

Nuclear Disarmament: Should America Lead?

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Nuclear arms control is back—or so it seems. The conclusion of the 2010 New START treaty follows a hiatus of two decades during which arms control was relegated to the margins of statecraft and all but disappeared from the political agenda. The question is why and to what end has arms control returned. For arms control to make a difference to the quality of international security in the twenty-first century, it must be meaningful and sustainable, contribute to tackling primary security threats, and build consensus on the rules of security governance.

Together with deterrence, arms control was a Cold War staple. When the Cold War ended and preoccupations with deterrence yielded to the demands of a different international environment, arms control was adrift, its specific role lost. Its connection with an era that had come to a close contributed to a sense of death by association. After all, what could be arms control's contribution to a world in which the Soviet Union no longer existed, systemic conflict was a rapidly fading memory, and the United States and Russia no longer threatened one another with nuclear annihilation? Though there was plenty of arms control going on, including negotiations for START II and for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), establishment of the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), there was a pervasive sense that arms control's best days lay behind it. When the United States failed to ratify the CTBT in 1999 and left the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2001, not even the conclusion of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty in 2003 was able to rekindle arms control embers. It no longer appeared to be part of the *fabric* of international relations.

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Recent efforts to bring back arms control have tried to do just that. In their already legendary article in *The Wall Street Journal* in January 2007, George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn lent their combined weight as elder statesmen to the idea of “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons” and called upon the United States to bring its “moral heritage” to bear on bold initiatives toward the elimination of nuclear weapons. The time to act is now, they argued, to prevent proliferation “into potentially dangerous hands.” A new nuclear era has dawned, in which countries like North Korea and Iran set dangerous proliferation examples and non-state actors are likely to “get their hands on nuclear weaponry.”¹ To stem the spread of nuclear weapons and strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, Shultz et al. proposed a number of broad initiatives. Together, they believed, these steps would reduce reliance on nuclear weapons among states that have them and support non-proliferation efforts.

Their call for nuclear abolition found broad support among other elder statesmen, all erstwhile members of the Cold War strategic community, and included such illustrious names as former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev; British politicians Malcolm Rifkind, Douglas Hurd, and David Owen; and George Robertson, former North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General; from Germany, Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsäcker, Egon Bahr, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher joined; and from Poland, former president Lech Walesa.² In January 2008, Shultz et al. published a follow-up piece in *The Wall Street Journal* in which they showed the wide echo their 2007 article had produced, now including a growing and impressive list of individuals familiar to students of American foreign policy.³

In December 2008, a group of international military, political, and business leaders founded Global Zero, a world-wide action group that quickly gained momentum. In July 2009, the group launched the Global Zero Action Plan, calling for specific steps to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 2030. The Plan

¹ George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” 4 January 2007, accessed on the website of *The Wall Street Journal Online* at http://www.fcnl.org/issues/item_print.php?item_id=2252&issue_id=54, 5 February 2010.

² Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, David Owen, and George Robertson, “Start Worrying and Learn to Ditch the Bomb,” 30 June 2008, accessed on the website of *The Times Online* at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comments/columnist/guest_contributors/article4237387, 5 February 2010; “Mikhail Gorbachev Calls for Elimination of Nuclear Weapons as Soon as Possible,” 31 January 2007, accessed on the website of the *Wall Street Journal Online* at http://www.2020visioncampaign.org/pages/143/Mikhail_Gorbachev_calls_for-elimination, 5 February 2010; Helmut Schmidt, Richard von Weizsäcker, Egon Bahr, and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, “Toward a Nuclear-free World: A German View,” 9 January 2009, accessed on the website of the *International Herald Tribune Online* at <http://www.acronym.org.uk/textonly/docs/0901/doc11.htm>, 5 February 2010.

³ George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, “Toward a Nuclear-Free World,” 15 January 2008, accessed on the website of *The Wall Street Journal Online* at http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB120036422673589947.html, 5 February 2010.

envisions four phases of ever more comprehensive disarmament goals, including the participation of all nuclear-weapons-capable countries and extensive verification and enforcement measures.⁴

Arguably, none of the individuals currently lending their support to the elimination of nuclear weapons subscribed to a vision of nuclear abolition during their time in office. Nonetheless, their standing in the policy community makes their support especially noteworthy. The dangers to international security they described are real: nuclear proliferation and the possibility of nuclear weapons in terrorist hands are a concern to the international community as a whole. Everyone's security is affected unless steps are taken to keep nuclear arsenals secure and to counteract proliferation in all its forms.

In April 2009, President Barack Obama added a sense of urgency. Speaking in Prague, he reflected that "in a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of nuclear attack has gone up. More nations have acquired these weapons. Testing has continued. Black market trade in nuclear secrets and nuclear materials abound. The technology to build a bomb has spread. Terrorists are determined to buy, build or steal one. Our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach a point where the center cannot hold."⁵ America was committed, the President stated, "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."⁶ He laid out an ambitious policy agenda: the United States would reduce the role of nuclear weapons in its own security strategy, embark on new arms control negotiations with Russia, aggressively pursue ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by the U.S. Senate, take steps toward a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, strengthen the NPT by increasing the cost of defiance and defection, and create an international nuclear fuel bank that gives equal access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Adding momentum to the abolitionist dynamic, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize to President Obama.

Can arms control once again become part of the fabric of international relations? This paper argues that to ask this question is to ask about principles of world order, its foundational assumptions, and its durability. Earlier arms control initiatives took their cues from the particular circumstances that

⁴ Accessed on the website of *Global Zero* at <http://www.globalzero.org/en/getting-zero>, 15 February 2010. Developing a strategy and fostering a global public campaign for Global Zero was the subject of a summit meeting 2–4 February 2010 in Paris, <http://globalzero.org/en/2010-paris-summit>. Similarly, see *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (Canberra, November 2009), <http://www.icnnd.org/reference/reports/ent/index.html>, accessed 25 June 2010.

⁵ The White House, "Remarks by President Barack Obama," Hradcany Square, Prague, 5 April 2009, accessed on the website of the *White House* at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-By-President-Barack-Obama-In-Prague, 10 February 2010.

⁶ *Ibid.*

governed relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. As a result, arms control was able to serve the security needs of both states. Due to their unique position in the international system, ensuring the security of the United States and the Soviet Union yielded essential benefits for the survival of all. Building on the work of Arnold Wolfers and Hedley Bull, both concerned with the relationship between national security and world order, I argue that the changes in the international system since the end of the Cold War challenge the established balance between nuclear possession goals and non-proliferation milieu goals. Traditional arms control no longer generates system-wide security benefits. Hence, the new security environment compels a reassessment of how national security and international security governance inform one another. I contend that new theorizing on arms control and disarmament is possible and yields fresh insight into the shifting relationship between arms control that regulates security choices and arms control that transforms international security.

