

Disarmament, a Twentieth Century Myth?

Disarmament is the name given to a twentieth century myth. Unlike the Greek, Puranic or Biblical ones, this myth has evolved from a solemn endeavour by military strategists, diplomats, politicians, and men of massive military-industrial investments. Beginning as an illusion in the early years of this century, its crystallisation has been completed through the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, writes **Iftexhar Iqbal**

IN the year 1910, in his book, "Great Illusion," Norman Angell with the subtitle, "A Study of the Relation of Military Power to National Advantage," warned that military power is socially and economically futile under twentieth century conditions and that "war even victorious can no longer achieve those aims for which people strive." Subsequently this book was translated into twenty languages and the writer was bestowed with a Nobel Peace Prize — but history did not follow his rational explanation of reality. Irrationality triumphed as the First World War shortly commenced in full swing. After the War, serious talks on disarmament followed in many forums, in different forms and various circumstances, continuing till 1933 when Hitler ordered the German representatives to withdraw from the on-going international disarmament conference in Geneva.

Two major achievements in the inter-war period search for security and disarmament were the Washington Naval Conference (1921-22) and the Locarno Treaties (1925). While the Washington Conference dealt with Far-Eastern problems in the wake of Japan's increased militarism, the latter's concern was Germany and Europe. These two were initially hailed as milestones on the international politics of peace and security. Foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany received the Nobel Peace Prize, but the folly that precipitated another World War, which persists still now in a different form, was more active than the peace-awarding authorities in Stockholm.

The Washington Conference established a tonnage ratio for existing capital ships (defined as warships over 10000 tons carrying guns larger than eight inches) of 5:5:1.75:1.75 for Britain, the US, Japan, France and Italy respectively. The doors to other categories of armaments remained open. Such a common stand was needed because the USA and Japan had their stake in imperial application of their authority in China and elsewhere in the Pacific. Japan abandoned its unilateral quest and preferential rights in China in favour of a multilateral approach to retaining China under the sphere of influence. As a reward, Japan was assured by the US and Britain that they would not establish new naval bases in Hawaii and in Singapore and would leave Japan undisturbed. The subsequent history proved that this arrangement actually systematized armaments to smooth the path for imperial inroads into colonies and semi-colonies. Such a backdrop was exposed through the Franco-Italian friction following the French insistence that the necessity to divide the French fleet between the Mediterranean and the Oceanic routes to the French empire in Africa and Asia entitled her superiority in auxiliary craft such as cruisers and submarines (Keylor, 1992:149). Moreover, not genuine search for peace but post-war economic recession resulting in inability to produce massive weaponry dictated this conference.

Locarno Treaties made Germany's western frontiers inviolable which secured France and Belgium. Other provisions and omissions encouraged German armament and aggressive tendencies, and Germany was virtually relieved of the Versailles-imposed disarmament obligations. Inter-Allied Military Control Commission which was intended to supervise the German disarmament program was reduced to a token institution by cutting its power and members (observers) at the request of Germany. On October 14, 1933 Sir John Simian, on behalf of Britain, France and the USA proposed a four year transitional period designed to meet Germany's demand for equality in arms. With the acceptance of this proposal Germany lawfully joined the arms bandwagon. Why this disastrous symmetry in armament was allowed to take place is a much debated issue. But perhaps the most obvious backdrop was presented in the Observer (September 16, 1962) by former British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home who was the private parliamentary secretary of Neville Chamberlain in the 1930s, "I think the main thing to grasp is that Chamberlain, like many others, saw Communism as the major long term danger. He hated Hitler and German Fascism, but he felt that Europe in general and Britain in particular were in greater danger from Communism."

Meanwhile in 1927 Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov proposed the immediate abolition of all armaments which was a step further to the original League of Nations contention (in Article 81) that the "members of the League recognize that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety." When Litvinov's proposal was rejected, he proposed the gradual abolition of all armaments which was also rejected. Later in 1932-33 the League of Nations sponsored conference on disarmament was held where the imperial powers fell upon themselves. US President Herbert Hoover proposed a reduction of armaments by one third which basically included smaller warships. But if carried out this would leave the USA unaffected as she had no such ships while Britain and Japan with huge number of them serving imperial interest would have to suffer strategic disadvantages. In fact they rejected the Hoover Proposal. Thus inter-war disarmament efforts were dictated by pro-imperialism and anti-communism which culminated in the greatest holocaust in history.

