The United Nations and Disarmament

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Banner headlines in the The New York Times on August 7, 1945, proclaim the birth of the nuclear-weapon age. The new era began with news of the first bomb test a month earlier, lower middle right, and the weapon’s first use, on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, lower far right.
When the United Nations began its work in 1946, there were those who anticipated that disarmament and armament regulation would probably be achieved comparatively quickly, whereas decolonization and independence of states would take considerably longer. In the event, matters evolved rather differently. Decolonization proceeded quickly through the 1960s and 1970s, and the membership of the United Nations increased from 51 states in 1945 to 189 by 2001, while in the same period real progress in disarmament and arms regulation was disappointingly arduous and slow.

As the founders of the United Nations met in San Francisco from April 25 through June 26, 1945, to finish writing the UN Charter, the end of World War II was already within sight. Little did they know, however, when they signed the Charter on June 26, that less than three weeks later the nuclear-weapon age would be born. The first nuclear explosive test took place on July 16 in New Mexico, USA, and three weeks later nuclear bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: on August 6 and 9, respectively. The first blast of some 15 kilotons (equivalent to 15,000 tons of TNT) destroyed 90 percent of Hiroshima whereas, due to the local geography, the 22-kiloton explosion over Nagasaki destroyed about one-third of that city. The two explosions killed or injured approximately a quarter of a million people and by 1950 a further 230,000 had died of injuries or radiation.

Since those days of summer 1945, the world has had to live with this dichotomy: On one hand, the authors of the Charter sought to establish a global mechanism for peace and collective security and the betterment of humanity through social progress, justice, faith in fundamental human rights, and respect for international law; and on the other hand, virtually at the same moment in history, human ingenuity had invented weapons with a destructive capacity to annihilate the human race.

The founders of the United Nations opened the Charter with this commitment:

We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetimes has brought untold sorrow to mankind ... have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

The primary purpose of the United Nations, as clearly stated in Article 1 of the Charter, is the maintenance of international peace and security, and, to that end, to take collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the
The Charter commits all Member States to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It accords to the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and provides a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Charter sets out action to be taken through decisions in the Security Council with regard to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.

The Security Council is charged with formulating a plan for a system of regulation of armaments “in order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.” The Council was to have the assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article 47 and was to submit the plan to UN Member States. In addition, the General Assembly was specifically given the right to take up issues of disarmament. The General Assembly “may consider … principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments, and may make recommendations with regard to such principles to the Members or to the Security Council or to both.”

With the emergence in the late 1940s of confrontation between the two principal military alliances, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and the ensuing Cold War, which lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Security Council was unable to take any action on contentious issues such as a plan for the regulation of armaments. The Military Staff Committee, which was supposed to meet at the level of military chiefs of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council, and which also had the five most powerful military forces, was stillborn and has remained so to this day. Even agreement on the Committee’s rules of procedure was precluded by the general climate of mistrust and suspicion between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers, and within two or three years their relations deteriorated further with the onset of the Cold War. The proponents of multilateral arms limitation and disarmament had to find other ways of making progress through the General Assembly and by the establishment of other bodies.

With the horrific devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki fresh in mind, in 1946, the General Assembly established an Atomic Energy Commission and gave it the task of ensuring that atomic energy would be used only for peaceful purposes. The United States proposed the creation of an atomic energy development authority for all phases of the manufacture and use of atomic energy. The goal was that once the authority was operating effectively, atomic weapon production would cease and stocks would be destroyed. The Soviet Union, however, called for a convention prohibiting atomic weapons and their production to be achieved first, together with the destruction of all atomic weapons within three months of the convention entering into force. Moscow saw the former as
preserving the American advantage of military nuclear knowledge and capability, whereas Washington perceived the latter as eliminating the US edge without first ensuring that atomic energy development would be under effective international control, and thus there was no agreement. This fundamental lack of trust between the two military giants would lead to a historic arms race that would continue for the ensuing four decades.

In 1947, the Security Council established another body, the Commission for Conventional Armaments, to make proposals for the general reduction of armaments and armed forces other than nuclear weapons. Again, however, there were major differences between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union and these clashes, together with a general deterioration in the international climate, resulted in the Commission being unable to make progress.

This photo of Hiroshima, Japan, was taken about a month after Little Boy, a uranium bomb, was dropped on the city on August 6, 1945. (UPI: Bettmann Newsphotos)

An atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, on August 9, 1945, reducing one-third of the city to charred rubble. (Photo originally appeared in Life magazine)
In 1952, the General Assembly combined these two commissions into a single body, the Disarmament Commission, with the objective of making proposals for a coordinated, comprehensive program of arms limitations and reductions of armed forces and measures to eliminate all major weapons adaptable to mass destruction. With the Western Powers seeking to give priority to the limitation and control of conventional weapons, and the Soviet Union preferring to focus on curbs on nuclear weapons, this effort did not find success either. In an inclusive effort to bring in the views of other states, in 1958 the membership was extended to all Member States of the United Nations. Frustrated by procedural difficulties, it was able to meet for only two sessions: in 1960 and 1965.

Recognizing that efforts to date had been futile, in 1959 the General Assembly began to look in other directions. It included in its agenda an item entitled “General and complete disarmament under effective international control” and sought partial measures that would attract broad support and contribute towards achieving the overall goal. Separately, in 1959 the major powers of Europe and the United States established the Ten Nation Committee on Disarmament with equal East and West membership. Designated as a negotiating body, it was expanded in 1962 into the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENDC) and endorsed by the General Assembly, with eight members added from Non-Aligned states. This became the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) in 1969 with a membership of 26 states, and it was expanded yet again in 1975 to 31 states.

Faced with the continued build-up of arms across the board, the General Assembly turned to limiting the introduction of arms into specified geographical areas. By the late 1960s, a number of collateral agreements had been reached, with the principal aim of curbing the expansion of the arms race into areas in which it had not yet extended. These included:

- the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, providing for the demilitarization of Antarctica;
- the 1963 Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water, known as the Partial Test-Ban Treaty;
- the 1967 Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, known as the Outer Space Treaty;
- the 1967 Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America, known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco; and
- the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, often called simply the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
These treaties were dramatic in comparison to the years of failure and were visionary in the limitations they placed on the expansion of nuclear weapon deployment. Notwithstanding these achievements, none of these treaties produced actual reductions in levels of weapons, and global military expenditures were continuing to rise.

Again, it was through the General Assembly that an effort was initiated to slow and reverse the arms race. In 1969, the General Assembly declared the 1970s as the First Disarmament Decade and called upon states to intensify their efforts to achieve effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race. The General Assembly called for nuclear disarmament as well as the elimination of non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations urged Member States to conclude a treaty on general and complete disarmament under effective international control. The General Assembly also drew attention to the importance of channeling a substantial part of the resources freed by disarmament measures towards the promotion of the economic development of developing countries: “disarmament and development.”

It was hoped that declaring a “disarmament decade” would be an effective device for focusing attention on the issue, but it was essentially unsuccessful in that, in the first years of the 1970s, UN members achieved agreement on only two further important multilateral treaties:

• the 1971 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, known as the Sea-Bed Treaty; and
• the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, popularly called the Biological Weapons Treaty.

The latter was notable for being the first international agreement providing for real disarmament by the elimination of a category of existing weapons. It was, however, to become the subject of much contention in later years in that it contained no verification provisions.