The first part of the paper questions the continued utility of nuclear deterrence strategies against the background of the post-Cold War security environment. The second part explores how possession goals are increasingly less able to generate milieu goals; the third part advances the notion that the possession of nuclear weapons must become responsive to the rising need for global security governance. American leadership in recognizing the growing rivalry between nuclear possession and non-proliferation provides new perspectives on the role of nuclear weapons in international security. However, I conclude that the role of disarmament in effecting global security governance is at best ambiguous. For disarmament to become a shared vision of international governance and world order, the United States must invite others to shape the rules that govern them. Sharing rule-making power is critical for advancing a disarmament agenda. It is also consequential for American leadership. Hence, in the final analysis, the challenge of eliminating nuclear weapons is likely to be evaluated on the merits of America's role in a future security order.

ARMS CONTROL AND AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

The resurgence of arms control lends itself to a number of observations. First, arms control initiatives center on America's leadership and its ability to shape international order. Cold War prescriptions of deterrence and containment are to be replaced by "engagement based on common interests, shared values, and mutual respect."⁷ As it has done on past occasions, Secretary Hillary Clinton argues, America can lead on an issue vital to the quality of international relations. It will do so in concert with others, fully recognizing that no country can solve global challenges on its own. With American leadership,

⁷ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations," Washington, DC, 15 July 2009, accessed on the website of the State Department at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/july/126071.htm>, 6 February 2010.

arms control is to speak to salient concerns in international politics, enhance global stability, and extend the network of rules that shape global governance.⁸ Back at the heart of statecraft, arms control serves as a beacon for the mission to create a better world and a signpost against which accomplishments are judged. Re-fashioned to engage a vastly different security environment, arms control gives purpose and direction to the international community. Putting the neo-conservative revolution of unilateralism behind it and against the backdrop of a national image tarnished by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States seeks to reconnect with its neglected soft-power capacities. A renewed commitment to arms control, engaging other players, showing restraint, and living by the rules one preaches to others, allows the United States to exercise consensual leadership, reclaiming its “moral heritage” on the world stage.

ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

A second observation is the explicit link forged between arms control and the elimination of nuclear weapons. There is a critical conceptual difference between arms control that *regulates* state behavior and arms control that *transforms* international relations. In its regulative role, arms control aims to curb potentially destabilizing behavior especially in the areas of military procurement and deployment. It plays a crucial but essentially modest role that is conservative and status quo-oriented.⁹ Arms control that aims at disarmament has its intellectual roots in the belief that the anarchic state system can be transformed, that security competition can be replaced by security cooperation, and that such a cooperative system can be maintained. Hence, in a globalized, interdependent world, arms control linked with disarmament would re-cast the relationship between national security and world order, between what states claim for themselves and the environment within which these claims are made. In short, the new promise of arms control is to do more than *stabilize* relations between states, more than lock in the status quo. It is about *transforming* these relations.¹⁰ To seek the elimination of nuclear weapons as

⁸ Charles D. Ferguson, “The Long Road to Zero. Overcoming the Obstacles to a Nuclear-Free World,” *Foreign Affairs* 89 (January–February 2010): 86–94.

⁹ The best source on the debate about the goals of arms control remains the Fall 1960 special issue of *Daedalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. A revised and enlarged version in book form appeared in 1961 under the same editor, Donald G. Brennan, *Arms Control, Disarmament, and National Security* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), 23. In his introduction, Brennan points out that “the doctrine of deterrence has assumed paramount and explicit importance in contemporary strategic thinking.” Hence, arms control is about managing the armaments policies that serve deterrence and avoiding nuclear war.

¹⁰ Philip Noel-Baker, the most prominent of early advocates of nuclear disarmament, rejects as a matter of principle the notion that the management of nuclear balances is superior to striving for the elimination of nuclear weapons. See his response to the chapters in Brennan’s book: Brennan, *Arms Control*, 451–456.

President Obama has proposed is to undertake those steps of arms control and disarmament that eventually lead to a world without nuclear weapons.

Though there are notable examples of both arms control leading to disarmament and cooperative security displacing years of war and mistrust, these are either issue specific or regionally bound. In 1987, for example, the United States and Russia agreed to rid themselves of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), a step that facilitated the credibility of Mikhail Gorbachev in the eyes of the West and ushered in the vast transformation that ultimately came to be known as the end of the Cold War. While the INF Treaty was certainly a milestone in the history of arms control and the Cold War, it is less clear whether this particular “confidence-building measure” lends itself to global application.¹¹ Cooperative security too appears compelling, especially in the context of European integration, where it transformed traditional balance-of-power politics. Yet even this remarkable achievement lacks global traction. Fifty years after Europeans took the first cautious steps toward integration by establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, their security community has remained regional, lacking notable imitators elsewhere.¹²

ARMS CONTROL AND WORLD ORDER

A third observation relates to the rising prominence of world order questions in international relations. Recent history is replete with efforts to understand the role of power and its relationship to the use and legitimacy of force in international politics. The experiences in the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan have starkly exposed the limitations of force and highlight the connection between security and development. Interdependence and globalization are reshuffling established hierarchies. Transnational actors erase the boundaries between the international and the domestic spheres. Failed states threaten to become safe havens for terrorists. The information revolution empowers individuals globally, increasing the spread of social networks, the demands of civil societies, and opportunities for crime and terrorism. Climate change signals resource competition and uncontrolled refugee flows. States and their institutions are grappling with unprecedented change. Though produced under the cloak of urgency, some of the strategies proposed are themselves a reflection of the longer-term challenges faced and constitute serious attempts to shape world order. Thus the European Union promotes itself as a civilian power

¹¹ Harald Mueller, “The Future of Nuclear Weapons in an Interdependent World,” *The Washington Quarterly* 31 (Spring 2008): 63–75, at 66. Mueller argues that the new role of arms control is “to help move the world from an era of self-help into an era of cooperative and collective security,” 65.

¹² Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Though Europe may be unique, the contributions to this volume demonstrate that the concept of security communities, broadly defined, offers fresh insight into how cooperative security can shape perceptions of what is possible in international relations.

projecting European preferences for governance structures that de-emphasize the use of military force.¹³ NATO's debate about a new strategic concept highlights the alliance's struggle to balance collective global responsibilities and collective defense.¹⁴ Both the EU and NATO have each adopted a comprehensive approach that develops more-nuanced understanding of the changing nature of conflict.¹⁵ The U.S. military has embarked on "winning the narrative," an explicit recognition of the limited role force plays in building stable societies.¹⁶ Government agencies and think tanks have engaged in future-oriented studies, invariably predicting greater complexity in international relations and emphasizing the need for cooperation.¹⁷

Taken together, these observations about the renewed interest in arms control reveal widespread concern about the state of international/global order, concern that is heightened by the sheer complexity of the issues and the absence of easy solutions. There is in addition a pervasive sense that the international system has so profoundly changed that a return to business as usual is not an option. In the critical area of national security, states are no longer the only actors, and individual states are less and less able to provide security on their own. Now great powers too have to come to grips with the fact that they need to build coalitions in order to be effective players.¹⁸ Last, there is a

¹³ Helene Sjursen, ed., *Civilian or Military Power? European Foreign Policy in Perspective* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007).

¹⁴ Klaus Wittmann, "Towards a New Strategic Concept for NATO," NATO Defense College Forum Paper 10, NATO Defense College, Rome, 2009. For an extensive bibliography, see the collection of publications at http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/strategic-concept-bibliography.html#strategic_concept_recent_articles, accessed 15 May 2010.

