

Some Thoughts on Disarmament and International Security in the 21st Century

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The title of this talk, and I stress “talk,” is “Some Thoughts on Disarmament and International Security in the 21st Century” and I underline the word “some”.

Let me begin by stating the obvious. These are certainly not the best of times for disarmament— be it multilateral, regional or bilateral. These are also times in which the maintenance of international peace and security is being challenged from many quarters. And this is a particularly bad period for multilateral diplomacy.

I shall begin with a short description of current multilateralism, followed by a brief discussion of some aspects of international security. Then I will refer to the subject of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and to the consensus hoax in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). I shall then offer a rather cynical interpretation of why multilateral disarmament agreements were achieved in the second half of the twentieth. I conclude with an assessment of why the prospects for nuclear disarmament in the immediate future are bleak.

Multilateralism

- In Mexico we are very fond of the word *multilateralismo* or multilateralism. You will not find the word in most dictionaries. Perhaps that explains why it is not part of the vocabulary of President George W. Bush’s administration.

- The Bush administration views “security” quite differently from the majority of United Nations member States.
 - For years the UN has been in crisis, thus the proposals to reform it. The deeper the crisis the louder the calls for reform.
 - In the near future the only thing that will change at the UN will be its offices since they will have to move elsewhere while the headquarters’ buildings are repaired and remodelled.
 - The UN’s present crisis is very strange. It is a kind of paralysis that effects 191 of its 192 member States. We all know which country is not affected by that paralysis.
 - One example: the **2005 World Summit Outcome**, a document adopted a year ago at the 60th anniversary session of the General Assembly. It is divided into four sections (originally it had a fifth section on disarmament):
 - Development
 - Peace and collective security
 - Human rights and the rule of law
 - Strengthening of the United Nations
1. The word “multilateralism” appears just once.¹ How can this happen in an organization which by definition is the center for multilateralism?
 2. At the request of the United States (and with no open opposition) the section on disarmament was eliminated. The word does not appear in the document. Nor does the United States’ preferred term “arms control.”
 3. The words “nuclear weapons” do not appear either. The word nuclear is mentioned

¹ “78. We reiterate the importance of promoting and strengthening the multilateral process and of addressing international challenges and problems by strictly abiding by the Charter and the principles of international law, and further stress our commitment to **multilateralism**.”

once and it is preceded by the word “terrorism.”² How is it possible that a document of this importance fails to mention the question of “disarmament and international security”?

International security

- Only a century has elapsed since the international community and its member States accepted the idea that one could and should seek international security.
- They also accepted that the maintenance of international peace and security should be based on disarmament. Beginning with The Hague Conference of 1899 this was also agreed in one form or another in the League of Nations Covenant, the United Nations Charter and the legal instruments that established regional organizations.
- At the same time, the concept of security has been changing. But its fundamental goal continues to be the same. What one seeks is to live and develop in peace.
- Concepts and aspects of security
 1. Balance of forces → military alliances: NATO and Warsaw Pact.
 2. Deterrence: Persuade an adversary that the risks and costs of acts of aggression far outweigh any gain to be obtained as a result of such acts. If war is not avoided, deterrence has failed.
 3. Equality in matters of security. It is not a concept of security, but simply a principle for the negotiation of bilateral weapons agreements [symmetry].
 4. Collective security. It is based on a global commitment to peace and international security undertaken as a legal obligation by all nations.

² “91. We support efforts for the early entry into force of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of **Nuclear Terrorism** 31 and strongly encourage States to consider becoming parties to it expeditiously and acceding without delay to the twelve other international conventions and protocols against terrorism and implementing them.

5. Neutrality. One of the principal means to promote national security has been the policy to remain outside military alliances.

6. Non-alignment. It is not merely a policy of governments but a movement of the peoples of non-aligned States as well.

7. Peaceful co-existence. It should not become a passive co-existence but rather proactive co-operation and understanding among all nations based on equality and mutual benefit.

8. Common security. The idea is to replace deterrence through armaments with a doctrine of common security. International peace should be based on a dedication to survival of all and not on the threat of mutual destruction.

9. Human security. The 1994 UNDP report: ecology (life) economy (wealth), society (support), politics (power) and culture (knowledge).