Thus, by the mid 1970s, thirty years after the foundation of the United Nations, there had been both progress and disappointment. On the positive side, the multilateral treaties that had been agreed upon were serving as the beginning of a framework of constraints on the deployment and expansion of weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations had been successful in carving out spaces for prohibiting the introduction of categories of weapons but had not been able to eliminate or reduce arms. On the negative side, the Security Council had been unable to contribute anything to the regulation of armaments and disarmament. Hence, the multilateral disarmament machinery that had
been established had failed to make real progress on reducing arms. Annual
global military expenditures were some $400 billion and rising, and the world
continued to lie under the shadow of a potentially catastrophic nuclear
exchange. Nuclear policy proclaimed by the superpowers had reached the alarm-
ing level of “mutual assured destruction” or MAD. Nuclear deterrence rested on
the chilling understanding between the United States and the Soviet Union that
each had sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy the other and the political will to
use them if necessary.

First Special Session of the General Assembly
Devoted to Disarmament – 1978

Once more, the General Assembly became the instrument of choice for a num-
ber of governments that wished to see the arms race halted and reversed. In
1976, on the initiative of Non-Aligned countries (those that refrained from
identifying themselves with one side or the other in the East/West competition)
and with support from East and West, the General Assembly decided to hold a
special session devoted entirely to disarmament. By giving the issue more
focused attention, the primary objectives were to establish by consensus a new
global strategy for disarmament and obtain fresh commitment at the highest lev-
els of government to make progress.

The session took place at UN headquarters in New York from May 23 to
June 30, 1978. Nineteen heads of state or government, 51 foreign ministers and
many other high-ranking officials took part, and the debate covered the entire
spectrum of disarmament issues. The outcome was a consensus agreement
embodied in the Final Document of the session and intended as the guideline for
all future multilateral disarmament efforts within and outside the United Nations.

The Final Document recognized that the United Nations has a central role
and primary responsibility in the field of disarmament. In four sections, the
Final Document identified goals, principles, and priorities and identified some
specific measures that states should pursue on an urgent basis. Although a con-
sensus document, some of the language was the result of hard bargaining and in
the end meant different things to different people. For example, on priorities the
wording was as follows: “[P]riorities in disarmament negotiations shall be
nuclear weapons; other weapons of mass destruction, including chemical
weapons; conventional weapons, including any which may be deemed to be
excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects; and reduction of armed
forces.”

To the active Non-Aligned states, this clearly meant that the first prior-
ity should be nuclear weapons and therefore laid a major responsibility on the
nuclear-weapon states to take action to pursue and achieve nuclear disarma-
ment. But to the United States and its Western allies, there was nothing in the
wording that identified an order in which the priorities should be taken, and as
nuclear deterrence was a fundamental defense strategy of the time, they did not
accept that nuclear disarmament should have first priority status.

To support the attainment of objectives of the Final Document, the General
Assembly in 1979 declared the 1980s as the Second Disarmament Decade, with
goals consistent with the ultimate objective of the disarmament process: general
and complete disarmament under effective international control.

During the years immediately following the special session, the international
climate worsened: The hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union
sharpened, military expenditures increased, and nuclear arsenals continued to
grow. These and other factors, such as Soviet military action in Afghanistan, the
occupation of the US embassy in Teheran, and the holding hostage by Iran of
US embassy staff, all had negative effects on disarmament efforts. Negotiations
ground to a halt on almost all the important issues. In this tense atmosphere,
the lofty goals of the Final Document moved even further out of reach.

Second Special Session of the General Assembly
Devoted to Disarmament – 1982

The second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament
took place in New York from June 7 to July 10, 1982. More than 140 states
took part in the debate, many expressing their deep concern at the lack of
progress. Also present to give voice were more than 3,000 representatives from
some 450 nongovernmental organizations, and the streets of New York wit-
nessed the largest popular demonstration in US history when an estimated
three-quarters of a million people took part in an anti-nuclear rally. Streams of
orderly protesters filled the streets, crowding past the United Nations hour after
hour as they snaked their way back and forth through the streets and avenues,
ending miles away in Central Park. Thousands of communications, petitions,
and appeals with many millions of signatures were received by the United
Nations from organizations, groups and individuals all over the world.

Despite these expressions of public concern, and various efforts to find
diplomatic language that would attract consensus agreement, in the end the
political gaps between the West, the East, and the Non-Aligned proved too large
to be bridged. To add to the difficulties, there were ongoing conflicts and in-
ternational tensions in various parts of the world, and the atmosphere was not at
all conducive to making concessions and compromises on matters that were
related to the perceived national security interests of Member States, in particu-
lar those who were members of NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The Concluding
Document of the session was weak and insubstantial.
At Bikini Atoll in the Pacific in 1946, a bomb more powerful than those dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima was tested by the United States. In just five seconds, the infamous "mushroom cloud," pictured above, grew to two miles wide. (Photo originally appeared in Life magazine.)
Nuclear Weapons

With China's first nuclear test in 1964, there were five declared nuclear-weapon powers: the United States in 1945, the Soviet Union in 1949, the United Kingdom in 1952 and France in 1960. Year after year, non-nuclear-weapon states pressed for a halt to the nuclear arms race. Their concerns mounted as the numbers of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons grew. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States made it clear that negotiations to limit nuclear weapons would be strictly a bilateral matter and a number of bilateral agreements were made. These, however, made little impact on actually reducing the overall numbers of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Indeed, to some critics, the levels set by these agreements simply provided ceilings for the continuation of strategic weapons and their delivery systems: "[A]rms control," it was averred, "is not part of the solution — it is part of the problem."

With the ending of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the threat of a major nuclear exchange receded, and the two major nuclear powers, Russia and the United States, themselves took steps to reduce their nuclear stockpiles, which represented some 98 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. By the end of the century, it was estimated that the nuclear stockpiles had been reduced by approximately half, to less than 30,000 warheads.

But, although the threat of nuclear war has lessened and stockpiles are reduced, large numbers of warheads and delivery systems remain. The consequences if a nuclear exchange took place would still be catastrophic. In 2001, the United States and Russia continued to have a combined total of some 13,000 strategic nuclear weapons, and another 6,000 tactical nuclear weapons. Strategic weapons are those with an intercontinental range and with a magnitude far greater than those dropped on Japan. Strategic nuclear weapons vary from approximately 150 kilotons, or ten times the yield of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, to one-to-five megatons (1,000 to 5,000 kilotons), primarily hydrogen bombs. Tactical nuclear weapons are those used in-theater with a magnitude of the more Hiroshima type or less. The explosive yield of nuclear weapons depends on the type of target, from a large urban or industrial complex, to a hardened underground military control center, or for much more local use as in a nuclear depth charges for use against submarines. China, France, and the United Kingdom are believed to have a combined total of about 1,000 nuclear warheads. With the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan in 1998, there are now...
seven countries with nuclear weapons, and for many years there have been reliable assessments that Israel has an undeclared nuclear weapon capability.

Some potential nuclear countries have reversed their policies. South Africa announced in the early 1990s that it had ended its undisclosed nuclear program by destroying its half-dozen or so nuclear devices. Argentina and Brazil signed an agreement in 1991 to end their rival nuclear-weapon research programs and agreed to have the International Atomic Energy Agency participate in overseeing the agreement.

The 1978 Final Document had declared that effective measures of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear war had the highest priority. At its annual sessions the General Assembly has repeatedly adopted resolutions calling for action by the nuclear-weapon states, especially the two major states, to pursue nuclear arms reductions and the cessation of the nuclear arms race. The responses to these calls have been varied.