¹⁵ Peter V. Jakobsen, "NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations," DIIS Report 15, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, October 2008; Eva Gross, "EU and the Comprehensive Approach," DIIS Report 13, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2008.

¹⁶ General James T. Mattis, US Joint Forces Commander and former NATO Commander Allied Command Transformation expressed this sentiment well when he said, "We do not want the US forces to be dominant and irrelevant in the future." "Joint Warfare in the 21st Century," 12 February 2009, accessed on the website of U.S. Joint Forces Command at <http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyarchive/2009/sp021209.html>, 4 February 2010.

¹⁷ General (ret.) Klaus Gaumann, et al., *Towards a Grand Strategy for an Uncertain World: Renewing Transatlantic Partnership* (The Netherlands: Noaber Foundation, 2007); Bob Graham and Jim Talent, *World At Risk: The Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (NIC 2008-003, November 2008); Giovanni Grevi, "The Interpolar World: A New Scenario," Occasional Paper 79, (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, June 2009); "Multiple Futures Project. Navigating towards 2030," Final Report (Norfolk, VA: Headquarters, Supreme Allied Command Transformation, April 2009); *The JOE 2008. Joint Operating Environment. Challenges and Implications for the Future Joint Force* (United States Joint Forces Command, November 2008).

¹⁸ In recognition that American forces will most likely be employed as part of a larger coalition, General Mattis requested U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to re-name U.S. Joint Forces Command the U.S. Joint Forces and Coalition Command, January 2010.

blurring of how the international relates to the national. Questions of world order have challenged national definitions of security, ushering in ideas of collective enterprise and responsibility.

It is in this context that we need to explore the calls for linking arms control with disarmament, for presenting it as an intellectually coherent and compelling case. In light of currently projected developments in world order, the questions must be these: What contribution does nuclear disarmament make? What makes nuclear disarmament more compelling now than before? And, even if it could be shown that nuclear disarmament were to make a significant contribution to world order, what is different now that should lead us to think that counter-arguments might be put to rest successfully?

NUCLEARISM AS FICTIONAL UTOPIA

Nuclear disarmament as a process and a goal has a history long in effort and thin in results. Not unlike other notions that envision transformative change such as collective security and security communities, it spans the divide between two different conceptions of security. One advocates state security through the augmentation of capabilities; the other believes state security derives from collective efforts to ameliorate anarchy.¹⁹ Most states find themselves somewhere along this spectrum, building capabilities and hedging against a deterioration in their security environment. Throughout the history of the modern state system, we see a prioritizing of capabilities trumping efforts to shape a more-benign international order, less reliant on power politics.

Two decades ago, engaging the dominance of nuclear weapons and thinking “beyond nuclearism,” Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler proposed that the real challenge to notions of world order transformation was not to imagine a perfectly peaceful world, in which dissent is absent and where all incentives for defection are perfectly deterred, but to envision a less than perfect world without nuclear weapons.²⁰ “The very idea,” they knew, “confronts almost all mainstream theories and assumptions about state and human behavior.” Nonetheless, they set out to challenge what they called an “academic hegemony,” namely, the assertion that to think seriously outside the “mainstream framework” is unworthy of serious scholarship.²¹ They were particularly taken aback by the conclusions reached by the Harvard Nuclear Study Group, which declared that nuclear weapons had to be coped with indefinitely. “Humanity has no alternative but to hold this threat at bay and to learn to live with politics, to live in the world

¹⁹ Sverre Lodgaard, “Toward a nuclear-weapon-free world,” *Daedalus* (Fall 2009): 140–152.

²⁰ Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Beyond Nuclearism” in Regina C. Karp, ed., *Security Without Nuclear Weapons? Different Perspectives on Non-Nuclear Security* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 21–54, 28. This chapter was part of a multi-year project on the future of nuclear weapons at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21, 23, 24.

we know: a world of nuclear weapons, international rivalries, recurring conflicts, and at least some risk of nuclear crisis. The challenge we face is not to escape to a fictional utopia where such problems do not exist.”²² Though the Harvard Nuclear Study Group reached these conclusions in 1983 during a resurgence of Cold War politics, they hold up well today when Robert Kagan cautions the Obama administration’s foreign policy on “the perils of wishful thinking,” ignoring “the clashing interests of great powers with competing ambitions and different world views.”²³ Then as now, it seems, there simply is no room for thinking about world order in terms different than competition and rivalry.

In this sense, calls for disarmament have remained the “fictional utopia,” rendered irrelevant by the cyclical nature of international politics. International politics is not about change but the management of relations to national advantage. Yet, such thinking rests more on forceful assertion than evidence and does not reflect the fact that significant transformations have taken place in international relations throughout modern history. Examples are well known and cannot easily be dismissed. They include decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s and the end of empires that in their heyday were legitimate and a powerful demonstration of a nation’s place in the international hierarchy. They also include the European integration process, wholly unimaginable before World War II, when power politics was ingrained in the very nature of the European state system.

Perhaps even more important for a discussion about transformation in international relations are those changes that are usually not mentioned but that are nonetheless critical indicators that a cyclical view of world politics is less and less warranted. These have to do with the decline of war between major powers, the rise of non-state actors, the changing nature of conflict, the use of information technology in all sectors of public and private life, and a rising awareness that only cooperation among actors can deliver solutions to global problems.²⁴ None of these transformations are complete, and their endpoints, if they exist, are yet unknown. They all had relatively modest beginnings, and their potential impact upon the choices of actors could not be easily projected. Few predicted a global financial crisis, but everyone now understands the dark side of interdependence and globalization. Most people use cell phones to talk to family and friends. Now we are also perfectly aware that a call from a cell phone can set off a chain of events that culminates in the kind of destruction witnessed on September 11. Many people used to believe that providing for their security is the government’s job. With the right weapons and the right alliances,

²² Albert Carnesale, et al., *Living with Nuclear Weapons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 19, quoted in Booth and Wheeler, 23.

²³ Robert Kagan, “The Perils of Wishful Thinking,” *The American Interest* (January–February 2010), accessed on the website of the *Carnegie Endowment* at <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24303>, 1 February 2010.

²⁴ For excellent recent scholarship on the question of war between major powers see Raimo Vaeerlynen, ed., *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates* (London: Routledge, 2006).

their security could be assured. Now they understand that the very way they live and the values they hold make them targets of militant ideologies far away.

The point here is to appreciate that the “nuclearism” exposed by Booth and Wheeler 20 years ago as an intellectual straitjacket has now become unsustainable. Indeed, the world has changed so profoundly that it is no longer those who call for nuclear disarmament but those who resist it who must be called to account. In a curious twist of history, it is those who believe in the undiminished utility of nuclear weapons and the ability to manage international relations to their advantage who pursue a “fictional utopia.” It is they who should be asked what the role of nuclear weapons now is and what warrants their trust in nuclear management.

Holding the advocates of “nuclearism” accountable is not the same as endorsing nuclear disarmament. Indeed, dissatisfaction with “nuclearism” alone does not make nuclear disarmament a viable proposition. What it does, however, is juxtapose a vastly changed world with a belief system developed during an entirely different era. Given the prevailing opposition to nuclear disarmament, this is no small feat. The almost reflexive rejection of nuclear disarmament must be countered by the critical review of the arguments that continue to endorse nuclear weapons in a world that no longer has an obvious niche for nuclear weaponry.

