver nuclear weapons makes the USA seek more effective defensive devices. The debate over military defences and the ABM Treaty (often called ‘the cornerstone of strategic stability’) risks becoming a proxy for a discussion about the distribution of power in the international system.

In Central and Northern Europe the priority is no longer defence in the traditional form but political and socio-economic preventive activities aimed at preventing and removing the sources of potential conflicts. However, of importance for arms control is not only the military restraint of states but also the role and implications of military collaboration and the creation of joint multinational units to respond to crisis situations.

Conflicts in the 1990s have demonstrated that small states and even non-state armed groups can accumulate offensive military capabilities that are formidable in the context of their specific strategic environment. These capabilities can be acquired covertly and their use can lead to a loss of control by the state over part or even all of the territory where it exercises legal sovereignty.

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IV. From deterrence to regulation

The new security environment presupposes a new role for arms control in the emerging international security system. For many states, effective arms control during the coming period will not be based on codifying a balance of power but on shaping a cooperative security regime with regulatory means.

Although many politicians and military officers in Asia and Russia still assume that some balance-of-power arrangement could be engineered, this thinking is wrong because there are no states or group of states which could uphold such a balance. Neither China, Russia nor any other state can aspire to balance the power of the rest of the world. In turn, even if the EU strove to strike a balance with the USA in new technologies and modern armaments, it would not be able to do so. For the USA to try to translate its military predominance into a direct instrument of coercion would be counter-productive in terms of achieving its own primary objectives.

Another determinant of the new security premises today should be that states which deliberately violate the widely accepted principles and norms of the international system are bound to face political, economic and even military coercion to respect those principles and norms. The recent past has seen the imposition by force of respect for the rules and norms of international law. This includes the solidarity displayed by many states and organizations towards Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the introduction of UN peace forces in Macedonia and other states in several regions outside Europe. Finally, there was the NATO intervention in Kosovo.

This calls for rethinking some of the fundamental tenets of international law. With reference to human rights and the respect for minorities’ rights, the principle of sovereignty needs to be redefined. Sovereignty is often interpreted in an abstract and absolute way. The principles of non-intervention in internal affairs, territorial integrity of states and self-determination of peoples also call for deeper reflection. As far as the latter is concerned, the question arises whether the main form of implementation should be secession; if so, then what are the limits on the formation of new states, the number of which has grown more than three times since the signing of the United Nations Charter? If it is deemed advisable and legitimate to draw up a new principle of cooperative international intervention or principle of international solidarity, the situations in which this is necessary should be clearly identified, and procedures and mechanisms should be set for respecting proportionality and not inflicting unnecessary harm and suffering.6 Who would be entitled to take decisions and under which circumstances in cases where the Security Council has become

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hamstrung by a veto because of the political interests of one or more of its members?\footnote{Rotfeld, A. D., ‘Rethinking the contemporary security system’, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1999), pp. 2–5.}

In other words, arms control can play a significant role by becoming an integral part of the new international security system. However, it cannot be boiled down simply to international legal instruments (treaties and conventions); rather, it should constitute a part of security policy and defence at the national level and of conflict resolution at the global level. Treaties and conventions remain central because they provide clarity about the obligations of states and an institutional framework within which resources can be mobilized and organized. However, treaties and conventions need to be supplemented with a habit of dialogue and discussion that assists in making actions consistent with agreed norms.

The current binding normative order is the point of reference for seeking solutions that would tackle the challenges and situations of today and tomorrow. This normative order provides a platform on which to build but should not itself be placed in question. It must then be asked how the activities of those states which for different reasons have found themselves outside the current order can be regulated—in particular, how the world community should respond to the activities of states which violate important norms codified in arms control agreements to which they are not parties. Ways must be considered for including in the arms control process those states which have an eroding influence on it.

The states whose leaders believe that the current normative order is inadequate or even wrong will not participate in cooperative arrangements on an official level. However, individuals from this group of states can and should participate in the wider discussion of the role and impact of arms control. Moreover, in these states public information can play a valuable role in making possible a debate on the merits and demerits of cooperation. This discussion may lead those who are hostile to arms control to change their view. At the least it may induce them to formulate their objections to arms control clearly and explicitly. If these arguments can be shown to be weak or incorrect, this may help shape the views of undecided actors, leading them to engage in cooperation. If the arguments put forward by critics are correct, then they can be incorporated in a revised normative framework.

V. New priorities

In these circumstances, the SIPRI report presented at the Nobel Symposium on A Future Arms Control Agenda set out a new list of priorities with regard to arms control in the context of the emerging international security system.\footnote{SIPRI, *The Stockholm Agenda for Arms Control* (note 2), p. 1.}
1. **To initiate a focused dialogue on the political and strategic context in which arms control is being carried out.** While it is often said that the world has changed dramatically in the past decade, these changes are seldom reflected in political and legal decision making. It is particularly important to consider the implications of changes in the relative political, economic and military power of states. Against the background of a growing number of independent states and the emergence of new centres of economic growth and technological innovation, the arms control agenda needs to be responsive to the interests of a wider group of states.