The United States, usually supported by the United Kingdom and France and their Western allies, has argued that the policy of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War actually preserved peace. However, with the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons can be reduced, and it is important that they should not further proliferate by more countries developing or acquiring their own nuclear arms. Certainly a better system to maintain world peace is needed but it would be a perilous pretense to suggest that such a system is at present available. In the meantime, the Western nuclear powers maintain that nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence continue to be essential components of a defensive military doctrine.

China has given a long-standing pledge never to be the first to use nuclear weapons, but stressed that the two major nuclear powers should take the lead in significant arms reductions. Only after that would China be ready to join all other nuclear-weapon states in reducing nuclear arsenals according to an agreed scale, as a step towards their elimination.

Russia and its predecessor, the Soviet Union, also gave a no-first-use undertaking but have consistently maintained the view that nuclear arms reductions must be achieved, in the first place, by bilateral negotiations with the United States. The West has never adopted a no-first-use policy, partly because the NATO alliance considered itself conventionally outgunned by the Soviet bloc and partly as a deliberate aspect of deterrence policy by always keeping Moscow guessing at what might trigger a nuclear release by the United States and its allies.

For many years, India argued vehemently for a nuclear-free world, but at the same time had carried out in 1974 what the Indian government described as a “peaceful nuclear explosion” and thereby demonstrated a capability to develop nuclear weapons. All doubts about India’s nuclear capabilities ended with its five consecutive nuclear-weapons tests in 1998, which Pakistan repeated shortly afterwards.
Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The issue of nuclear non-proliferation has received major attention over the years. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was adopted in 1968, came into force in 1970, and was extended indefinitely in 1995. The treaty has 187 States Parties, including the original five nuclear-weapon states, but Cuba, India, Israel and Pakistan are not members.

According to the treaty, all States Parties, including the nuclear-weapon states, commit themselves “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” The non-nuclear-weapon states, for their part, undertake not to receive or control any nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and not to seek or receive any assistance in manufacturing such weapons or devices. In return for this undertaking, the treaty provides for all Parties to “facilitate, and have the right to participate in, the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.” The latter clause is implemented through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), situated in Vienna. The IAEA is charged with two tasks under the NPT: to assist countries in developing nuclear power and technology for peaceful uses and to operate a safeguards system with a view to preventing a diversion of nuclear energy from peaceful uses to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The importance of the NPT cannot be over-emphasized. It serves as the anchor of all the efforts to constrain the development and spread of nuclear weapons. At the same time, however, it has aroused significant criticism among some of the non-nuclear-weapon states who have pointed out that, while they have kept their side of the bargain, the nuclear-weapon states have not carried out their undertaking in Article VI, and that there are still more nuclear weapons than there were when the treaty was signed in 1968.

The implementation of the treaty is reviewed every five years at a major conference held at the United Nations in New York. The Sixth Review Conference took place in 2000 at a time when progress on disarmament negotiations had been very slow, both bilaterally between the United States and the Russian Federation, and multilaterally in the Conference on Disarmament. Moreover, the US Senate had rejected the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the declared intention to proceed with a US National Missile Defense System threatened abrogation of the bilateral Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia.

A breakdown in the Conference would have seriously undermined the credibility of the NPT only five years after it had been indefinitely extended, largely at the wish of the nuclear-weapon states. The Non-Aligned countries continued to press for a convention on nuclear weapons that would contain a specific
Weapons of Mass Destruction

timetable for their eradication, a demand that the nuclear-weapon states have always stoutly resisted. However, a more central view was taken by the “New Agenda Coalition,” consisting of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden, and eventually compromises were reached on meaningful forward action that were acceptable to the nuclear-weapon states. An important element was the acceptance by the Conference as a whole of a call for “an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament.” By this, the nuclear-weapon states reaffirmed their political commitment to the goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons without giving any dates by which that goal might be achieved.

The next review is expected to take place in 2005.

Security assurances. In order to encourage non-nuclear-weapon states to refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons, over the years certain assurances have been given by nuclear-weapon states. Statements by the latter that they will come to the assistance of any non-nuclear-weapon state threatened by the use of nuclear weapons are known as “positive assurances.” Guarantees that nuclear-weapon states will not use their nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states are referred to as “negative assurances.” There is no wording in the NPT that covers either form of assurance, thus they remain simply policy statements.

When the NPT was concluded, three states — the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States — gave identical formal declarations of positive assurance that they would act, as permanent members of the Security Council, through the Council to take the measures necessary to counter aggression with nuclear weapons or the threat of such aggression against a non-nuclear-weapon state. Subsequently, on June 19, 1968, the Council adopted Resolution 255 on the subject.

Between 1978 and 1993, negative assurances were given unilaterally by all five nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT, although the wording was not uniform. The differences led to unease among the non-nuclear-weapon states, many of which considered the negative assurances to be insufficient, and prolonged discussion at the Conference on Disarmament over many years in efforts to find a formula on effective international arrangements to which all could agree.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones. Recognizing that large areas of the world were free of nuclear weapons, there have been a number of initiatives by non-nuclear-weapon states to preserve that condition as a way of strengthening the security of the states involved. Adding to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and in 1968 the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco), the United Nations created:
• the 1972 Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Seabed and Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof (the Seabed Treaty),
• the 1986 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (the Treaty of Rarotonga),
• the 1997 Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (the Bangkok Treaty), and
• the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (the Pelindaba Treaty), which was signed in 1996 but as of January 2002 had not yet received the necessary 28 instruments of ratification for entry into force.17

Even though some of these treaties include significant sea areas, all respect the principle of freedom of movement on the high seas and thus do not constrain the carriage of nuclear weapons on board ships of the nuclear-weapon states. Their terms do, however, have the effect of precluding port visits by ships known to be carrying such weapons and this has led to a policy by nuclear-weapon states of “neither confirming nor denying” the presence of such weapons on board. In instances where such declarations have been insufficient for acceptance by the host government, such as New Zealand, the result has been the complete absence of visits by any ship of the foreign navy concerned.

The establishment of these nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZ) has underscored the important role that can be played by regional organizations and arrangements stemming from discussions and initiatives on placing limits on nuclear weapons that have taken place within the United Nations.

Efforts to ban nuclear tests. The banning of nuclear testing has been pursued for many years. Although nuclear-weapon technology is now such that warheads can be designed, developed, and manufactured without the need for testing, as time passes the warheads age and doubts arise about their reliability. In some cases, there may also be a need to test trigger mechanisms and other refinements, although much can be achieved in sophisticated laboratory testing. Bans on testing strictly limit qualitative development of nuclear weapons, particularly on countries at the early stages of nuclear-weapons acquisition. There is therefore considerable interest on the part of both established nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states in banning tests as a means to curb proliferation.

The first such treaty was a multilateral convention that prohibited certain types of tests and entered into force in 1963, the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water. This was followed by two bilateral treaties between the United States and the Soviet Union: the Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests, which placed a 150-kiloton limit on the yield of an underground explosion (the Threshold Test Ban
Treaty), and the Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes (the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty).

But these were not enough. In Article I of the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the parties undertook to conclude "a treaty resulting in the permanent banning of all nuclear test explosions." The achievement of such a treaty, with universal membership and of unlimited duration, would be a major contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security. However, despite considerable efforts since 1963 to negotiate a treaty acceptable to all, the goal has so far proved elusive. The principal stumbling block for many years was that of reliable verification, but eventually a worldwide system of on-site inspections and seismic, infrasound, radionuclide and hydroacoustic stations, and laboratories was devised.