This is not to suggest that there is anything “fictional” or “utopian” about nuclear weapons and the dangers they pose. Nor is the aim to diminish any of the steps taken to reduce accidental or inadvertent use of nuclear weapons or to secure nuclear materials and prevent their trafficking as demonstrated by the Proliferation Security Initiative. Rather, it is to question the continued appropriateness of the nuclear management approach itself and the exclusion of alternative thinking that it entails.

Second, holding advocates of nuclear weapons to account allows us to engage the perennial tension between national security policies and world order goals, between one’s own power and the choices one offers others. If nuclear weapons are to stay, it needs to be shown that they make a positive contribution to world order. Since the current international environment differs greatly from the one that gave nuclear weapons prominence, it would be naïve to presume that environments are mutable but policy tools are not.

RECONCILING DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY?

Half a century ago, Arnold Wolfers provided a useful distinction between “possession goals” and “milieu goals.” The former are goals that nations claim in competition with others, such as a share of power or security or, in this case nuclear weapons, that privileges one state over another. The latter are about shaping the rules by which nations play.²⁵ The spread of democracy,

²⁵ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration. Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1962), 67–80.

for example, is largely seen as a milieu goal, since it is believed to lead states to adopt more peaceful foreign policies. A fostering of interdependence, since it is believed to increase the cost of war and thereby reduce violent conflict, is also a milieu goal.

Wolfers's distinction between possession and milieu goals is useful. Great powers, especially, have the resources and the ambition "to devote their resources to the benefits they may hope to derive from helping to preserve or improve conditions prevailing beyond their borders."²⁶ Wolfers rightly points out that milieu goals are not altruistic; they serve state goals. The difference is that milieu goals are inclusive. They reflect an approach to the national interest that embraces the environment within which states operate. It is this that leads states to pursue international law, international organizations and institutions. An exclusively defined national interest is all about possession goals, where national capabilities are treasured and no alternative ideas are compelling. Possession goals not tempered by milieu goals generate fears of losing one's advantage, lead to anticipation of challenge, and promote an atmosphere of uncertainty. Milieu goals do not signal weakness nor do they compromise national security.²⁷ On the contrary, they demonstrate that positive synergies can be created between national and international security. U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of World War II shows that investment in the economic and political recovery of Western Europe served U.S. interests and shaped the evolution of peaceful relations among European nations. Likewise, Simon Bulmer shows that post-unification Germany's pursuit of milieu goals in Europe generated trust in German foreign policy among its neighbors and allowed Germany to develop national interests that do not threaten others. Had Germany opted for possession goals alone, European integration would not long have survived and the historic problem of the German question would have returned.²⁸

Milieu goals require a degree of voluntary self-restraint, an understanding that strategies of dominance alone do not yield desired results. Milieu goals also require cooperation. You cannot be multilateralist on your own; but it makes more sense to expect cooperation from others when they too share the benefits of cooperation. Possession goals in the guise of milieu goals are likely to be exposed for what they are, mainly efforts to reap relative gains, to market policies to others that may use the language of milieu goals but disproportionately

²⁶ Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, 75.

²⁷ Robert Kagan makes the opposite argument. Milieu goals are the preferences of states that do not have the material capabilities to acquire possession goals. In Kagan's universe, capabilities shape possibilities. Milieu goals are not absent, but their pursuit is entirely instrumental. Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness. Why the United States and Europe see the World Differently," *Policy Review* (June–July 2002), accessed on the website of the Hoover Institution, Stanford University at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3460246.html>, 12 February 2010.

²⁸ Simon Bulmer, et al., *Germany's European Diplomacy: Shaping the Regional Milieu* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

allocate the gains of cooperation. Realists and nationalists are not troubled by this. In blunt fashion, Charles Krauthammer's 2004 speech at American Enterprise Institute expresses the belief that multilateralism is "to reduce American freedom of action by making it subservient to, dependent on, constricted by the will—and interests—of other nations. To tie down Gulliver with a thousand strings."²⁹ Following this logic, milieu goals only make sense if they support preferred strategies of dominance. This same logic also forestalls serious consideration of nuclear disarmament, because it would constitute a dangerous weakening of American capabilities. There would simply be no reason for the United States to lead in this area, as called for by Shultz et al. and supporters. Holding on to nuclear weapons is justified on the grounds that great powers must not be constrained in their range of action.³⁰

If, as has been argued here, the changes in international relations make nuclearism no longer sustainable as an approach to global problem solving, and if there is evidence to suggest that these same changes allow us to revisit the balance between possession and milieu goals, the possibility of nuclear disarmament is no longer unthinkable. From this follows that we need to ask whether nuclear disarmament is a viable milieu goal in the Wolfers sense. That is, it has to be shown that nuclear disarmament serves the *common* interest and the *national* interest. This is not to suggest that, of course, everyone will be better off in the absence of nuclear weapons. Such reasoning only works in an abstract setting, not in the real world, where the task is to start with an existing security slate. Instead, we have to proceed with the knowledge that the altruistic state does not exist and that any scheme of world order will at best remain imperfect. *The issue is whether the imperfections of a world without nuclear weapons are preferable to those we confront in the presence of nuclear weapons.* Clearly nuclear disarmament is a milieu goal. But its desirability must not be judged on the presumption that milieu goals are superior to possession

²⁹ Charles Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute Press, 2004), 6.

³⁰ Lieber and Press, for example, make the argument that for the United States to uphold its alliance commitments and defend its interests, it needs to maintain a robust deterrence force in the form of credible counterforce options. Were the United States involved in a conventional war with a nuclear-armed adversary, it would need to offer its leaders military options that would deter nuclear escalation. This is a powerful argument against the notion that the rationale for having nuclear weapons is deterrence only. Lieber and Press contend that deterrence must be militarily credible to be effective in time of crisis. Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The Nukes we Need," *Foreign Affairs* 88 (November–December 2009): 39–51. The problem with this line of argument is that although it does permit nuclear force reductions, it rules out reducing reliance on nuclear weapons. Its logic is that U.S. national security strategy must be developed not to deter likely but all possible contingencies. Reminiscent of counterforce arguments during the Cold War, Lieber and Press reify a nuclearist determinism that leaves little to no space for alternative thinking. For a different argument see Hans M. Kristensen, et al., "From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence: A New Nuclear Policy on the Path Towards the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons," Occasional Paper No. 7, (Washington, DC: Federation of American Scientists & The Natural Resources Defense Council, April 2009).

goals. Such thinking only nurtures realist and nationalist fears. Instead, we need to explore whether and how a *new* balance between possession and milieu goals can be struck and whether nuclear disarmament is a useful tool for striking this new balance.