A Toothless United Nations

The Second World War left the world more vulnerable, more insecure than it was before. This is perhaps the first time in history when a great war was followed not by peace but by a great wave of tension, insecurity and bloodshed which had been termed the Cold War. The central anxiety focused on the spectre of nuclear war that followed the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Though in the Charter, which created the United Nations after the end of the war, the term 'peace' and 'security' abounds, the words 'disarmament' and 'possible disarmament' appear only once, respectively. The General Assembly is given the authority to "consider principle governing disarmament and regulation of armament" and "to make recommendation with regard to such principles to the members of the Security Council" (Article 12:1). But in the very next article it is emphatically made clear that, "While the

Security Council is exercising power in respect of any dispute or situation the functions assigned to it in the present Charter, the General Assembly shall not make any recommendation with regard to that dispute, or situation unless the Security Council so requests." In Article 47 the proposed Military Staff Committee was empowered to advise and assist the Security Council on the "regulation of armaments and possible disarmament." Ultimately, the Security Council was left with the duty only to regulate armament (not disarmament) and the original contention of disarmament allotted to the article was defeated. Furthermore there is a scope for the arms-loving countries to deconstruct the text of Article 26 by arguing that armament is an ordinary national affairs of the rich nations who could carry out armament programmes without the "least diversion of the world's human and economic resources." The UN Charter thus treats an effective ambiguity and contradiction that impaired the possibility of an universal arrangement for disarmament.

Charity Begins in Outer Space!

The UN's inherent incapacity did not stop staging of disarmament negotiations. Besides a UN-sponsored Conference on Disarmament and other activities between 1945 and 1963 when the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed, it has been estimated that 863 international disarmament meetings were held covering 17000 hours of alleged negotiations during which 18,000,000 words were spoken and "proposals and documents were piled higher than the Alps and the Rockies." However, after the Second World War in the late 40s, the prospect for fruitful disarmament became a strategic impossibility as the psychological threat of US success in nuclear empowerment, which Truman presented to Stalin in Potsdam (1945), was brought home by the latter. Therefore the USA's Baruch Plan, to form an International Atomic Development Authority intended to exert "managerial control over all atomic energy activities politically dangerous to world security," was not accepted by the USSR. She instead advocated for the total destruction of existing nuclear stockpile in three months time.

But when in September 1949 the USSR gave birth to its first nuclear bomb, the strategic parity with the USA came and finally she had her position of strength. From now on the USSR changed her stand and joined the arms race with the USA which by now had begun tireless testing of nuclear weapons. The first opportunity for denuclearization was carefully ignored. The USSR exploded a hydrogen bomb early in 1950s and launched Sputnik in 1957. It was in 1959 that the first post-war disarmament agreement was reached. From 1959 to 1996, more than twenty major arms control agreements were reached. An analysis into the nature, strategic contents and the space they created for fulfilling the very agreement they were designed to reach gives only a fuzzy picture. Among these agreements only one was truly a disarmament agreement which called for the destruction of biological, bacteriological, and toxic chemical weapons through the Biological Weapons Convention signed on 10 April, 1972. But this too proved to be merely a composing of good intentions as the USA declined to sign it and used such weapons in the Vietnam War followed several years later by the uses of chemical weapons by Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War.

All other agreements were arms control of a preclusive nature or of limiting it. This suggests that disarmament has never been an original agenda before the negotiators.

Towards CTBT

The movement for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was first promoted by the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954. In 1963 an attempt by Great Britain, the USSR, and the US to conclude the CTBT failed over the disagreement on the issue of verification mechanisms. Instead, they settled on a Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) banning explosions in the atmosphere, under water, and in outer space, keeping the underground open for testing. In the following years three treaties were concluded: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968), the Threshold Test Ban (1974), and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty. The highest positive results of these treaties was that the last one limited the size of an underground nuclear explosion to 150 kilotons. Meanwhile France and China continued testing in the atmosphere until 1974 and 1980 respectively.