One of the major achievements of the United Nations in the nuclear field is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was overwhelmingly adopted by the General Assembly after years of planning, hard work, and lobbying by many non-governmental organization (NGOs) that advocate arms control. It was not only an achievement for curbing nuclear weapons but also for halting nuclear contamination of the environment, even by underground testing. In 1996, the CTBT was opened for signature in New York. By Article I of the Treaty, each State Party would undertake not to carry out any nuclear-weapon test or any other nuclear explosion, and would prohibit and prevent any such nuclear explosion at any place under its jurisdiction or control. Article II provided for the establishment of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization, based in Vienna, to ensure the implementation of its provisions including international verification of compliance. Article XIV declared that the treaty would enter into force 180 days after ratification by all the 44 states named in Annex 2 to the treaty, which included all known nuclear weapon-capable countries. The need to obtain ratification by all 44 states is a major bar to the achievement of agreement on the CTBT being translated into a successful Treaty.

Both India and Pakistan declined to sign the CTBT in 1996, and in 1998, following a change of party in government in New Delhi, India conducted nuclear-weapon tests. Within weeks, India's tests were followed by those of Pakistan, and so both countries openly acknowledged that they had developed a nuclear-weapon capability.

As of the beginning of 2002, 164 states had signed the Treaty and 89 had ratified it. France, Russia and the United Kingdom had ratified, but China and the United States had not. Israel had signed but not ratified, and neither India nor Pakistan were signatories. On October 13, 1999, the US Senate voted 51-48 to reject the CTBT. President Clinton declared, "By this vote, the Senate majority has turned its back on 50 years of American leadership against the spread of weapons of mass destruction." According to the opponents, their neg-
ative vote was because the treaty was not verifiable, that other countries could not be trusted to implement the treaty faithfully, and that it was fatally flawed. Although not yet in force, the fact that so many of the Member States of the United Nations have signed the CTBT and half the membership has ratified it is in itself a powerful statement of world opinion. While every sovereign state has a right to decide what is in its own security interest, the wide and overt expression of support for the CTBT among the members of the United Nations illustrates the role of the world body in providing a source of political pressure and moral suasion. The United States adopted legislation in 1992 by which it declared a moratorium on nuclear testing. Despite not ratifying the Treaty, the United States has observed its provisions by continuing its moratorium. The principal reason underlying the present US moratorium is that the United States has not needed to conduct any nuclear explosive tests, although by 2002 there was a growing discussion in Washington that tests may be required in the next few years for scientific and technological reasons.

Chemical weapons

Chemical weapons have been in existence for centuries. In 431 BC, Spartan armies used burning sulfur in sieges of cities with the objective of disabling the defenders. During World War I in Europe, both sides used gases such as chlorine, phosgene and “mustard gas,” blistering the lungs, eyes, and skin of soldiers and resulting in 1,300,000 casualties, of which about 100,000 were fatal. The horrifying effects led to widespread revulsion and, in 1925, to an international agreement signed in Geneva, the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. Although this Protocol was generally observed during World War II, there were reports of use by Japan in China, and by Egypt against Yemen in the early 1960s. Subsequently, the United States used chemical defoliants in the war in Viet Nam to destroy the forest cover of Viet Cong forces. In the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranian troops and against Kurdish insurgents, and following the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991, very large quantities of Iraqi chemical weapons were found and destroyed by the UN Special Commission established by the Security Council to eliminate Iraq’s arsenal of weapons of mass destruction.

A further dimension was added in 1995 when a Japanese terrorist group, Aum Shinrikyo, used sharpened umbrella tips to puncture plastic pouches of the nerve agent sarin in the Tokyo subway, causing 12 deaths and injuring 5,000. Chemical weapons are not particularly difficult to manufacture and virtually any country with a reasonably modern chemical industry could produce ingredients that, if used together, could constitute such weapons or serve as precursors to them. For example, triethanolamine is a precursor chemical for
nitrogen mustard gas and can be found in a variety of lotions, ointments, and detergents (including shampoos, bubble baths and household cleaners), as well as in industrial lubricants and surfactants.

During the 1970s and 1980s, recognizing the dangers of existing stocks and the growing risks of proliferation, the international community sought through the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to build on the 1925 Protocol to negotiate an agreement to ban the production of chemical weapons and eradicate existing stocks. Progress was slow, partly because of an impasse between the United States and the Soviet Union, and partly because of the search for a reliable system of inspections and verification. Multilateral negotiations proceeded more or less in parallel with bilateral negotiations between the two major chemical weapons possessor states that resulted in a bilateral agreement signed by the Soviet Union and the United States in June 1990. Further multilateral work led to agreement within the Conference on Disarmament in September 1992 and the UN General Assembly adopted the text of the convention by consensus on January 13, 1993. The outcome was the Convention on the Prohibition of Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, more usually known as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which was opened for signature in Paris on January 13, 1993, and came into force on April 29, 1997. As of December 31, 2001, a total of 174 states had signed the Convention, of which 145 had ratified or acceded to it.

The CWC is regarded as the first globally verifiable multilateral disarmament treaty. It prohibits the development, production, acquisition, retention, stockpiling, transfer and use of all chemical weapons, which are defined in the Convention as all toxic chemicals and their precursors, unless they are intended to be used for purposes not prohibited by the Convention. The definition also includes munitions and devices specially designed to release toxic chemicals, as well as any equipment specially designed for delivering chemical munitions or devices.

An important part of the Convention is the provision of extensive verification mechanisms by which all declared chemical weapons and their production facilities are subject to systematic inspections. These include provisions for a high level of intrusiveness and challenge inspections. This means that those in charge of verification can carry out immediate inspections if there is a suspicion that some violation of the agreement is taking place. For the Member States to agree to such an aggressive oversight mechanism indicates the seriousness of their determination to eliminate these weapons. The verification regime also extends to commercial chemical industry operations with the purpose of deterring, preventing, and, if necessary, detecting attempts to by-pass the ban by using so-called “dual-use” technologies and chemicals.

Another major task is the destruction of existing stocks, which is carried out under rigid control. Various deadlines have been set for the completion of
destruction, but the amounts of chemical weapons to be destroyed in the Russian Federation and in the United States are such that there may have to be extensions. It has been estimated that the costs of destroying US and Russian stocks may amount to some $20 billion.

To implement the Convention, a special organization was established, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), with headquarters in The Hague, the Netherlands, and a staff of some 500 persons. The CWC is a good example of multilateral cooperation, carefully and painstakingly negotiated, designed to establish and promote confidence between its States Parties in the interests of maintaining international peace and security. It illustrates vividly the positive product of the members of the international community working together to achieve benefits for all.

Biological weapons

The main difference between biological weapons and chemical weapons is that the former are derived from living organisms in order to convey lethal diseases to humans. Because of the dangers to the originator, they are difficult to handle and store and their use can carry high risks for the attacker. Both sides experimented with biological weapons during World War II with long lasting effects — British experiments with anthrax spores on an island off the west coast of Scotland rendered the island uninhabitable for some 50 years, due to the capacity of anthrax spores to lie dormant in the topsoil for a considerable time.

For 40 years following the 1925 Geneva Protocol, chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons were considered jointly in arms control efforts. In 1968, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of experts, a detailed report on these weapons types. Stemming from that report, the two types of weapons were dealt with separately. Gradually the views and political positions of the Western and Socialist countries were brought together, and in 1971 a single draft convention was presented to the General Assembly. Building consensus on such a difficult issue after so many years of friction was a significant step forward for the United Nations.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons (more widely known as the Biological Weapons Convention — BWC) was opened for signature on April 10, 1972, and entered into force on March 26, 1975, thereby becoming the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning the production and use of a complete category of weapons.