This is the issue Hedley Bull wrestled with in his seminal 1976 essay, "Arms Control and World Order."³¹ Bull was keenly aware that a discussion of nuclear disarmament had to proceed not just from where we are but with a thorough appreciation of how we got here. His analysis of the role of arms control in international relations revealed that the state of international order did not readily lend itself to a distinction between possession goals and milieu goals. The Soviet Union and the United States were cooperating in arms control for the purpose of avoiding nuclear war, but that cooperation was decidedly skewed to serve their own interests. As Bull argued, "These special or bilateral purposes reflect the preference of the two great powers for a world order in which they continue to enjoy a privileged position."³² Hence, the milieu goal of war avoidance through arms control maintained the existing distribution of power in the international system, the possession goal of the superpowers. Though everyone benefits from the success of arms control, it is the possession goal of securing their privileged positions that "leave the existing political structure of the world intact."³³ Both sides have a vested interest in enlisting the support of others for arms control, but this support also means an affirmation of superpower status. It was the milieu goal of avoiding nuclear annihilation through arms control cooperation that legitimated the possession goal of having nuclear weapons.

Bull was concerned that the practice of arms control, though it contributed to the stabilization of superpower relations, locked in place a security system resistant to change "whose effect is to formalize the claims of these two states to a special position in the hierarchy of military power."³⁴ International security is entrusted to those who hold nuclear weapons and "we are choosing arms control arrangements which leave those countries which now possess preponderant military power secure in the enjoyment of their position."³⁵ In other words, arms control has an inherent anti-proliferation bias that is supported and legitimated by the milieu goal of keeping down the number of states with nuclear weapons *and* the possession goal of maintaining a privileged security status for nuclear weapons states.

Obviously, this is not quite what Wolfers had in mind when he spoke of a link between possession goals and milieu goals. The latter are about international structures of governance, not the perpetual maintenance of a differentiated

³¹ Hedley Bull, "Arms Control and World Order," *International Security* 1 (Summer 1976): 3–16.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

security system. Yet Bull cautions against rejecting the existing international order out of hand. Arms control cooperation, he argues, has reduced the nuclear danger, “however inadequately and imperfectly.”³⁶ These imperfections should not lead to the presumption that an international order could be constructed in which imperfections would no longer exist. In fact, Bull has little time for ideas that ignore the role of power and capabilities in international politics. The challenge, he says, is “how to make the state system work.”³⁷ At the same time, he does not believe that a grossly hierarchical international order is stable. A world order viewed as fundamentally unjust by the majority of states would inevitably attract challengers. It would foster dissent and calls for fundamental change. Foreshadowing the *Anarchical Society*, Bull advocates that “making the state system work is a matter of preserving and nurturing what remains of a rudimentary consensus about ‘minimum order,’ not of advancing towards some ‘optimum order’ about which, at the global level, no consensus exists or is in prospect.”³⁸

Nurturing consensus is not synonymous with settling for second best because the big prize remains unattainable. Rather, it gets back to Bull’s point that any system of order has to use the building blocks it finds itself with, not invent grand schemes bereft of mechanisms to bring them about and likely to be creating new lines of division. What Bull is ultimately arguing for is the evolution of an international order that rebalances the interests of great powers with the aspirations of the international community. A system of international order that primarily caters to the advantage of some is unable to accommodate dissent. It can manage that dissent but at considerable risk of either further alienation or outright failure. In other words, world order is about nurturing a consensus on the balance between possession goals and milieu goals.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, for example validates Bull’s call for attending to a sustainable balance between rights and responsibilities. The NPT locks in place an agreement between nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states based on restraint and privileges. Non-nuclear weapons states agree not to proliferate, and gain unrestricted access to civilian nuclear energy. Nuclear weapons states are obligated to engage in serious nuclear disarmament efforts. The agreement projects a world order in which, at some point, all states are non-nuclear and all have unimpeded access to civil nuclear energy. Forty years of NPT history show that nuclear weapons states have a long way to go toward realizing their disarmament obligation. Their number has grown to now include India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel (though unconfirmed), and possibly Iran in the near future. Few states trust the ability of the international community to manage proliferation temptations successfully.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 10.

Holding on to nuclear weapons, or efforts to acquire them, continue to demonstrate their high value; nuclear possession continues to be rewarded with enhanced status.³⁹

Recognizing that balance between possession and milieu goals is critical to international order makes Bull's work of enduring value. Balance respects the irreducible need of states to attend to national security even under conditions of globalization; balance also asserts the need for structures of governance that legitimate possession goals. Bull's recommendations of how to strike a stable balance are necessarily modest and reflect his belief that international politics is inherently imperfect. He emphasizes not large-scale transformation but small, sustainable steps that nurture consensus. Hence to Bull, the milieu goal of nuclear disarmament can only be compelling if the structures of governance necessary to sustain it establish a balance between possession goals and milieu goals reflective of the need for both.

THE RETURN OF ARMS CONTROL: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SECURITY AND WORLD ORDER

Arms control earned its credentials at a time when regulating the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was to everyone's benefit. The imperative to avoid nuclear war created a perfect match between the possession goals of the two powers and the milieu goals of the international community. Though of overriding importance and perfect in that sense, profound changes in the international system warrant examination of *how* nuclear weapon use is to be avoided in the future. We have also recognized that a new international or global order must resonate with the distribution of power, the "imperfections" of any world order currently conceivable and into which globalization in all its different forms introduces new variables. Third, we have learned that relations between possession goals and milieu goals are complex; establishing rules of *global* governance and maintaining *national* security is not an easy bargain, especially since the self-serving needs of national security demand cooperation with others and turn arms control into a multilateral effort. Fourth, there is little doubt that a return to Cold War arms control would not address current problems of security. Simply too much has changed. For one, attention has shifted away from a concern with nuclear great-power relations toward relations between new nuclear states, proliferation issues generally, and the possibility of nuclear weapons in the hands of non-state actors. Hence, arms control must address a much larger and more-diverse spectrum of problems, must be able to tackle nuclear issues across a broad front. For another, during the Cold War, the United States had little choice but to accept a relationship of mutual deterrence with the Soviet Union. In the new security environment, this

³⁹ Kurt M. Campbell, et al., eds., *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider their Nuclear Choices* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), esp. pts 1 and 3.

mutuality does not apply to would-be proliferators. Hence, the United States is not interested in finding new ways to regulate new deterrent relationships that would replicate U.S.–Soviet relations. Such regulatory arms control would fail to address the desire on the part of state and non-state actors to seek nuclear capabilities in the first place. No conceivable milieu goal is served by proliferation in the guise of new deterrent relationships.

There is, of course, a whole host of unfinished arms control business, including a follow-on agreement to the New START Treaty between the United States and Russia concluded in April 2010; U.S. ratification of the CTBT; strengthening the International Atomic Energy Agency's ability to detect and act on NPT safeguard agreements; comprehensively following through with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 of 2004 that calls for nations to improve the security of weapons of mass destruction–related materials, equipment, and technology; and institutionalizing the 2006 Russian–American Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.⁴⁰

Interestingly, with the exception of the CTBT, none of these measures constitutes new arms control. They are about establishing leverage over new actors and foreclosing their nuclear options. They are in the *tradition* of Cold War arms control even if they encompass a broader agenda. They *regulate* behavior; they do not *transform* the existing order. The thrust of current arms control measures is about fostering milieu goals: keeping down the number of proliferators, and reducing the potential for terrorists to gain access to nuclear technology. They do little in the area of possession goals, nor do they come close to rebalancing milieu goals and possession goals.