The world has changed radically since 1945. Colonies in the classic sense have disappeared although there persists a certain neo-colonialism. What seems paradoxical is that when the entire population of the globe has finally begun to live in nation-states, the role of the State has begun to change.

- Since 1945 the UN has gone from 51 to 192 member States.
- Over the past 15 years the world has been transformed.
- The disappearance of the Soviet Union was a turning point but there were other changes.
- Aside from States, other actors have appeared on the international stage: transnational corporations and NGOs.
- Communications, technological advances and globalization have accelerated change. Communications are no longer under the control of the State. One obvious example is the Internet but one should also think of radio and television.

- As a result, the State, for centuries the principal international actor, has been losing power.
- Technological development depends more on the private sector than on the State. The name of Bill Gates comes to mind. This impacts the investment capacity, from genetics to cloning to technologies for waging war.
- Financial transactions flow around the world and can generate regional or world crises in the solution of which the State has a small part to play.
- Only if they undertake joint action will States recover the possibility create, with other actors, an international order free from threats and fear.
- Cooperation is the key.
- The concept of security is today based on the concepts of international security, the security of the State and human security.
- Thus the importance of promoting multilateralism, a co-operative multilateralism.

With regard to security, there are four main aspects:

- International security goes far beyond the military.
- International security is transnational, global and interdependent.
- International security is achieved through the action of a variety of actors; the State is no longer the sole actor.
- International security has today a much broader agenda and requires the concerted action of all actors.

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)

The situation regarding the proliferation of WMD is rather encouraging with respect to biological and chemical weapons and most discouraging regarding nuclear weapons. The first

two have been prohibited in multilateral treaties, although only the Chemical Weapons Convention has a strong verification system. The Bush administration has seen to it that a decade of international efforts to design a similar verification system for the Biological Weapons Convention has ended in failure, or at least put on hold.

The world has yet to agree on a treaty to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. They are legal (at least for the time being) in five nations: United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) recognizes them as Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Nuclear weapons are illegal in the rest of the world except in three countries that have not joined the NPT: India, Israel and Pakistan.

The nuclear non-proliferation regime was established by the NPT in 1970 and extended indefinitely in 1995. It was felt then, and it is still true for most, that the world would be safer with fewer NWS. The vast majority of NPT signatories felt then and still do that the world would be safer if there were no nuclear weapons at all. Thus the treaty's article VI.

In December 2002 the Bush administration's unveiled its "National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)." The thrust of that "strategy" is that nuclear weapons are not the problem. They are only a problem if they fall into the wrong hands, such as countries in the "axis of evil" and non-State actors, beginning with terrorists. Washington now argues that WMD cannot be disinvited and thus there is a need to enforce the non-proliferation of WMD. Yet there are examples that contradict that argument. Nuclear weapons were surrendered to Russia by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union and South Africa got rid of its nuclear arsenal with the end of *apartheid*.

The United States was able to delete the references to nuclear disarmament from last year's 2005 Summit Outcome because the UN General Assembly occasionally strays from its

rules of procedure. Those rules state that resolutions can be adopted by a vote or, if no one objects, without a vote. But there are times when some delegations, especially when an important document is to be approved, insist that decisions be taken by consensus which in theory means that each of the 192 member countries has a veto. Let me explain.

Consensus . . . that makes sense

For years the USSR tried to exercise its Security Council veto power in the General Assembly. In the seventies the United States began to do the same. With the backing of some of its Western European allies, it launched a campaign to change or, at least, to re-interpret the decision-making provisions of the Charter and the Assembly's Rules of Procedure.

In the seventies some began to speak insistently about the advisability that the General Assembly adopt its resolutions "by consensus," a term difficult to define since it means "general agreement" or absence of outright opposition. It is argued that resolutions have greater validity if they are adopted without any declared objection. There can be no doubt that a "general agreement" is attractive. In fact, one of the aims of the UN is to be "a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment" of the purposes of the Charter. And consensus could be considered precisely as a process leading to that harmonization of positions. It is a means to attain it, not an end in itself. In other words, it is an instrument to achieve common positions and not, as some permanent members would have it, a device to oppose them.