The parties to the Convention undertake never to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain microbial or other biological agents or toxins for other than peaceful purposes, and to destroy or divert to peaceful purposes
all agents, toxins, weapons, equipment and means of delivery. Any State Party finding another State Party not in compliance may lodge a complaint with the UN Security Council. The Convention has always had a major flaw, however, in that, unlike the CWC, it contains no provisions for a verification mechanism. Without such provisions there could be no reliable way of ensuring the effectiveness of the treaty.

In light of rapid scientific progress and a disturbing discovery by UN inspectors in 1991 that Iraq (a BWC State Party) had a vigorous biological weapons program, considerable efforts were made in the 1990s by States Parties to negotiate and develop a legally binding verification regime. By 2001, the text of a draft protocol was at an advanced stage, but also by the end of that year the attitude of the United States had hardened. On November 19, 2001, in Geneva, John R. Bolton, Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security, declared that the United States “rejected the flawed mechanisms of the draft Protocol” and that “countries that joined the BWC and then ignore their commitments and certain non-state actors would never have been hampered by the Protocol.”

Bolton then went on to name Iraq, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Sudan as countries possibly with biological weapons research programs, as well as the Al Qaeda terrorist network, which had shown interest in acquiring such weapons. “The BWC has not succeeded in dissuading these states from pursuing BW programs,” stated Bolton, “and we believe that the draft BWC protocol would have likewise failed to do so.”

In the face of such a flat rejection by the United States of the draft protocol, further work on it has now been suspended. The need for international action to tighten the BWC is, however, increasingly vital as the risks of proliferation grow and therefore the dangers increase of biological weapon capability falling into the hand of terrorists.

Amendments to the BWC and the agreements on satisfactory verification mechanisms are for the States Party to decide, but in addition to meetings of the BWC membership, it is in the global forum of the United Nations that governments are able to voice their concerns and press for action to move this difficult issue forward to satisfactory resolution.
In many respects, the term “conventional weapons” used in UN parlance is anachronistic. It originated with the establishment in 1947 of the Commission for Conventional Armaments in order to make a differentiation between weapons of mass destruction and all other weapons. As science and technology have moved considerably since 1947, the term “conventional” now embraces weapons that the man or woman in the street may well regard as distinctly unconventional, such as excimer and chemical lasers, or fuel-air explosives.

UN disarmament terminology also includes the term “conventional disarmament” and it should be borne in mind that this refers to efforts to achieve reductions and limitations of conventional weapons. It is not the opposite of “unconventional disarmament.”

For many years, there was a large measure of resistance among Non-Aligned countries in the United Nations to efforts to make progress in conventional disarmament. To a great extent this was because they saw such initiatives, which tended to come from the Western countries, as being primarily attempts to divert attention from efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament. There was also a concern among some of the more newly independent states that lurking beneath the surface there was perhaps a desire by the developed countries, which already had all the weapons they needed, to keep developing countries inadequately armed and thereby unable to defend themselves should external intervention become necessary.

Nevertheless, it was unarguable that year-in and year-out it was conventional weapons that were actually being used to kill people in violent conflict. In 1980, at the initiative of Denmark, the General Assembly approved in principle the carrying out of a study on all aspects of the conventional arms race. Conducted by a group of qualified experts and chaired by Denmark, the report was completed in 1984 with the title of Study on Conventional Disarmament. For the first time at the United Nations, the nature, causes and effects of the conventional arms race were explored in depth. Principles, approaches, and measures for conventional arms limitation and disarmament were also addressed.

At the time of the study, the Cold War was at its height. Annual global military expenditure had climbed to over $800 billion, with four-fifths of that amount being spent on conventional arms and armed forces by major military states. According to the study, conservative calculations indicated a total conventional-weapons inventory of over 140,000 main battle tanks, over 35,000 combat aircraft, over 21,000 helicopters, over 1,100 major surface warships and over 700 attack submarines. The study noted that, since the end of World War II, millions of people had been killed by conventional weapons in some 150 conflicts fought...
in the territories of over 71 states, mostly in the developing areas of the world.

Among the conclusions of the study was a recognition that the problem of the conventional arms race was urgent and required concrete steps to be taken in the field of conventional disarmament.

Although not widely recognized at the time, the study broke valuable new ground. It contributed to focusing more attention to an aspect of disarmament on which no progress had been possible. Politically, the study attributed some 70 percent of global military expenditures to six main military spenders: alphabetically, China, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also indicated that almost one-third of the expenditures were those of other countries, many of which were countries that could ill afford such defense budgets. Other UN studies in the early 1980s were the Study on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, the Study on Conventional Disarmament and the Study on all Aspects of Regional Disarmament. These reports, as well as external developments in the mid-1980s, such as accelerated efforts in Europe on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM)s and political changes in Eastern Europe, helped to shift the international community towards more proactive thinking regarding constraints on conventional weapons.

Reporting Military Expenditures. In 1980, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 35/142 B, “Reduction of military budgets” which introduced into the United Nations a system for the standardized reporting of military expenditures. As with all General Assembly resolutions it imposed on Member States no compulsory requirement to report, but called upon them to report voluntarily, in a standardized format, expenditure on personnel, operations and maintenance, procurement and construction, and research and development.

Since 1981, annual reports have been issued by the UN Secretariat, publishing the information provided by Member States. The latest, “Report of the Secretary-General on objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures,” was contained in A/56/267 of August 3, 2001, to which 55 countries contributed information.

U N Register of Conventional Arms. In December 1991, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 46/36 L, entitled “Transparency in Armaments.” Requesting the Secretary-General to establish a Register of Conventional Arms, the resolution called upon all Member States to provide annually relevant data on imports and exports of conventional arms, together with available background information regarding their military holdings, procurement through national production and relevant policies.
The register was established in January 1992 and technical procedures were
developed later that year by a panel of experts. Over the years, various improve-
ments to the definitions and reporting procedures have been made and Member
States are asked to report by May 31 each year information on seven categories
of weapons: battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery sys-
tems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships of 750 metric tons or above,
and missiles and missile launchers with a range of at least 25 kilometers. The
UN Department for Disarmament Affairs receives and compiles the information
and stores the reported data in a computerized database.

The most recent report was issued as A/56/257 of July 31, 2001, to which
94 governments had submitted returns. According to the Department for
Disarmament Affairs (Conventional Arms Branch), it has been estimated that
the register captures over 95 percent of the global trade in the seven categories
of armaments. The US Congressional Research Service has assessed the global
arms trade as worth more than $30 billion in 1999, of which 68 percent was
absorbed by the developing world. The main producers and exporters are coun-
tries in the industrialized world. This imbalance is magnified by the budgetary
portion these arms purchases command in many countries already struggling
with extreme poverty. DDA has also issued a 2001 Information Booklet on the
register to help disseminate this information.28

Small Arms and Light Weapons

On the occasion of the United Nations’ 50th anniversary in 1995, Secretary-
General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued a supplement to his seminal 1992 paper,
“An Agenda for Peace.”29 In Section D. of that document, he introduced the
term “micro-disarmament,” and stated, “By this I mean practical disarmament
in the context of the conflicts the United Nations is actually dealing with and of
the weapons, most of them light weapons, that are actually killing people in the
hundreds of thousands.”30

He went on to identify two categories of light weapons that merited special
attention. First — “small arms, which are probably responsible for most of the
deaths in current conflicts. The world is awash with them and traffic in them is
very difficult to monitor, let alone intercept.”31 Secondly, the proliferation of
anti-personnel landmines — “… work continues to try to deal with the approxi-
mately 110 million landmines that have already been laid. This is an issue that
must continue to receive priority attention.”32

The upsurge of interest in small arms and light weapons occurred in parallel
with the increase in the number of violent conflicts that erupted following the
end of the Cold War. The end of superpower confrontation, welcome as it was
for lifting the risk of a nuclear exchange, did not lead to the expected peace divi-
dend. At the same time as defense budgets of the members of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact were being reduced and their armed forces downsized, ethnic disputes and militant nationalist movements that had lain dormant now sprang into action. Wars became intra-state with complex regional spillovers rather than inter-state. Factional leaders and warlords sought small arms and light weapons, and there was no shortage of suppliers.