For that to happen, entry into force of the CTBT would be an important first step. Ending nuclear testing for all is a de facto disarmament measure for nuclear weapons states. The CTBT's future, however, is not promising, nor does arms control appear to be headed toward embracing a transformative agenda. Conservative, regulatory measures remain firmly entrenched. This is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than by the 2009 *Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*.⁴¹ Reminiscent of the Clinton presidency's nuclear posture review to “lead but hedge,” the Commission recommends that the United States “move in two parallel

⁴⁰ Kenneth N. Luongo, “Making the Nuclear Security Summit Matter: An Agenda for Action,” *Arms Control Today* 40 (January–February 2010): 15–21.

⁴¹ Positions in favor and opposed to a CTBT have remained as far apart as they were in 1999. Then as now the principal contention between the two camps is whether a CTBT would actually impede proliferation. Treaty opponents see little prospect of North Korea and Iran changing policy were the United States to ratify it. Those who advocate ratification believe that a CTBT would enhance U.S. non-proliferation efforts and increase the pressure on others to join (China, Israel, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, India). *America's Strategic Posture, The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), 81–87. The Report concludes: “The Commission has no agreed position on whether ratification of the CTBT should proceed.”

paths—one path which reduces nuclear dangers by maintaining our deterrence, and the other which reduces nuclear dangers through arms control and international programs to prevent proliferation.”⁴² The Commission recognizes that progress in stemming nuclear proliferation is significantly shaped by perceptions of two different kinds of security systems, one for nuclear weapons states and one for the rest. To secure the cooperation of others in the area of non-proliferation, the Commission argues that the United States and Russia must be seen as moving seriously to “reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in their own force posture and are continuing to make significant reductions in their nuclear arsenal.”⁴³

To a large extent, the formulation of two parallel paths toward security in the twenty-first century reflects divisions within the Commission on how to reap the benefits of deterrence *and* roll back proliferation. To achieve the latter, the Report places much emphasis on American engagement of the international community that is extending the nuclear dialogue far beyond U.S.–Russian negotiations. Deterrence will be maintained as the bedrock of American security and as the premise upon which U.S. leadership is based. Though the Commission firmly rejects American unilateral disarmament measures, it acts on the conviction that the nuclear weapons states must do more to reduce their reliance on nuclear weapons. But caution rules. Arms control must rest on “rigorous analysis of the requirements of security and stability.”⁴⁴ On the issue of global elimination of nuclear weapons, the Commission concludes that it “would require a fundamental change in geopolitics.”⁴⁵ Commissioners appear to agree that such transformation is not in the offing.

Nonetheless, we are able to discern Bull’s “rudimentary consensus” about “minimal order.” Tensions among the commissioners aside, there is agreement that the goals of non-proliferation demand international cooperation and that national security strategies emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons send the wrong message to would-be non-proliferation allies and potential proliferators. Hence the Commission’s recommendation of *parallel* efforts demonstrates the rise of proliferation concerns in the calculus of deterrence. Though critics can rightly argue that parallel efforts by definition never meet, and that therefore deterrence and disarmament will remain in opposition, this is to miss the point. “Minimal order” now includes a consensus that the milieu goal of non-proliferation cannot be obtained without a re-visioning of deterrence requirements. While it was sufficient during the Cold War to treat deterrence and proliferation separately *and* reap the benefits of possession and milieu goals, the new security environment raises the cost of possession goals. Reliance on nuclear weapons no longer produces desired global stability. This recognition

⁴² *America’s Strategic Posture*, xii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

recasts the relationship between possession goals and milieu goals and raises questions about the extent to which one now constitutes the other. In their third essay on the elimination of nuclear weapons, Shultz et al. recognize this new connection between deterrence and proliferation, arguing that maintaining an effective deterrent and reducing the dangers of proliferation and nuclear terrorism are “not mutually exclusive imperatives.”⁴⁶ In short, possession goals and milieu goals no longer reinforce one another to create a system of international order that generates stability for those who set the rules and those who are expected to live by them. Merely keeping down the number of proliferators, and reducing the potential for terrorists to gain access to nuclear technology will not yield a sustainable security order. These are strategies of denial, of telling others what they are not permitted to seek; they lack a cooperative element, essential for successful milieu goals. The issue now is how to build a new security order.

OPPORTUNITY FOR DISARMAMENT?

Reflecting on half a century of arms control experience, Lawrence Freedman concludes that “real breakthroughs in theorizing about nuclear disarmament” were achieved decades ago and new theorizing must amount to more than “dusting down” old proposals.⁴⁷ What emerged at the beginning of the nuclear age, he argues, was what was possible; arms control was more modest than disarmament but its very modesty, in the absence of more-comprehensive alternative options, also made it a desirable security choice. Freedman attributes the success of arms control to its working “with the grain of international relations.” Arms control, in other words, made few demands; it regulated relations between states and, unlike disarmament, did not aim to transform them. Back on the international agenda, arms control initiatives ultimately leading to disarmament must, once again, take their cues from “the grain of international relations.”⁴⁸ Freedman is convinced that any other approach will quickly stall. To him, new nuclear disarmament theorizing is not about improving traditional disarmament visions but the manner in which we conceptualize the conflicting demands of national security and international governance. In this sense, Wolfers’s and Bull’s observations about possession goals and milieu goals are of enduring relevance and speak directly to the task of refashioning international order today.

⁴⁶ Perhaps reflecting their own hesitation on a fast-track approach to nuclear disarmament, the authors remind their readers/supporters that “Providing for this nation’s defense will always take precedence over all other priorities.” Shultz et al., “How to Protect our Nuclear Deterrent,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 2010, accessed on the website of *The Wall Street Journal Online* at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704152804574628344282735008.html>, 5 February 2010.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Freedman, “A New Theory for Nuclear Disarmament,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 65 (July–August 2009): 14–30, at 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

If, as argued here, proliferation concerns in the new security environment shape the calculus of deterrence, long-standing divisions between regulative and transformative arms control begin to erode and new theorizing is possible. Emphasis on deterrence and U.S.–Russian arms control no longer produce an environment in which their bilateral benefits yield milieu goals. Though they maintain a relationship of mutual deterrence, the absence of hostilities dramatically reduces the milieu value of mutual deterrence. Working with “the grain of international relations” now must reflect the increasing disutility of privileging nuclear deterrence and a recognition that possession goals without milieu goals render the former progressively less viable; the threat of nuclear proliferation offers only marginal returns on additional investment in traditional nuclear arsenals. Likewise, working with “the grain of international relations” means transformative arms control must be attentive to the power differentials that inevitably exist in the state system. Milieu goals are great power goals; they have to serve the interests of those powers willing and able to shape international relations. Hence, new theorizing must begin by acknowledging that international order is ultimately about striking a bargain between the power to create rules and the manner in which these rules are formulated and adhered to. Does this mean that more can now be achieved than during previous years of theorizing?