Many of the Assembly's most important decisions have been adopted by a vote. The Charter itself was voted upon, article by article, at the San Francisco Conference. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights was not, as one would say today, a "consensus text", but rather was approved by a vote in 1948. Both the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty were adopted by a vote. And

there are many more examples. Finally, if the rule of consensus is so good, why does the Security Council not adopt it?

Multilateral disarmament agreements

Will NWS undertake nuclear disarmament negotiations? In other words, what is the future of nuclear disarmament? To answer that question it might be useful to review what has been achieved over the last six decades in the field of multilateral disarmament and why it was possible?

During the second half of the twentieth century a number of multilateral disarmament treaties were concluded, some of great importance, for one, very simple, reason: when one of the military powers —here one fills in the blank with the name of the United States— reached the conclusion that it no longer needed certain weapons or weapons systems, it decided to eliminate them unilaterally and then, as a corollary, demanded a universal treaty to ensure that no one else could have them.

The first time this happened was in the early 1960s when President John F. Kennedy and Prime Minister Harold MacMillan decided, in light of the enormous wave of public demonstrations and protests, to put an end to their tests in the atmosphere. They convinced the Soviet Union to do the same. The three sat down and drafted what in 1963 became the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water, known as the Partial Nuclear Test-Ban (PTBT). Why was it possible to do so? Because all three countries had begun to test underground. France was then the only other NWS (China would become one in 1964) but could yet test underground.

In 1971, the three countries that gave us the PTBT offered us a second example: the Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof. They simply banned something no one wanted to do. Who would think of stationing nuclear weapons or other WMD on the ocean floor?

In 1972 came the third example: the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Traditionally, biological and chemical weapons had been dealt with together. But in 1971 the United Kingdom proposed that the Geneva-based Conference negotiate an agreement for the elimination of biological weapons only. And so it happened. The reason was very simple. In 1969 the recently inaugurated President Richard Nixon decided unilaterally to eliminate biological weapons from the United States' arsenal. The opinion of his military advisors was that those weapons were as dangerous for the one who used them as they were for the intended target. Chemical weapons were still useful (the Vietnam war had not ended). The Soviet Union agreed with the United Kingdom's proposal and the Convention was drafted.

Twenty years later the Geneva-based Conference concluded the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. Once again the proposals of the United States military were the decisive factor. After the first Gulf War they reached the conclusion that chemical weapons had lost their usefulness. With highly sophisticated conventional weapons one could defeat a large army—it was said that Iraq's was then world's fourth largest— even one that had weapons of mass destruction. The pace of the negotiations in Geneva suddenly accelerated and within a few months the Convention had been drafted.

The fifth and last example is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty which the Conference on Disarmament sort of concluded in 1996. I say “sort of” because the text was sent from Geneva to the General Assembly in New York in a most unorthodox manner, without the full agreement of the members of the Conference on Disarmament, notably India.

For years technological advances, especially in the field of computer science, had made it possible to stop underground nuclear tests, which are necessary to improve the design of new weapons and ensure that existing ones still work. Early in his first term, President William Clinton declared a unilateral moratorium on all nuclear testing. Russia followed suit while the United Kingdom, which tested in Nevada, simply had no choice. Like France, China was close to achieving a laboratory-testing capability. And both countries would do so in a short time. Again, a military activity was banned after a unilateral decision by the United States..

The conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing description of the origin of some multilateral disarmament treaties is rather simple. To attain nuclear disarmament it will be necessary that the United States military reach the conclusion that nuclear weapons are no longer needed and should be eliminated. In view of the political atmosphere in Washington, one cannot imagine such a possibility in the near future. Furthermore, President Bush’ so-called *Nuclear Posture Review* assigns an important role to nuclear weapons.³ NATO also contemplates their possible use. With NATO’s increased membership and Russia’s new nuclear posture, today there are more persons than ever living in countries that accept and defend the possession of nuclear weapons and their possible first use.

Will nuclear disarmament only be attained when the the United States decides to pursue it? Probably. But one could explore another path. Following the example of the role played by

³ On January 9, 2002, the United States’ Defense Department announced that it had completed the drafting of that document but only made public a part of it.