After the end of the Cold War in 1993, countries represented at the Conference of Disarmament reached an agreement to "negotiate intensively a universal and multilateral and effectively verifi-

able Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which would contribute effectively to the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects to the process of nuclear disarmament and therefore to the enhancement of international peace and security." To this effect a draft resolution was submitted to the Security Council in August, 1996 simultaneously by Belgium and Australia. The resolution was overwhelmingly adopted on 10 September, 1996 by 158 votes in favour, 3 against (Bhutan, Cuba and India) and 5 five abstentions (Lebanon, Libya, Mauritius, Syria and Tanzania). CTBT will now enter into force in 180 countries after the date of deposit of instrument of ratification by 44 state members of the Conference on Disarmament that possess nuclear reactors or nuclear research facilities of the 44 states that are required to ratify the treaty. North Korea, India and Pakistan are yet to sign it, having propagated the theory that the morale of forbidding others from developing nuclear weapons can never get logistic footholds unless holders of one weapons exemplified their intention of reduction or elimination of the weapons.

Regional Conscience

Amid so much confusion, a sort of nuclear disarmament, however, took place in some regional platforms. The process started when South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Rarotonga, signed in 6 August, 1985) came into force on December 11, 1986. It prohibits the manufacture, acquisition, possession and control of nuclear explosion devices. Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and small adjacent territories bound themselves to the treaty. Two other treaties consisting of same bindings are the South-East Asia Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Treaty of Bangkok, opened for signature 15 December, 1995) and African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty (opened for signature on 11 April, 1986). Though the later two treaties are yet to be enforced, their strong condemnation of Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests is indicative of their commitment.

The Lost Case of Disarmament

As mentioned earlier, the inter-war disarmament efforts had failed. After the war, when world attention was focused on nuclear diatribes, a quite revolution was taking place in conventional armament. Sophisticated weapons of mass-destruction found smooth growth in terms of quality and quantity in most of the militarily superior countries of the world. While the two superpowers were undergoing a "Cold War" in their bid to prevent a nuclear war, they were sending arms and armies to various peripheries and at least 200 "Hot Wars" were taking place in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, but not, however, in the territories of the superpowers. These wars were more or less the side effects of the Cold War where ideologies sharpened the differences among groups or peoples, conflicts ensued, and a flood of arms came in from both the superpowers.

In fact, by 1960, the world was spending in real terms, five times as much for military purposes as in inter-war period. By 1986, the "Year of Peace," the armament expenditure had increased to \$900 billion or 12 times. Some 60 per cent of the weapons supplied to the Third World during the Cold War came from the US and the USSR, both of which were jointly responsible for 66 per cent of the global arms trade.

All that is why the term disarmament, in the Cold War period if seen in global perspective, proved to be merely rhetoric. All disarmament talks took place in Washington, Moscow, London, or Paris while so many people in the 'periphery' and 'non-Metropolitan' areas of the globe were sacrificing their lives by the weapons produced in the countries attending highly trumpeted summits.

Post-Cold War Scenario

For the optimists who hoped that after the Cold War all will be quite in the global front, realpolitik proved far more imperative than real concern for peace. In fact, the institutional framework of disarmament negotiations that gradually came to operate in the sixties, seventies and eighties fell apart. No major disarmament talk, except the 'paralyzed' CTBT, has taken place within or without the UN system. Rather an escalated pace of armament are in the offing. The USA has defined 27 key technological areas to ensure its military preeminence in space as well as incoming weapons capable of destroying satellites in space as well as incoming missiles. She plans to develop and deploy a multi-faceted anti-missile defense system after negotiating with Russia to modify the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty signed between the USA and the USSR in 1972. On the other hand, President Yeltsin had asked the

Duma more than once to ratify the Start II treaty which had been ratified by the USA in 1996. But the Duma has been shy in doing so because many members take it as a treaty intended to weaken Russia. They demand that it should be linked to NATO's eastward expansion and American development of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence System. Douglas Roche, a former Canadian MP and Ambassador for Disarmament, learned in a recent visit to Moscow that, "some politicians and militarists, concerned about Russia's crumbling conventional force structure, are once again talking of nuclear weapons as a vital link of defense for Russia" (Breakthrough News, January-August 1998, P 14).

Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea and a good number of other countries have been well into the armament business for a long time. In fact, the arms production, marketing, import and export is constantly receiving wide-ranging feedback from all over the globe. For an example, in 1995 the USA exported \$22 billion worth of arms accounting for 57 per cent of the world's total arms sales while in the same year, just after the signing of the CTBT by more than 175 countries in May 1996, China and France conducted nuclear tests. India and Pakistan's tests of May 1998 have strengthened the myth of disarmament. The situation regarding nuclear weapons in the world is at a critical stage. A full decade after the end of the Cold War, more than tens of thousands of nuclear weapons remain in poised. Even if Start II were ratified, at least 17,000 nuclear weapons would still remain in 2007.