Re-conceptualizing the demands for national security and international governance has to start from Wolfers’s assumption that both must be satisfied if the resulting international order is to endure. First and foremost, this means that efforts to determine the role of nuclear weapons in twenty-first century security must part company with the prevailing practice of conducting two separate conversations, namely one on deterrence requirements and another on proliferation threats. Instead, we need to shift focus to a *security* conversation, hence change the nature of the debate itself. Second, this re-conceptualization postulates a shared sense that a stable international order is not about overcoming power differentials, but mitigating their disruptive effects through standards and rules commonly arrived at. Third, re-thinking the role of nuclear weapons must also be an invitation to review their standing vis-à-vis other policy priorities upon which nuclear weapons have a bearing. This would permit a broadening of the traditional arms control agenda and would make regional security assurances and alliance commitments integral to questions of international order and the future of nuclear weapons. Fourth, since it was the milieu goal of avoiding nuclear annihilation through arms control cooperation that legitimated the possession goal of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, a new security order must legitimate nuclear weapons in national arsenals in terms of how well national arsenals contribute to the overall goals of sustainable world order. This would demand a reassessment of numbers and types of nuclear weapons in national arsenals as well as their purposes. To reclaim milieu goals through the possession of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons states must credibly demonstrate security benefits accruing to the international

community. Under any new bargain between national security and international governance, an answer to the question of who benefits must speak to the international community as a whole. In Freedman's assessment, the role of a *strategy* of disarmament in tackling any of these complex problems is at best ambiguous. A legitimate new security order is not about numbers of weapons but about conciliating conflicting interests and aspirations, the very conundrum Bull saw no ready escape from.

In this context, the Obama administration's 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) makes an important contribution; it is a first attempt to conceptualize a roadmap for security in the twenty-first century. It links *national* security to American *international* security interests and establishes a functional relationship between possession goals and milieu goals.⁴⁹ It recognizes the declining utility of large nuclear arsenals in the pursuit of international security objectives. U.S. nuclear forces can therefore become smaller, and conventional capabilities can take on tasks previously assigned to nuclear weapons. A smaller nuclear arsenal signals reduced reliance on nuclear weapons in U.S. strategy as well as meeting America's NPT obligations. At the same time, the NPR pledges to maintain "safe, secure, and effective nuclear forces" while nuclear weapons continue to exist.⁵⁰ To this effect, the administration commits to invest in extending the lifetime of nuclear weapons and modernizing the nuclear infrastructure. In addition, the NPR gives an unequivocal negative security guarantee to non-nuclear weapons states that are members of the NPT and abide by its rules: the administration pledges not to engage in nuclear testing and to pursue Senate ratification of the CTBT.

Though disappointing to those expecting a commitment to nuclear no-first-use and bolder arms control steps, the real value of the NPR lies not in its ambition but in its modesty. Its focus is on developing a perspective on nuclear weapons that repositions the United States vis-à-vis the international community. To manage the threat of nuclear proliferation, the United States needs allies, not more nuclear weapons; hence, the document is devoid of references to American nuclear preponderance and assertions of nuclear utility. Rather, emphasis is placed on demonstrable progress toward U.S. NPT disarmament obligations, reduced reliance on nuclear weapons, the "extreme circumstances" under which the United States would consider nuclear use, the goal of *eventual* no-first-use, and the singling out of states noncompliant with NPT rules.⁵¹ Nuclear weapons, the document suggests, are a burden, not an asset, and tolerating their existence in U.S. national arsenals is legitimate only "to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners."⁵²

⁴⁹ "The Nuclear Posture Review Report," April 2010 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 6 April 2010).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, ix.

Departing from past practice, the traditional regulative function of arms control is now embedded in a transformative arms control agenda.

The NPR makes clear that nuclear proliferation is not in the interest of the international community and that proliferators will find themselves isolated and confronted by an anti-proliferation coalition led by the United States. By assembling an anti-proliferation coalition, the United States is able to strengthen non-proliferation norms and connect its own arms control efforts with a broadly supported consensus on the undesirability of nuclear proliferation. The NPR resists going for broke and instead emphasizes steps and measures that can reasonably be expected to work over the medium term. Thus the NPR speaks of the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide as a distinct policy goal only to the extent that this goal gives *direction* to U.S. arms control efforts whose *purpose* must remain the security of the United States and its allies and partners. The NPR carefully avoids sacrificing credibility for visionary boldness, reflecting the "rudimentary consensus" on the relationship between regulative and transformative arms control. In short, the NPR is working with "the grain of international relations," aiming at what is possible in areas in which consensus can be nurtured. This is no small feat. After decades of bifurcation between possession goals and milieu goals, we see the beginning of a redefinition of possession goals, recognizing that milieu goals are not merely great-power management tools; it is the global security environment shaping the very nature of possession goals.

CONCLUSION

Bull concluded his 1976 essay on a conservative note. "For so long as international society continues to contain a hierarchy of military power, the present one or some other, it does not seem likely that order can be preserved without rules that reflect these priorities."⁵³

Nuclear weapons are a major factor in this hierarchy and the prevailing international order. Though new challenges have emerged in the shape of new actors, complex interdependence, globalization, and renewed attention to the desirability of a more-equitable international order, radical transformation of international order is not on the horizon. Notably, however, this paper has shown that the rules that reflect the priorities of international order have evolved. The price of possession goals has led to decreasing returns on milieu goals. Hence, Booth and Wheeler's argument that "while we should not minimize the strength of the obstacles to denuclearization, neither should we ignore the sociological reality that the rigidity in the situation is in part because of the rigidity in our thinking" no longer holds.⁵⁴ This paper has identified a significant decline in the "rigidity of thinking." To cope with a new security

⁵³ Bull, "Arms Control," 16.

⁵⁴ Booth and Wheeler, "Beyond Nuclearism," 54.

environment, structures of governance need to emerge that redefine the scope of arms control, the level of cooperation required, and the sustained engagement of major powers. Milieu goals *have* asserted themselves, and a compelling case can be made for a new balance between possession goals and milieu goals. Hence, we witness not a stepped-up search for possession goals but broad-ranging efforts of cooperation.⁵⁵ For those who reject the existing “hierarchy of military power,” such cooperation is but a token of greater transformation yet to be delivered. For others, the imperfections of any system of international order continue to demand caution lest our ability to nurture a consensus on minimal order is eroded by the unpredictable outcome of bolder steps.⁵⁶

As we consider the future of the President’s goal of nuclear weapons elimination, four issues are likely to play a critical role. First, there is the problem of how to nurture the delicate domestic balance the President has forged. The NPR shows that the administration has taken innovative steps to conciliate possession and milieu goals in the new security environment while trying to reassure both the arms control and the deterrence communities. There is nothing in the NPR that cannot be supported by both deterrence and disarmament advocates.⁵⁷ Strategic belief systems have not been put to the test. That challenge is looming in the future, when negotiations on numbers and types of nuclear weapons are more consequential than the reductions in the New START Treaty. American leadership and its willingness to seek cooperation on issues of international security can rely on broad domestic support only for as long as it can satisfy opposing camps. The New Start ratification politics have revealed the fragility of the domestic consensus not merely on issues of arms control and disarmament but on presidential credibility in international negotiations.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ United Nations, 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, NPT/CONF.2010/50, vol. I (New York: United Nations, 2010), accessed on the website of the *United Nations* at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20\(VOL.I\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=NPT/CONF.2010/50%20(VOL.I)), 20 June 2010. Also see the renewed commitment to securing nuclear materials at the Nuclear Security Summit, 12–13 April 2010, Washington, DC, accessed on the website of the *White House* at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/press-conference-president-nuclear-security-summit>, 14 April 2010. Testimony by Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of the New Start Treaty clearly shows the connection the administration makes between national security policy and international security governance. Accessed on the website of the United States Senate at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/medhttp://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ClintonTestimony100518a.pdf> and at <http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/GatesTestimony100518a.pdf>, 20 June 2010.