The illicit trade in small arms grew rapidly and became a source of deep concern to governments, particularly those in poor and developing countries. In 1994, arising from an appeal of the President of Mali for assistance in the collection of light weapons circulating in his country, the Secretary-General had sent a mission to Mali and other countries of the Sahara-Sahel region. The mission concluded that the overall security situation needed improvement before any weapons collection could be implemented; that the situation was severely affecting socio-economic development and creating a cycle leading to more illicit light weapons. The situation had to be addressed in the context of the whole region.

In 1995, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on small arms, with the help of a panel of governmental experts. In the ensuing report, the panel identified small arms as those designed for personal use, including rifles, machine guns, hand-held grenade launchers, and light weapons like those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew, such as portable anti-tank guns and portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems. The report noted, “Among the worst affected victims of recent conflicts fought primarily with small arms and light weapons are the inhabitants of some of the poorest countries in the world.”

The panel of experts drew particular attention to the major role of illicit trafficking, fostering terrorism, drug trafficking, mercenary activities, and the violation of human rights. Among other suggestions for action, the panel recommended that the “United Nations should consider the possibility of convening an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects.”

Accepting that recommendation, the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects took place in New York from July 9 to 20, 2001. The outcome was the adoption of a wide range of political undertakings at the national, regional, and global levels. The initiatives embraced measures to introduce national laws to exercise effective control over production, export, import, transit or transfer of such weapons. The United Nations also encouraged countries to cooperate with the UN system to ensure effective implementation of arms embargoes decided by the Security Council and to encourage disarmament and
demobilization of combatants and their reintegration into civilian life.\(^{36}\)

Practical Disarmament Measures. In December 1997, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 52/38 G entitled “Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures.” Interested governments met on a number of occasions and agreed on two main purposes: the examination of and, wherever possible, joint support of concrete projects of practical disarmament, particularly as designed and initiated by affected countries; and the exchange of information about relevant lessons learned in the field of practical disarmament and its dissemination to interested countries.

Furthering the pragmatic approach, the group agreed that it should concentrate on hands-on proposals and avoid discussion of concepts, and that its key emphasis would be threefold: practical and attainable objectives, voluntary financial commitments as a means to achieve objectives, and focus on Africa and Central America as areas for immediate action.

Subsequent activities supported by the group included a subregional seminar in Yaoundé in Cameroon on the training of trainers in practical disarmament measures, a workshop on weapons collection and integration of former combatants into civil society, held in Guatemala City, and a weapons-in-exchange-for-development program in the Gramsh District in Albania.

Weapons having excessively inhumane or indiscriminate effects

Long before the United Nations was established, there were international efforts to constrain the use of certain weapons that were thought to be too inhumane or indiscriminate. The St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868 declared that weapons that aggravated the suffering of the disabled should not be used. The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 banned the use of poison or poisoned weapons and projectiles for the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases, and the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of poison gas.

In 1972, a UN expert report on the use of napalm and other incendiary weapons described the horrendous effects of incendiaries on the human body and appealed for the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of such weapons. In 1973, the General Assembly decided to broaden the question to include all other conventional weapons deemed to cause unnecessary suffering or to have indiscriminate effects, and to seek agreement on rules prohibiting or restricting their use. These steps eventually led to the calling of an international conference, which was convened in Geneva in 1979.

The Conference focused its attention on drafting three protocols: one concerning non-detectable fragments, a second concerning landmines and booby traps, and a third concerning incendiary weapons. To cover these three protocols, there
would be a general framework treaty. The outcome in 1980 was the unanimous adoption of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (generally known as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons). The Convention was an “umbrella” treaty to three protocols:

- Protocol I prohibited the use of any weapon whose primary effect was to injure by fragments which in the human body escape detection by X-rays.
- Protocol II related to the use of landmines, booby traps and other devices, such as those activated by remote control or automatically after a lapse of time.
- Protocol III prohibited in all circumstances making the civilian population the object of attack by incendiary weapons.

The rules agreed upon were not as strong as some countries wished, but at least they protected civilians to some extent and represented a useful development of humanitarian law.

Anti-personnel Landmines and the Ottawa Convention. The extensive use of anti-personnel landmines became an issue of increasing concern to a number of countries from the early 1970s. With the conflicts that erupted in Cambodia, Iran and Iraq, many places in Africa, and Europe, the scourge of landmines became even more evident. By the late 1990s, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations estimated that there may have been between 100 and 120 million mines already laid, and more than a further 100 million stockpiled for use. The ICRC has estimated that 2,000 people are involved in landmine accidents every month — one every 20 minutes — of whom about 800 die and the rest are maimed.

A UN Review Conference in 1996 failed to find consensus among the international community to improve on the provisions of the 1980 Convention on conventional weapons discussed above. This prompted Canada, with a highly active nongovernmental involvement, to call for other like-minded countries to support a treaty to ban the use of anti-personnel landmines. The “Ottawa Process,” as it came to be known, quickly produced results, and when the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the Ottawa Convention) was opened for signature in December 1997, 123 countries signed it. At the end of 2001, 133 countries had signed the Convention, of which 122 had ratified it.

The Convention commits signatory countries to: clear out minefields within 10 years; destroy stockpiles of mines within four years; assist the economic and social rehabilitation of mine survivors and victims; and report each year on the
Among the countries that have not yet signed the Convention is the United States, on the grounds that for the time being the deployment of anti-personnel landmines in certain places will continue to be needed for the protection of US troops and allies. However, US production of anti-personnel landmines ceased in 1993 and under the Clinton Administration the declared policy was to end the use of all anti-personnel landmines outside Korea by 2003 and to be in a position to sign the Ottawa Convention by 2006 if suitable options could be found that would allow the United States to maintain the war-fighting capability and safety of its men and women in uniform. At the time of writing (March 2002), the current administration of President George W. Bush has made no policy statement on the issue.
Under the terms of the ceasefire signed by the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in December of 1996, this stockpile of arms and ammunition was turned in by the URNG.

(UN/DPI Photo 187629C: John Olsson)
In recent years, UN peacekeeping operations have become much more complex than they were in the early 1990s. With societies and economies torn apart by savage internal conflicts, peace operations have widened to embrace conflict prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding. In many of the intrastate conflicts, the combatants are often young men, and occasionally young women, who have been recruited or forced into combat service by warlords and factional leaders. Some may be as young as 10 or 11 years old, and many have little or no education. A large number of combatants have no concept of security except that from the end of a gun, and they do not necessarily view the end of war bringing any benefits if they have no job, no education, and no future.

The Secretary-General has identified three key objectives for successful, comprehensive peace-building: (a) consolidating internal and external security; (b) strengthening political institutions and good governance; and (c) promoting economic and social rehabilitation and transformation. The disarmament of former combatants, their demobilization from war service, and their successful reintegration into civilian life are major parts of achieving the peace-building objectives.

