

# A southern view of arms control

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# A SOUTHERN VIEW OF ARMS CONTROL

by Onkar Marwah

*Die wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit strategischen Problemen globalen Zuschnitts einschliesslich Fragen der Abrüstung geschieht weitgehend aus dem Blickwinkel des Gegensatzes zwischen Ost und West. In diesem Beitrag wird versucht, diese Problematik aus der Sicht der Dritten Welt anzugeben.*

*La discussion scientifique à propos de problèmes stratégiques d'ordre global y inclus la question du désarmement se déroule principalement dans l'optique entre l'Est et l'Ouest. Cet exposé tente d'aborder cette problématique du point de vue du tiers monde.*

## **Introduction**

The control of arms is inevitably linked to the control and distribution of power. It follows that issues of peace and war and perceptions about conflict and cooperation among states condition approaches to arms control. As a consequence, the effort to control arms requires and has been tied to the reality of continued conflict rather than to an assumed utopia of total peace.

One might assume that peace and war are indivisible in an interdependent world. The fact is that in the intellectual stimuli governing 'realist' peace and conflict theories, and in prescriptive policies to reduce international violence, peace has been made divisible. More specifically, a condition of peace for the dominant subsystems of the world – which translates as the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies – is conceived as peace for all. Arms control, as currently understood, has been a function of the latter's conflicts, needs and mutual fears – particularly in terms of nuclear weapons – rather than an end in itself. Indeed, arms control has become, in the dialectics of today's major ideological conflicts allied with nuclear deterrence theories, a means to stabilize, maintain, rationalize, streamline, and where necessary increase, the arms already possessed in great numbers and destructive power by the two superpowers and their allies forming the dominant subsystems of the international system.

That a symbiosis of the preceding kind should exist between realist peace efforts, established international relations and nuclear deterrence theories, and the objectives of arms control, is not illogical. The avoidance of nuclear war concerns all states big or small, rich or poor. A balance of (nuclear) power vision will, however, concentrate on those states that can figure in the balance game, not on those who do not. Further, deterrence theorists may perform an excellent task in explaining the intricacies of superpower conflict scenarios – but they are not going to enlighten us within those theories with aspects and types of conflicts or the fears and concerns of non-nuclear states. Barring a few third world states – Brazil, China, India – few among the members of the South possess the potential, now or sometime into the future, to be able to resist the varied forms of 'interventionism' that is enjoined by the dominant subsystems' members as a consequence of their own conflicts, upon the rest of the world.

### **Location and incidence of interstate armed conflict in the postwar period**

Considering the structure of thought, inspiration and reality which advocates in the temperate zones of the world bring to international conflict, more than coincidence may explain the ensuing reality of peace and war in the postwar period. Of the 120 substantive wars waged in the past thirty-two years on the territories of seventy-one countries, all save five of the wars – those in Greece, Hungary, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia and Ireland – took

place in the countries of the South. Foreign armies participated in an overwhelming manner in 74 or 62% of the total of those 120 wars. Seventy percent of the total time and 83% of the overall war intensity was accounted for by those 74 wars. As regards major military-bloc 'representation' in those wars, the NATO countries intervened in 62 of those 74 wars outside of their territories, whereas the socialist states participated in five – with the addition of Afghanistan, six – of those wars in the developing countries.<sup>1</sup>

There is no automatic causal connection between the conditions of relative peace in Europe, and the thirty years of war waged in the poorer regions of the world. Indeed, many of the latter conflicts devolve from local disputes, boundary quarrels and internal confrontations among the Southern countries. It is equally true, however, that today more than ever, the global objectives of the superpowers and their allies ensure their continued, strong and frequently overwhelming participation in the wars of the poor – as witness the spreading war across Central America, and that incubating in Southern Africa.

### **Conventional arms and the Poor**

As a consequence, perhaps, of the continued conflicts in the poor regions and the propensity to further war and intervention, arms controllers in western countries have directed their attention to the inherent dangers in the scale of conventional arms transfers from the rich to the poor countries. On the face of it the concern and the objective – to reduce the transfers – are laudable policy norms. It so happens that in implementing policies, the reductions in arms transfers are not required to be applied to such states as appear fit for 'exclusion' from the restrictions – and those 'excluded' or 'included' in the restraints can change as the interests of the exporting states change, e.g., Iran, Pakistan, Somalia, Egypt, etc.