⁵⁶ Bold steps are not necessarily detrimental to security. Adler and Barnett conclude their study of security communities with the reminder that “to understand security requires the fundamental recognition that policymakers have the ability to act upon the world with new knowledge and new understandings about how to organize security.” Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*, 438.

⁵⁷ “U.S. Nuclear Posture Review Priorities,” Council on Foreign Relations, 6 April, 2010, accessed on the website of the Council on Foreign Relations at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/21841/us-nuclear-posture-news-priorities.html>, 20 May 2010.

⁵⁸ “Obama Pushes for Senate Vote on New Arms Treaty,” *The Washington Post*, 18 November 2010, accessed on the website of *The Washington Post* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/>

Second, U.S. commitment alone, even if sustained, cannot craft an enduring new balance between possession goals and milieu goals. From the perspective of international order, there is an inherent tension between possession goals and milieu goals. By their very nature, possession goals are about hierarchy. The dilemma is that in an anarchic international system, one cannot get milieu goals for all without possession goals for some. What has changed is the price tag for claiming possession goals without attending to milieu goals. The United States has begun to reassess the price it is willing to pay for possession goals in order to make its milieu goals more effective and attractive. There is little evidence of other nuclear powers willing to act on this logic.⁵⁹ If the United States fails to engage other nuclear powers in re-evaluating the role of nuclear weapons in international security, the domestic consensus could quickly unravel.⁶⁰

Third, U.S. leadership in arms control is challenged internationally. The very same security environment that is reshuffling the relationship between national nuclear arsenals and proliferation concerns also demands that milieu goals themselves cease to reflect preferred visions of governance. To be sure, reduced American reliance on nuclear weapons and sustained advocacy of non-proliferation cooperation can have important milieu effects. From a perspective of world order, however, these effects continue to represent American-crafted or, at a minimum, American-led Western milieu goals. For those who do not share these goals, they appear as just another form of dominance. In a world of rising

article/2010/11/17/AR2010111701598, 18 November 2010; Henry A. Kissinger, George P. Shultz, James Baker III, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, and Colin L. Powell, "The Republican Case for Ratifying New START," *The Washington Post*, 2 December 2010, accessed on the website of *The Washington Post* at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/01/AR2010120104598>, 2 December 2010.

⁵⁹ Kingston Reif, "Nuclear Weapons: The Modernization Myth," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 8 December 2009, web edition accessed at <http://www.thebulletin.org/web-edition/features/nuclear-weapons-the-modernization-myth.html>, 10 March 2010. Reif makes the case that the nuclear modernization programs of other nations do not threaten U.S. deterrence capabilities; hence, the United States can indeed reduce reliance on nuclear weapons without sacrificing deterrent effects.

⁶⁰ Domestic consensus on President Obama's nuclear policy is delicate, as was evident in the debates prior to its release. "US to Make Stopping Nuclear Terror Key Aim," *The New York Times*, 19 December 2009, accessed on the website of *The New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/19/us/politics/19nuke.html>, 20 December 2009; "Obama Presses Review of Nuclear Strategy," *The Boston Globe*, 3 January 2010, accessed on the website of *The Boston Globe* at http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2010/01/03/obama_presses-review, 4 January 2010; "Obama's Nuclear-free Vision Mired in Debate," *The Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 2010, accessed on the website of *The Los Angeles Times* at <http://www.latimes.com/news/nation-and-world/la-na-obama-nuclear4-2010jan04,0,1799502.story>, 6 January 2010; "What's Holding up the Nuclear Posture Review?" *The Weekly Standard*, 6 January 2010, accessed on the website of *The Weekly Standard* at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/what%E2%80%99s-holding-nuclear-posture>, 10 January 2010; "Nuclear Weapons Review Put Off," *The Washington Times*, 7 January 2010, accessed on the website of *The Washington Times* at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jan/07/nuclear-weapons-review>, 10 January 2010.

powers, others will demand voice in how rules of governance are created and implemented. It is therefore paramount that creating sustainable milieu goals for a new security order must include rule-making power for others. This makes a twenty-first century security order a collective challenge and qualifies the role of American leadership. The United States can lead, but only with due regard to the input of other players. More than buying into a new security order, others will demand a seat at the table.

Progress toward nuclear weapon elimination is a test of rule-making power and how that power is shared. It follows logically that a new theory of disarmament is also a new theory of international order. This will become obvious in arms control endeavors including entry into force of the CTBT, negotiations over tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, a fissile material production ban, a sanction regime for NPT violators, ballistic missile defenses, and nuclear arms reductions beyond U.S.–Russian bilateral negotiations; the degree to which any of these measures progresses testifies to national and collective abilities to design a new international order. Hence, the Obama administration's inclusion of nuclear disarmament and the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons in its policy agenda represents perhaps the most-potent challenge to America's rule-making power. For disarmament to be pursued, the United States must accept others asserting a say in shaping the rules of governance. Responding to the proliferation challenge and the declining utility of nuclear weapons, the administration re-evaluated its nuclear posture and took a prudent first step. Consensus on future steps will be harder to forge, more difficult to maintain, and more consequential for U.S. leadership.

Fourth and finally, while major states have an incentive to reduce the cost of possession goals, that is, reduce reliance on nuclear weapons in their own strategies to foster support for non-proliferation, the goal of disarmament remains distant. The imperfections of the international system reflect that the relationship between possession goals and milieu goals is complex. Arms control and disarmament steps in pursuit of ultimate nuclear weapon elimination highlight this complexity and impede the emergence of a compelling and transformative elimination logic. As the arsenals of the United States and Russia decline, the existing dispersal of declared and latent nuclear capability elsewhere becomes more prominent, challenging the domestic consensus in both countries to go further despite the continued need for non-proliferation governance structures. Moreover, the extent to which states currently possessing nuclear weapons or planning to do so in the future are willing to adopt disarmament as a milieu goal is unclear. North Korea, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran and a host of radical non-state actors may not be persuaded that a world without nuclear weapons is preferable, irrespective of who is leading the effort.

Together these observations strongly suggest that though the need for international security milieu goals is increasingly pressing, their realization is far from assured. The rising heterogeneity of international relations that

compels states to cooperate and redefine the relationship between national security and international order generates obstacles to cooperation. Nuclear weapons, deeply embedded in the structure of the international system, reflect these obstacles as endemic imperfections. As a milieu goal, their elimination makes sense; but only if the resulting imperfections along the way and the conditions at the point of destination create a global order preferable to that of today. It is in the trading of relative imperfections that disarmament as an approach to world order has to prove its mettle.

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