Ottawa in the case of the Convention on anti-personnel mines, one might call for a world conference outside the United Nations to draw up a treaty for the elimination of nuclear weapons. The text is opened for signature and one waits for the United States (and perhaps other nuclear powers) to join it one day.

The prospects for nuclear disarmament in the immediate future are bleak

Recent years have not been good for those who advocate nuclear disarmament. In May 2005 the 187 States party to the NPT meet for four weeks in New York in what was its seventh review conference. There they tried to improve on what was agreed in 2000. The Conference was a complete failure. It fell victim to the attitude of the Bush administration to multilateral agreements in general and disarmament treaties in particular. Washington paralyzed the work of the Conference during the first two weeks and then refused to honor what it had agreed to in the past. Over the last two weeks the United States allowed the Conference to meet but did not allow it to reach agreements.

For their part, the countries that proposed the thirteen steps that were approved unanimously at the 2000 NPT Conference wanted to move forward regarding nuclear disarmament. They are the New Agenda Coalition (Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden). But there was the danger of moving backwards since Washington tried to re-open the text agreed in 2000 in order to weaken its contents.

The truth is that Russia and the United States have the responsibility to lead us towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Only when those two countries reduce significantly their arsenals (to less than a thousand warheads) will one be able to insist that China, France and the United Kingdom participate fully in the negotiations aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons. But even then it will be necessary to convince India, Israel and Pakistan to do the same. The scourge of

horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons will only begin to be controlled when those states that now possess them decide to eliminate them.

Since 1945 some 130,000 bombs have been produced, all but a small percentage by the United States (over 70,000) and the former Soviet Union (over 50,000). We know that since the end of the Cold War Russia and the United States have reduced substantially their nuclear arsenals (to some 10,000 nuclear weapons each). It is estimated that China, France and the United Kingdom have arsenals of between 300 and 600 bombs. Some think that India and Pakistan have around fifty but will probably have ten times that number in a few years. No one knows the approximate size of the Israeli nuclear arsenal. One also knows that France and the United States are investing a lot of resources in order to modernize their nuclear arsenals.

It is obvious that the administration of President Bush has no intention to begin talks with other nuclear powers in order to fulfill its commitments in the field of nuclear disarmament. Worse still, as a result of its war against international terrorism, it has managed to move the attention of much of the world regarding nuclear weapons from the very real threat posed by existing arsenals to the hypothetical horizontal proliferation, not just by nations but also by the so-called non-State actors. An example of this is Security Council resolution 1540.

That resolution —adopted on April 28, 2004 at the behest of the United States— addresses the threat posed to international peace and security by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. It does not mention the word disarmament and uses the word “proliferation” only in its horizontal meaning. The Council declared itself “gravely concerned by the threat of terrorism and the risk that non-States actors . . . may acquire, develop, traffic in or use nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery.” The Council decided, among other things, that all States shall adopt and enforce laws to prevent that

threat. Then it lists in great detail the kind of laws and other measures that States shall adopt. In other words, the Security Council decided to legislate in this field and forced States to do the same.

Some observers believe that by adopting resolution 1540 the Security Council is signaling its intention to take up once again the issues regarding the regulation of armaments which it ceased to discuss a half a century ago. However, that resolution could also be seen as an example of how one country is managing to impose its own agenda with regard to weapons of mass destruction and how the rest of the nations are allowing it to do so, thus undermining the arms control and disarmament agreements concluded over the past forty years.

At the beginning of the 21st century multilateralism is in deep trouble. This current crisis will perhaps not last beyond 2009 when a new administration takes over in Washington. But who knows? For the time being one will simply have to grin and bear it. It makes little sense to make concession after concession in matters of substance in order to please Washington. If one does so, one will live to regret. It has happened before. For example that is exactly what happened at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

As to the question of international security and the so-called war against terrorism, the United States has said repeatedly that it is willing to ensure that security and wage that war by itself if necessary. The sooner the international community leaves the United States alone to do just that the better we will all be. The promotion of disarmament and the enhancement of international security in the 21st century will be better served if we think that the current situation is the last chapter of the 20th century and that the 21st century will begin in 2009.