There are, of course, two parties to an arms transfer deal involving the rich and the poor states. Some among the latter – and not so poor – states may seek weapons from the rich based on their individual calculations of the national interest. The substantive fact is that the 'exceptions' by the major arms suppliers to arms-transfer restrictions make a shambles of their overall policies. Least of all can such continued 'exceptions' convince other third world states of good faith attending the implementation of policy, or permit them to gamble with reductions of their own defence-related expenditures.

In global terms, the military expenditures in 1980 of the NATO, Warsaw Pact, other European states, China and Japan, accounted for 84% of the total. The whole of the South accounted for 16% of world military expendi-

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see, Istvan Kende, "Dynamics of Wars, of Arms Trade and of Military Expenditure in the 'Third World', 1945–1976." *Instant Research on Peace and Violence*, 2/1977, 58–82.

tures. Of the latter percentage, 15 Middle Eastern countries contributed 8% or approximately half of total third world expenditure, 16 Far Eastern countries excluding Japan accounted for 4% – and the remaining 90-plus developing countries provided a bare 4% to the global expenditure on arms. Major third world states such as Brazil, Argentina, India, Pakistan, Nigeria fell within the last category of third world states. These figures clearly indicate that over 70% of the military spending of the third world is concentrated in West Asia and the Far East – areas in both of which the superpowers and their allies remain heavily involved, and where the provision of weapons is not entirely dependent on the unilateral choice of the purchasing state. It is further worth pointing out that 90% of the world's arms sales are made by just six countries, all of them either members or quasi-members of NATO, or the Warsaw Pact countries – the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>2</sup>

It is not often that the data on world military expenditures and sales are disaggregated in the preceding manner. Nor is it ever shown that, in reality, the conventional arms race between the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries – and based upon their own divisions and demands upon the rest of the world – also stridently drives the arms race among the poor states. Given the capital intensity and technological sophistication of modern conventional weapons – and their quick obsolescence – two other forms of impact follow upon the purchasing countries. One, the “systems” nature of modern armaments ensures that the purchaser is locked into ‘improved’ versions of the weapons from the same vendor. Two, that, given the technical immaturity of most third world countries, military training missions and advisors from the vending country arrive to develop a corps of local handlers of the weapons – and to forge links with the military elite of the purchasing country.

It is also puzzling as to why the available data on arms sales does not include a monetary evaluation of the real, permanent but unheralded transfers of conventional arms among allied developed states. While nominally indicated as of the magnitude of 3-to-4 billion dollars, the actual value of such developed-country-to-developed-country transfers is substantially greater and exists in the form of silent and automatic licensed arms manufacture agreements. A monetary reckoning of such licensed production-runs of sophisticated conventional weapons needs to become part of the open literature on the international trade in weapons. It would then be possible to follow arms sales trends in the developed and the developing parts of the world and to seek curbs wherever they are due. Until a common set of measures is devised for application to both the advanced and the developing regions, generalised laments directed exclusively at the “arms trade with the third world” will appear discriminatory and unconvincing to the countries of the South. It would seem equally necessary to codify the re-

2 Collated from *SIPRI Yearbooks* by the author.

straints and assure all states against abrupt changes to their detriment in the exporters' policies – especially since the number of exporting nations is so few, and the real majority of them members or quasi-members of NATO.

### **Nuclear weapons and the Poor**

The debate over which countries have a 'legitimate' right to possess nuclear weapons and which do not, provides a brutally frank paradigm of the differences – and inequities – existing in arms control matters between the rich and the poor states. The formal line between those allowed and disallowed from possessing nuclear weapons, as embodied in the clauses of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty is, of course, not drawn formally between the advanced and the less-developed states. Ostensibly it divides five great powers from the rest of the world. The real division has existed, however, without the need for formal definition. Overall technological and scientific capabilities separate the advanced from the rest. As it so happens, the former states are mainly members of the NATO/WTO nuclear military defence alliances, or their allies and quasi-allies, and have been prevailed upon to subsume their individual nuclear weapons-making capabilities within the alliance frameworks. Since practically all of them accept a provision for their defence by nuclear weapons, allow the deployment of these weapons on their territories, and could manufacture nuclear weapons themselves if needed, they should be counted as nuclear-weapon states. Their current abjuration from the actual manufacture of these weapons must be seen as a decision based on 'efficiency' and cost-sharing criteria, and not on any particular horror of the weapons or their possible use.