"Who Shall Decide When Doctors Disagree?"

Peace is possible, so is disarmament. Even after so many wars, conflicts, and violence, Thomas Hobbes and his followers have not been fully able to justify their statement that "the condition of man... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone." Peace, rather than armed conflict and war, have been present most of the time in most places and predominates in human conscience. It is peace which is natural, armament and war which are irrational. The only problem is that the subtle, divine qualities of human beings and human societies seem to be subdued or in slumber. They need constant encouragement and pressure to help them come into their own. At the same time, the institutional frameworks promoting nonviolent conflict resolution which have evolved throughout the ages need to be revised and reformulated to correspond to the changing contexts in the modern world.

Coming up with common senses. Employment of high philosophy and critical cognitive procedures to reach a certain problematic may take time and accuracy may not be ensured. But common sense helps locate reality in a simpler way. By 1961, one expert concluded that nuclear weapons have become a thousand times more destructive than they were at the time of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that there is no victor in thermonuclear war. This was proven by the Chernobyl accident where at least five crore people have been affected and plutonium radioactivity will be active for next thousand years. Thousands of kilometres adjacent to Chernobyl are now practically uninhabitable for living creatures for a thousand years. Common sense speaks out that we humans are on a suicide squad. Unless we stop nuclear armament we are going to prove ourselves void of common sense, the minimum requirement for being human.

Understanding common injustice: We the citizens of the world are in a trap of injustice which is inherent in the armament process itself. The money spent on two B-2 bombers could have eliminated New York city's 1991 deficit. One bomb on a B-52, costing \$11,000 could run a clinic for 4,060 patients in Bangladesh for a month or set up a self-running medical supply system for a rural population of 100,000 (Tom Aston, "A Big Boost for Suppliers" World Press Review, April, 1991 P 12). US special fiscal for 1999 was set to spend nearly \$20 billion for so-called emergencies. Half was for extra defense spending including intelligence, and 700 million for anti-missile defence, whereas the administration was spending \$6 billions for agriculture, \$1.1 billion for education, \$7.1 billion for the IMF fund. On the other hand, many poor countries are spending a substantial portion of their GDP on defence. In 1991, North Korea spent 26.7 per cent of her GDP on defence. Many other countries in West Asia, Africa, and Asia are deep into the business. South Asia, the abode of millions of the poorest of the world's poor, imported 42.4 per cent of total arms exported to the Third World in 1989. At present India and Pakistan are busy in switching over from import line to production line. It has been estimated that 15 days of global spending on military arms and research is equivalent to one year of formal aid to developing countries (UNDP Human Development Report, 1992).

The question is: Do power-regimes of nation states possess the right to produce or procure export or import weapons, by the money of the tax-payers, the sole purposes of which is to kill human beings? If answer is negative then it may well be considered that the classical notion of the welfare state is jeopardized. And it is for the tax-paying citizens of the world to raise up against armament, otherwise they will diminish their own human rights.

Siding with the common man: Politics of peace that involve the common man from all strata of life are a key option. The Hydrogen Bomb test by Britain in 1954 led Bertrand Russell to found the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament Movement. He was imprisoned in 1961 for demonstrating outside the British Parliament against nuclear weapons. He could not bring difference to the ever-active armament programmes, but he for the first time in modern history demonstrated that power regimes could be hesitant, frustrated and a bit pensive over the issue of armament by the pressure of a mass civilian upsurge.

A dreary deja vu



Once it was their home



Trees are not spared, either



Man and machine against nature's fury



At the flood shelter in wait for the deluge to subside

After last year's devastating flood that had nearly two-thirds of the country submerged for more than two months, one must have hoped for a respite this time around. However, that was not to be. Heavy rain in the upper riparian India caused flash floods in Chittagong. That was only the beginning. As heavy downpour continued, more areas went under water. Breach in the Gumti embankment made matters worse. The Dhaka-Chittagong roadlink was snapped near Comilla. Despite fervent prayers of the whole nation, it was a nightmare revisited. Meteorologists say that a flood of last year's magnitude is highly unlikely. But their assurance means very little to those who are once again facing the wrath of nature. Anisur Rahman's camera arrested in frames the flood onslaught.