The disarmament process involves procedures for collecting and disposing of the small arms and other weapons that have been used by the combatants. Arrangements also often have to be made to recover weapons from the local population, to preclude the risk that weapons will be hidden for use in some future recurrence of the conflict. In times of uncertainty and tenuous security following a prolonged internal conflict, it is often not easy to persuade former combatants to surrender their weapons in return for an unknown future. Demobilization involves the disbandment of armed groups, and sometimes government forces as well, by gathering them together at pre-identified collection points for administrative processing and discharge orientation.

UN peacekeeping operations have undertaken the disarming of combatants by directly collecting arms, destroying them, and making efforts to reintegrate former fighters into productive endeavors. This has taken place in El Salvador, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and other UN operations. Within the United Nations, much attention is currently being paid to developing and implementing successful projects of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration as effective contributions to the achievement of sustainable peace in place of the recurrence of violent conflict. The 2002 report on Sierra Leone by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) indicates that the UN operation in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, has been particularly successful in carrying out disarmament and demobilization.
The most important ingredient is reintegration. Without careful planning and adequate resources, including programs for cash or in-kind compensation, training and prospects for some kind of remunerative employment that will provide income for themselves and their families, ex-combatants will be very reluctant to commit themselves to the process. With young men, they may have never known any life other than violent conflict, and therefore the process may be one of original integration into society, rather than reintegration. With girls and young women, who often will have been taken away as sexual companions, they may face additional hazards of rejection in their home villages and even by their own families. For all former combatants, societal reconciliation and return to normalcy present major personal challenges, which they cannot overcome without thoughtful and careful external assistance.
NGOs and Public Interest

In the consideration of disarmament at the United Nations, a vital part is played by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the public. The active interest and support of the NGOs has often been instrumental in pressing certain issues, as was the case in the genesis and adoption of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines. Many aspects of disarmament demand detailed knowledge and persistent attention, and the existence of NGOs, research and academic institutes and well-informed members of the public has often served to encourage or discourage certain governmental initiatives, or spur government representatives to action.

The NGO Committee on Disarmament at UN Headquarters in New York and the NGO Special Committee on Disarmament at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, cooperate on a wide range of international disarmament issues. In his closing remarks, Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala, President of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, said of the NGO community:

"Over the past twenty-five years, non-governmental organizations have performed valuable services for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) — in encouragement, ideas, public support and advocacy of further progress toward the goals of the Treaty. I should like to pay them a sincere tribute for their dedication."  

For more than 25 years, the two NGO disarmament committees have networked with peace and disarmament NGOs around the world to provide civil society, UN Member States, and the Secretariat with a number of services:

- providing resources of expertise and information on disarmament;
- soliciting various viewpoints;
- supporting campaigns, such as banning landmines, promoting the Chemical Weapons Convention, etc.;
- encouraging activity of NGOs and civil society within the United Nations;
- informing NGOs of UN and international progress on disarmament through publications and conferences; and
- supporting coalitions around specific disarmament topics, such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and ideas such as Abolition 2000."
These committees are viewed as primary allies of the international movements for arms control, peace and disarmament, and UN bodies designated to serve these worldwide constituencies. Their functions are to inform NGOs of the status of negotiations, country positions on disarmament issues, and major obstacles and opportunities, and they assist NGOs in transmitting their expertise and proposals to the appropriate decision-making forums. The New York committee also publishes four regular issues of Disarmament Times each year and additional issues when events merit special coverage. Disarmament Times is the only independent, professionally produced newspaper devoted to accurate, objective reporting on arms control and disarmament activities in the UN context. As information gathering is vital to their participation and the majority of NGOs on disarmament are never able to visit UN headquarters, the UN NGO committees on disarmament maintain websites and participate in electronic networks and online correspondence with hundreds of groups worldwide. In 2001, the New York committee initiated a Disarmament Journalists Network, which is an interactive global network of journalists informed about arms issues from a multilateral perspective.

In the 1950s and 1960s, individual scientists, experts, research institutions, and various NGOs were active in campaigns to stop radioactive fallout from nuclear testing and to prevent nuclear proliferation. By disseminating information and warnings about the dangers of nuclear testing and the spread of nuclear weapons, they stimulated public interest. This helped generate political pressure for governments to ban testing in the atmosphere in 1963, and to agree on the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968. Two NGOs with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to promote a world free of nuclear weapons: the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (1985) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (1997).

Atomic pioneer J. Robert Oppenheimer, left, director of Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, and General Leslie R. Groves, chief of the Manhattan Project, examine the remains of a steel tower at Point Zero of the Trinity site in New Mexico, where the first test of the atomic bomb had taken place on July 16, 1945. (UPI: Bettmann Newphotos)
The term “disarmament machinery” refers to the collection of organs, bodies, commissions and committees in which multilateral arms limitation and disarmament are discussed and negotiated. Changes in the composition, names and responsibilities have been made over the years to reflect the changing international situation. The primary bodies are briefly described below.41

General Assembly

Even though, according to the Charter, the Security Council has specific responsibilities for arms regulation, the main deliberative initiatives and actions on disarmament have consistently been taken by the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. The General Assembly itself, composed of all the Member States of the United Nations, is the primary deliberative body. Although its resolutions have no binding power on Member States, when adopted by consensus or with large majorities they constitute expressions of global political attitude and opinion on major issues. Therefore the General Assembly serves as a source of powerful moral and political suasion that governments cannot easily ignore. By 1984, at perhaps the height of the Cold War, a quarter of all the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly were on disarmament.

First Committee

With the same membership as the General Assembly, the First Committee is one of the Assembly’s seven main committees. Meeting from October to December each year, the First Committee deals exclusively with disarmament and related international security issues, weighing various proposals and positions and adopting draft resolutions for forwarding to the General Assembly for formal adoption.

Disarmament Commission

Stemming from the commission established in 1952, which did not meet after 1965, the Disarmament Commission was resuscitated by the 1978 Final Document to serve as a subsidiary forum for deliberation of disarmament issues when the Assembly is not in session. Unlike the Conference on Disarmament, the membership of the Disarmament Commission embraces all Member States of the
United Nations. Meeting in one annual session of several weeks, it provides an opportunity for a more in-depth consideration of a small number of items, usually over a three-year cycle, and reports to the General Assembly.

**Conference on Disarmament**

Described in the 1978 Final Document as the “single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum,” the Conference on Disarmament (CD) first met in 1979 and assumed the negotiating mantle of its forebears, the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENDC) and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD). At that time, the CD’s membership was 40 states, including all five nuclear-weapon states. It meets at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, usually from January to September each year, has its own rules of procedure, develops its own agenda and works by consensus. It is not a subsidiary of the General Assembly, but it takes into account the recommendations of the Assembly and reports to it annually or more frequently, as appropriate.

The terms of reference of the CD include practically all multilateral arms control and disarmament problems. Currently the CD primarily focuses its attention on the following issues: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament; prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters; prevention of an arms race in outer space; effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons, including radiological weapons; and a comprehensive program of disarmament and transparency in armaments.

The CD now has a membership of 66 states. The requirement to work by consensus makes its work frustratingly slow and subject to blockage by a small number of members, or at times even only one. On the other hand, as a negotiating body, decisions affecting the national security of states cannot be decided by majority and against the wishes of a minority; to do so would quickly result in the collapse of the CD itself.