Despite the preceding reality, a vast literature has avidly chronicled the advance to near-nuclear status of a few third world states, and of the terrible dangers to the world if some of these states actually manufacture the weapons. All forms of pressures continue to be exerted to delay or prevent the onset of a world in which some third world states may also be counted as possessing the means to make such weapons. Indeed, in a rare example of "joint" interests in this regard, the advanced states of both the West and the East have cooperated smoothly in setting up the so-called London Suppliers Club to proscribe certain materials and technology that may aid the development of nuclear capabilities in the third world. These restrictions have been imposed on a worldwide scale in spite of the continuing hostility between the NATO and the WTO groups of states, and the relentless growth in the quantity and quality of their own nuclear (and conventional) arsenals of weapons. As with the experience in the export-availability of conventional weapons, the restraints on nuclear technology and materials are to be applied discretionally. The restrictions allow for trade in these materials and technology among allies on both sides – and also to special client states, among which may figure countries such as South Africa.

## Nuclear arms control among the superpowers

Since the beginning of the nuclear era, the world has witnessed nine international agreements in the area of nuclear or strategic arms restraint. All but one of them have concerned negotiations between the US and the Soviet Union. These are:

1. *The Antarctic Treaty*, 1961, leading to the nuclear demilitarization of the Antarctic continent.
2. *The "Hot Line" Agreement*, 1963, between the US and the Soviet Union, to reduce the chances of a miscalculated nuclear attack.
3. *The Partial Test Ban Treaty*, 1963, prohibiting nuclear testing in outer space, above ground, and under water.
4. *The Outer Space Treaty*, 1967, banning emplacement of nuclear weapons in outer space or in other celestial bodies.
5. *Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America*, 1968, as implied by the title.
6. *Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, 1967, whereby all except five states would surrender the choice to make nuclear weapons.
7. *Seabed Arms Control Treaty*, 1972, prohibiting the deployment of nuclear weapons in the sea depths.
8. *Strategic Arms Limitation/Reduction Talks*, or SALT I and II, and the current START talks, 1969 onwards, and other agreements under their aegis, such as the one at Vladivostok in 1974 or the aborted INF talks, seeking to place limitations on the strategic or intermediate range weapons systems of the US and the USSR.
9. *Treaty on the Limitation of Antiballistic Missile Systems*, 1972, restricting the aforesaid systems to two sites each for the US and the Soviet Union (subsequently reduced to one site each).

Items 1, 4 and 7 above are in the nature of 'nonarmament' agreements. Item 2 relates to a procedural concern for safety between adversaries in an 'enemy partners' situation, and not their complements of weapons or conditions of hostility. Item 3, like item 6 later on, called for voluntary abstentions by others and not by the charmed circle of five legitimate nuclear weapon powers. Nor did the item totally prohibit nuclear tests since they could, and were, carried out in large numbers underground. Item 5 was also an act of abatement by others and not by the five nuclear powers. Items 8 and 9 are exclusive pacts between the two global powers who have generally interpreted them as means to streamline rather than decelerate their nuclear arms race. Indeed, over the period of these negotiations the number of weapons in the hands of the two superpowers are reckoned to have doubled over what they possessed at the initial stage. Item 9 is an agreement resulting from a joint American-Soviet cost-benefit analysis: countrywide ABM systems were judged as beyond the financial and technical means of even the US and the Soviet Union. Now, as new technological paths have opened up, it appears as if the ABM treaty may be scrapped. The same may

be the case with regard to the Outer Space Treaty once the “High Frontier” strategy enunciated in recent months by the US, comes into vogue with space-based weapons systems.

Additionally, the chances appear to be strong that earlier prohibitions on the production and deployment of chemical and biological weapons will be modified by the superpowers. The new era of space-based laser and particle-beam weapons is also dawning upon the world, and there seems to be little attempt at heading of these new facets of the overall arms race between the superpowers and their allies.