2. **To revitalize the institutional framework for making and implementing arms control policy without assuming the primacy of any single institution.** Overemphasizing the legal dimensions of treaties at a time of rapid political change has proved to be sub-optimal as a means of achieving the broad objectives of arms control and disarmament. A mix of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral processes, including both politically binding and legally binding instruments, in the pursuit of agreed goals may prove to be a better way of building cooperative security.

3. **To organize the relations between major powers in ways that minimize the risk of war.** The major powers need to supplement their existing general commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes with strengthened consultation mechanisms, in particular in those regions and around those issues where their disagreements are the sharpest. Two issues that stand out are: (a) the need for a new security dialogue among the nuclear weapon states—in particular Russia and the USA—to coordinate nuclear plans and deployments in order to minimize the role of deterrence in their mutual relations; and (b) the need for a new security forum in North-East Asia to consider the implications of theatre missile defences and related nuclear issues.

4. **To engage the USA in the international system on the basis of responsible leadership within a common framework.** With the collapse of the bipolar security system, the entire concept of bilateralism in arms control had to change radically. A key part of the international political and strategic context of arms control is the enormous political, economic and military weight of the USA. If the USA is to continue to see a self-interest in multilateral cooperation (and it is only on this basis that US engagement can be ensured) then other states should accommodate many US interests in multilateral forums. The special position of the USA within the international security system has opened a new possibility for a more cooperative approach. This implies for the USA a more ambitious and integrated approach both to nuclear arms control and to control of other weapons of mass destruction than has been witnessed in the past. It requires a comprehensive scheme for the revitalization of the reduction and dismantlement process as well as for the prohibition of the production of fissile material for military purposes. It requires the acceptance of the new realities by the USA and of a new role for the USA based on the
mutual interests of the other actors. For the USA it means a need to consider arms control as an integral part of a broad conception of the US national interest. The failure to manage multilateral processes without US participation has spurred other states and organizations to make greater efforts to raise their capacities for individual and collective action. This is a welcome development, but it should be accompanied by continuous and structured dialogue between the USA and its partners.

5. To manage relations with the few states outside the normative framework for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons-related arms control and disarmament. Recent experience in North Korea suggests that relations with states that have placed themselves outside the normative framework for arms control by violating their commitments under existing arms control and disarmament treaties can be managed effectively outside the UN Security Council but under general Security Council authorization. Far from reducing cohesion among the permanent members of the Security Council, this more decentralized approach has made it easier to build a political coalition that engages not only the five major powers but also other relevant actors in a common search for a solution to the problem of compliance. By contrast, the attempt to manage the response to Iraqi non-compliance directly through the Security Council has amplified disagreements between the five permanent members. The criteria for Security Council membership do not necessarily facilitate participation by all relevant actors in a search for a common solution to the problem. The experience after the nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 suggests that managing relations with states that have chosen not to join the nuclear arms control regime would be facilitated by an informal but high-level multilateral dialogue on the role of nuclear weapons in national and international security. Such a dialogue may produce a new consensus that would have no direct legal implications, but it could provide a platform for progress in revitalizing existing nuclear arms control processes.

6. To establish a rule-based agreed framework for the legitimate use of force in the new security environment. The main priority of security policy should be to ensure peaceful political changes. However, with limited exceptions—notably in Western and Central Europe and in North America—the perception that the use of force ‘works’ continues to undermine the willingness of states to rely exclusively on peaceful means to resolve their political differences. An important priority in these conditions is to stimulate dialogue on the principles and organization of national military and paramilitary establishments. The dialogue should include discussion of the constitutional processes by which decisions are taken on the use of force as well the rights, tasks and duties of armed forces. Recent events in, for example, the former Yugoslavia and East Timor have underlined the utility of force as an instrument of political change in the eyes of sub-state or non-state groups with political objectives. The 1996 Florence Agreement on Sub-Regional Arms Control, which includes the constituent entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina as parties along with the states of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has demonstrated that it is
possible to regulate the military potential of sub-state groups with political objectives. General principles and practical arrangements that can regulate the military potential of sub-state groups should be elaborated through an informal international dialogue that includes the participation of representatives of sub-state armed groups.

These priorities reflect a pragmatic and informal approach. Arms control is not a value per se. It is part of the common and cooperative security system. The dimensions and rules of arms control are changing. These changes concern: (a) its military relevance; (b) its legally binding character; (c) the scope and content of the obligations undertaken; and (d) the verifiability of agreements. In this context, several issues remain open. The search for appropriate solutions calls for not only a revitalization of the institutional framework for reforming the existing arms control and security system but also a creative and unconventional approach.

The new arms control strategy is taking shape in an environment for which a functioning security system has not yet been worked out. As long as such a system does not exist, there will be no arms control strategy; it will be bound merely to react to specific situations. In short, an organizing principle for the new system is needed. The political philosophy of mutual assured destruction of the past should be replaced by a future-oriented concept of cooperative threat reduction which would tackle both conventional armaments and weapons of mass destruction. In the past, arms control became more effective and comprehensive when its political significance was on the wane. Today it can only gain significance if it constitutes an integral part of the emerging international cooperative security system.