During the late 1990s, the CD began to find itself in an impasse. The United States, together with France and the United Kingdom, declined to accept the proposal by Non-Aligned members of the CD to begin negotiations on the elimination of nuclear weapons. Instead they urged negotiations to ban the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, but the majority of other members of the CD would accept this only as part of a larger effort to achieve nuclear disarmament. Separately, China and Russia, concerned at the steps the United States was taking towards the establishment of a national missile defense system, have called for the CD to start discussions on the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. The United States has opposed this proposal. The result of these
political differences has been that by late 2001 the CD had achieved no substantial work for four years.

Department for Disarmament Affairs

Within the UN Secretariat, disarmament matters are serviced by the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) under an Under-Secretary-General who answers directly to the Secretary-General. Originally a Centre for Disarmament within another Secretariat department, DDA was established in 1982 by the Concluding Document of the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. In 1992, it was subsumed in the newly formed Department of Political Affairs, but Member States made it clear that disarmament was of such importance that it should be a department of its own. DDA was re-established in January 1998 by General Assembly Resolution 52/12. The Department advises the Secretary-General on disarmament-related security matters; monitors and analyzes developments and trends in the field of disarmament; supports the review and implementation of existing disarmament agreements; assists Member States in multilateral disarmament negotiation and deliberation activities towards the development of disarmament norms and the creation of agreements; and promotes openness and transparency in military matters, verification, confidence-building measures, and regional approaches to disarmament. It also interacts with nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, research institutes and individuals active in the field of disarmament; cooperates with organizations of the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations on matters related to disarmament; and provides to Member States and the international community objective information on disarmament and international security matters.
Conclusions

Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld once remarked:

The UN reflects both aspiration and a falling short of aspiration, but the constant struggle to close the gap between aspiration and performance now, as always, makes the difference between civilization and chaos.42

So it is with disarmament at the United Nations. The lofty goal of general and complete disarmament is far from being attained, and probably never will be. The contentious and competitive nature of humankind and the security dilemma are such that in reality disarmament is unlikely to be either general or complete.

But that does not deny the validity of the aspiration. In a world too often beset with death and destruction — where societies are fractured, economies destroyed, lives needlessly wasted, and the stability and security of civilization replaced by the savagery and chaos of war — the international community comes together at the United Nations to seek progress towards a sustainable peace that is more than just the absence of war.

Progress is often, and indeed usually, slow. In some directions, such as nuclear disarmament or constraints on conventional weapons, it may sometimes be perceived by the public at large as virtually non-existent. And yet, as the number of treaties and conventions listed above illustrates, one by one states find it in their interest to use the forums and processes of the United Nations. In doing so, they seek agreement on highly sensitive issues through discussion, exchange of ideas and compromise. To achieve that agreement, they are willing to surrender slivers of their national sovereignty and commit themselves to internationally agreed upon action to limit, reduce or otherwise control certain weapons and their uses.

Perhaps, above all, the pattern of treaties, conventions and resolutions at the United Nations has set a series of norms over the years, and it is those norms that become the guiding lights for international action. The wider the membership of a certain treaty or convention, the more it represents majority view and moral suasion. There is nothing that forces a Member State of the United Nations to sign and ratify a formal and binding agreement unless it so wishes, but for many states their commitment is an investment in their security by the commitments of others. The larger and more powerful the state, the more options it can afford, but even at that level there is value in mutually agreed upon and trustworthy agreements. Moreover, in democracies, which regularly
see changes in leadership and policies, unilateral declarations of intent that can be denied by subsequent administrations are no substitute for legally binding, mutually agreed upon commitments.

The pursuit of disarmament at the United Nations is often a cautious and intricate business — but then, so it should be, for it is dealing with nothing less than national and international security.
Endnotes

1. Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the UN Charter.
2. Chapter V of the UN Charter.
3. Chapter VI of the UN Charter.
4. Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
5. Article 26 of the UN Charter.
6. Article 11 of the UN Charter.
7. The Baruch Plan.
8. The Gromyko Plan.
12. Article VI of the NPT.
13. Article II of the NPT.
14. Article IV, Paragraph 2 of the NPT.
16. Article III(i) of the NPT.
17. The current status of these and other disarmament-related treaties can be found at http://disarmament.un.org/TreatyStatus.nsf.
18. A radionuclide is a type of atom that exhibits radioactivity and can be monitored.
19. Hydroacoustics is the use of quasi-continuous acoustical and optical measurements to monitor physical and biological entities underwater.
20. For more information on the treaty, its signature, ratification and status, as well as the commission that prepared it, see http://www.ctbto.org
21. Ibid.
23 For more information about the CWC and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, see http://www.opcw.org.

24 The OPCW has a website (http://www.opcw.org) containing a wealth of information from which this section has been drawn.

25 As of the start of 2002, there were 144 States Parties to the treaty: http://disarmament.un.org/TreatyStatus.nsf.


27 An excimer is a kind of molecule that exists in aboveground energy. An excimer laser is a weapon that uses a precisely directed beam of high energy to destroy or immobilize the target.

28 Both the latest report and the booklet are available at http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB/.


30 A/50/60, Paragraph 60.

31 Ibid. Paragraph 63.

32 Ibid. Paragraph 64.


34 Ibid, Paragraph 19.

35 Ibid. Paragraph 80 (k).


37 Jodie Williams of Putney, VT, won the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts at organizing NGOs to mobilize support for the landmines agreement.


40 Jayantha Dhanapala is now (March 2002) the Under-Secretary-General of Disarmament Affairs at the United Nations.

41 More details and other elements of the disarmament machinery, together with information on current activities, are available at http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/index.html.

Bibliography


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Suggested Research Topics & Exam Questions

• Discuss the first use of nuclear weapons. What was the significance of these events? Discuss the political and military implications.

• How do nuclear weapons differ from conventional weapons? What is meant by nuclear deterrence?

• How is disarmament handled in the UN Charter? What is the role of the Security Council or the General Assembly? Discuss the Military Staff Committee. In which body has most of the activity taken place?

• How successful has the United Nations been in eliminating arms? Discuss the problems and issues.

• Discuss the creation of nuclear-free zones. How many geographic areas are covered, and what are the conditions of the treaties that created them? Evaluate their usefulness.

• What is MAD? How have the nuclear powers handled disarmament? Discuss nuclear policy by nuclear and non-nuclear countries.

• What are weapons of mass destruction? Describe the weapons that fall into this category.

• Who are the nuclear nations? When did they each acquire nuclear weapons? Who are the latest countries to test?

• What is the Non-Proliferation Treaty and what are its goals? How does the International Atomic Energy Agency operate with the NPT? How important is the NPT? How is it reviewed?

• Discuss efforts to limit or ban the testing of nuclear weapons. What is the status of these agreements?

• Describe chemical and biological weapons and what efforts have been made to control them. What are the concerns about these weapons? Have the treaties been successful?
• Discuss the use of conventional weapons and the findings of the 1984 study. What was the significance of such a report and what was the follow-up? Research subsequent UN reports on conventional arms and arms expenditures. What do they reveal?

• What is the connection between the end of the Cold War and the upsurge in interest in small arms and light weapons? How has the United Nations responded to the issue of small arms?

• Some weapons are described as having excessively inhumane effects, particularly on innocent civilians. What weapons fall into this category? Describe the Ottawa Convention and how it came about.

• How has the United Nations contributed to disarmament through its peacekeeping operations? Research several UN operations and discuss the interaction of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants into society.

• What role have NGOs played at the United Nations on disarmament issues? How do disarmament NGOs stay in contact with events at the United Nations? Have their efforts been effective?

• What bodies at the United Nations are considered part of the disarmament “machinery”? How do they operate? How do they overlap?

• Analyze the effect that the United Nations has had on disarmament. Where are its successes and failures? Why has it been less successful than the founders had hoped?