It can be stated without melodramatic overture that, by any comparative yardstick, the attempt to restrain the nuclear-weapon urges of even the large third world states but remain resigned to the unchecked super-weapons’ competition of the US and the USSR, is like swatting at mosquitoes but letting the rogue elephants roam free.

Indeed, the experience seems to be that, in the totality of their varied arms competition – conventional, nuclear, chemical, biological, and space-based systems – the two superpowers know no bounds. Similarly, their respective allies appear helpless or unwilling to exercise influence for restraint on the superpowers in the area of arms control.

The situation, novel though it may seem in the context of the new breed of weapons, is really as old as when the arms race began in the postwar period. Neither side can accurately predict or deny what the adversary plans for or might acquire militarily in ten years time. Based on surmise, insufficient information and the yardstick of ‘prudence’, the proposition is that the superpowers and their allies will continue to prepare against each others’ suspected leapfrogs in the arms race, and that ‘arms control’ will remain a facade to regulate the continuous build up of strategic weapons.

It is beyond the purview of this analysis to consider the subtler intricacies of the superpowers’ arms competition, or to apportion blame between the two. For the rest of the world, and especially for the countries of the South who have been either the unwilling victims or the helpless dupes of the arms race between the superpowers, the issue consists of persuading both to initiate a visible first step towards arms de-escalation. If that appears impossible, then wisdom lies in strengthening themselves to a level which increases the stakes for superpower intervention in their affairs. Unfortunately, at the current stage of their internal development, only a few of the larger third world states – Brazil, China, India and some others – can aspire to such a capability. For the rest, there are few options – but even in their case, the objective is clear: to strengthen themselves politically and militarily *outside* of the seamless and unpredictable web of the superpowers, their allies, and their disputes.

### **The superpowers: visible steps to arms control**

Security is a matter of perception, and there is no logical way in which a nation can be convinced that it should feel ‘secure’ with the possession of



800 rather than 10 000 megatons of destructive power to guarantee its safety. It seems, however, that at some point a concept of deterrence which has so far provided for no more than an unending cycle of matching and hence cancelling escalation, must be replaced with something more reasonable to ensure a nation's perception of security. Such an objective need not spell strategic doom for either superpower or a negation of their real or imagined sense of insecurity. Thus, according to one knowledgeable scholar:<sup>3</sup>

“In terms of population and industrial vulnerability one can contemplate the fact that 40 percent of the population and 65 percent of the industrial capacity of the Soviet Union resides in only 200 cities with populations over 100 000 people. The US also has about 200 cities with populations over 100 000, but the proportion of population and industry resident in them is even higher than that of the Soviet Union. It would take, then, no more than 400 megatons equivalent to devastate the 200 most populous cities in either country.”

The immensity of the military power of the two superpowers over all others is such that their activities should become a thing apart from all other considerations for those who genuinely seek arms control. Every other state's actions – however evil they are – appear secondary and need to be treated as such in devising control systems. Success in real arms control should be measured by – and possibly only by – the stages in which the two great nuclear rivals progress from a voluntary no-accession to a mandatory accession to international controls on their weapons systems. Controlling the others would thereafter seem to be a relatively simpler exercise.

The initial steps which the two superpowers could be called upon to take, are the following:

- a) *a nuclear freeze*: given their overkill-overinsurance ratios, adherence to such a restriction should be the least difficult abnegation for the superpowers.
- b) *declaration of no-first-use of nuclear weapons*: to assuage European fears, such a declaration may apply initially to the world excluding Europe.
- c) *declaration of no-use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states*: This undertaking should be unconditional. It is entirely contradictory to withhold such a guarantee and still expect other states, particularly third world states, to abjure from the possession of nuclear weapons.

There are a number of other 'first steps' the superpowers would need to take to dispel fears that their actions are not merely in the nature of 'condominium' arrangements to maintain military superiority over the rest. Among them are: a downward escalator on the complement, type and tech-

3 Kosta Tsipis, "Vertical Proliferation of Strategic Weapons," unpublished paper in possession of the other, pp. 1,10.

nological innovation of strategic weapons systems; guarantees against the clandestine or selective transfers of nuclear or other more exotic weapons technology and materials to specially-favored states; linking their de-escalatory policies in respect of strategic and conventional arms; and an internationally-acceptable agreement to restrict conventional arms transfers to both allies and the third world states.

If commonsensical considerations do not drive the two superpowers toward the 'first steps' suggested, then perhaps enlightened self-interest should provide the motivating force. For the fact is that if such steps pre-saging equitable arms control burdens are not taken, then new technological changes and their improving GNPs will cheapen the acquisition of strategic power and reduce the time required to possess it for the new nations. The latter, especially the larger third world states, will surely move to achieve the same in the absence of worldwide arms control measures.

The time available to the major nuclear powers and their allies to commence a process of shared obligatory controls in the area of arms is not a lengthy one. In the major third world states, as in the advanced countries, techno-bureaucratic processes once underway acquire a life of their own, and cannot be easily stopped. Thus, if the primary managers of the international system seek only to freeze the existing overwhelming imbalance in arms rather than initiate processes for a mutual sharing of obligations with the third world states, then they must be prepared for disappointment.

### Conclusion

As a noted Scandinavian scholar has conceptualised, the countries of the South remain victims of a state of "structural aggression."<sup>4</sup> That is, the international system in its present mode and distribution of power – economic, political and military – inexorably favors some states to the detriment of the rest. Since the mid-twentieth century onset of decolonization, third world demands for political independence have been followed by the clamor for a 'new international economic order.' They are inevitably going to be supplemented by demands for a 'new international strategic order.' Equity is at the base of all the three facets of poor-state 'demands' upon the advanced countries of the world – and no distinction is made as between the East and the West in this respect. In another twenty years, approximately 85% of the world's population will reside in the countries of the South, so that these demands – however modest their current realisation – can only increase in the future.

As the figures and the data show, real third world defence expenditures, preparedness and proclivities are a minor aspect of the same problems at a substantially greater scale in the rich and powerful states. Their solution

4 Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, March 1969, 167-191.

would appear possible – with the cooperation of the South – if visible processes could be set in motion to curb the urge to war, arms and intervention at the behest of the advanced states. If peace remains divided and arms control is pressed only to ‘disarm the unarmed,’ then it is unlikely that either peace or arms control that includes the third world will emerge.

Within the arms control community, the responsibility of those from the European countries of both East and West is greater than that of others. Since third-world views on arms control tend to be dismissed or discounted as ‘biased’ by the superpowers, it is the special task of the latter’s European allies to concentrate upon the arms malaise in their midst, and to seek to curb it at the fountainheads before they ask the poor to disarm.

An old Sanskrit political text has described the interaction of states as frequently similar to a situation where a frog, in the process of being swallowed by a snake, still continues to express its own hunger pangs! In that sense, perhaps the advanced states of both the East and the West are themselves the real and certainly the initial victims of the stalled attempts at arms control. The sins of the poorer states in this area, while not absent, come far down in the scale of events. They could be rendered inconsequential were it possible to circumscribe the activities of the major military powers, spenders, intervenors, and discriminatory pushers of arms.

### **Note on bibliographic sources**

The analysis of strategic issues is a recent vocation in a limited number of third world countries. Most of the writings are reactive, and narrowly-confined to concerns relating to the needs of a particular country, or a particular theme. Very little, if any, of the literature refers to the general problems encountered by the poor, weak, non-European states in a world situation in which they remain the objects rather than the subjects of strategic events. Specifically, there are few conceptual studies that examine the role, or hypothesize the attitudes, of third world states from their own generic standpoint in a world dominated and defined by today’s superpowers and their respective military allies.

As a consequence, the preceding pages are an attempt at reflecting some of these generic concerns despite the paucity of literature and the absence of citable references. Their inspiration comes from a diversity of sources, some originating from western mainstream strategic literature and data, and the rest based on the author’s lengthy acquaintance with the less-coherently-expressed but nevertheless, real views of third world strategic thinkers – as given in interviews, discussions, and through association with a number of the newly-created “centres for strategic studies” in third world states (Jakarta, Islamabad, New Delhi, etc.).

The author is also currently involved in a major conceptual study of third world attitudes to current strategic and arms control issues based on the East–West confrontation.

## **General References**

A. Publications of the (I) US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Washington D.C. (II) International Institute of Strategic Studies, London (III) Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm (IV) Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi (V) Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (VI) Centre for Strategic Studies, Jakarta.

