

Ruksana Kibria

SUPERPOWER ARMS CONTROL TALKS: AN ASSESSMENT

It has been well over a decade since the first strategic arms limitation talks between the United States and the Soviet Union were held. Critics are usually cynical about it and the effectiveness of such negotiations, and hold a rather dim view of their utility. "Do these talks possess any value other than being merely rhetorical?"—seems to be the question that they would collectively ask. They might even urge the substitution of the word 'rigmarole' for talks, due to apparent futility of such dialogues. For some people superpower arms control talks have turned out to be a meaningless exercise which serve no purpose other than legitimising the stapling together of the defence programmes of the two sides¹. The newly appointed Director of (US) Arms Control and Disarmament Agency is reported to have referred to arms control negotiations as "a sham"². Even the American President Reagan once considered the arms control process to be a "fraud and a trap"³. In the words of Leslie Gelb, "Arms control has essentially failed. Three decades of US-Soviet negotiations to

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1. Joseph T. Kruzel, "Arms Control and American Defense Policy : New Alternatives and Old Realities", *Daedalus*, (Washington, D. C : The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1981), p.137.
 2. Ralph Earle II, "Arms Control : Its Role in the Future", *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Volume XLIX, Number 18, July, 1983, (New York News Publishing Co., 1983), p.546.
 3. Norman Podhoretz, "Appeasement by Any Other Name", *Commentary*, Volume 76, July, 1983, (New York, N. Y. American Jewish Committee, 1983), p.38.

limit arms competition have done little more than to codify the arms race".⁴

This paper attempts to give, along with a brief history, the rationale for arms control talks between the superpowers, and to study whether such talks have any value at all. This article mainly deals with the political aspects of arms control talks, reference to the technical aspects being thus minimal.

The purpose of arms control talks is primarily to achieve a parity in weapon systems between the United States and the Soviet Union, and to maintain stability. Bilateral negotiations are imperative because, due to the nature of US-Soviet arms competition, weapons programmes can gain a dangerous or "mad" momentum and neither power can unilaterally pursue a stabilising policy.⁵ In 1960 Thomas C. Schelling stated that the purpose of arms control was to lessen the chance of war, to minimise the cost of the arms race, and to reduce the accompanying damage in case deterrence fails.⁶ In spite of the passage of over two decades, the basic purpose of arms control has not changed. Even if arms control negotiations do not lead to any agreement the fact the superpowers are communicating is a significant thing in itself. Such dialogues can do much in creating an environment that would reduce mistrust and lead to mutual understanding. Such talks could enable both sides to perceive the political, military, and technical problems facing them.⁷ It is a fact of inter-

4. Charles W. Kegley, Jr, and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1981), p.412.
5. Jerome H. Kahan, "Arms Interaction and Arms Control", in John E. Endicott and Roy W. Stafford Jr., eds., *American Defense Policy* (Fourth Edition), (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 107.
6. Robert P. Haffa Jr., in Endicott and Stafford eds., *op. cit.*, p. 100.
7. Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr., "The Rationale for Superpower Arms Control", in William R. Kintner and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr. eds., *SALT: Implications for Arms Control in the 1970s*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), p.6.

national politics that political tensions are not caused by arms, they reflect them.⁸

A Brief History of Superpower Arms Control Talks

Although arms control talks could be traced as far back as 1817 it was only after the end of World War II, with the advent of the nuclear device and its potentials for enormous destruction that the concept of arms control assumed a seriousness of great magnitude. In 1946 Bernard Baruch initiated a plan which sought to internationalize nuclear energy. Baruch also advocated the destruction of all existing nuclear weapons, but the plan failed due to Soviet opposition. The Soviet leaders were sceptical about the verification provisions and prospect of a freeze on the development of their own nuclear technology.⁹

The most constructive step in arms control since the end of World War II was, paradoxically taken when the United States and the Soviet Union had faced their worst crisis, over Cuba in October 1962. Having come to the brink of a nuclear holocaust, both the superpowers sought to reduce tension in their relationship through arms control negotiations. Ten months after the Cuban missile crisis the two superpowers became signatories to the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. This Treaty, while not totally banning nuclear testing¹⁰ was what the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy considered to be the first step "to reduce tension, to slow down the perilous arms race and to check the world's slide toward final annihilation".¹¹

8. Henry A. Kissinger, "Nuclear Weapons and the Peace Movements", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1982, p. 39.

9. Nils H. Wessel, "Soviet-American Arms Control Negotiations", *Current History*, Volume 83, May, 1983, (Philadelphia, Pa. : A Current History, Inc., 1983), p.210.

10. It banned only nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater. Underground testing was not prohibited.

11. P. Terene Hopman and Timothy D. King, "From Cold War to Detente : The Role of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty," in Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alexander L. George, eds., *Change In the International System*, (Boulder, Colorado; Westview Press, 1980), p.163.

Almost a decade later, on May 26, 1972 the SALT I accords were signed between the United States and the Soviet Union. The SALT I is a landmark in the history of the superpower relations. It was for the first time that the adversary nations agreed to limit

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their antiballistic missile (ABM) systems to two on either side, and an Interim Agreement put a freeze on the number of offensive strategic nuclear missiles on each side.¹² In the SALT I agreement the Soviet superiority in number and payload of missiles was balanced by US superiority in number of warheads and in "uncontrolled systems", for example, long range bombers, shorter range aircraft capable of carrying on assaults against Soviet targets from aircraft carriers and bases abroad.¹³ The issue of MIRV (multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle) was also not included, as a result of which, from 1972 to 1977 the number of MIRVed missiles of the superpowers increased four fold.¹⁴

In 1974, US President Nixon and the late Soviet Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev signed the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, which put a limit on underground nuclear weapons tests to a maximum of 100 kilotons. This treaty, however, has not been ratified by the United States.¹⁵ On November 24, 1974, at the Vladivostok summit between President Ford and the Soviet leader Brezhnev, the United States and the Soviet Union conceded to a formula in which the Soviets dropped their previous demand that certain advantages which they had enjoyed in SALT I, for

12. John H. Barton, *The Politics of Peace : An Evaluation of Arms Control*, (Stanford, California : Stanford University Press, 1981) p.148.

13. *Ibid.*, p.149.

14. Kegley and Wittkopf, *op.cit.*, p. 411, 412.

15. Earle, *op. cit.*, p.546.

instance, inequalities in number of launchers, would not have to be incorporated in SALT II.¹⁶ One of the documents produced at Vladivostok expressed mutual faith in the need to promote the talks on strategic arms limitation, and a mutual commitment that both the countries will continue to make efforts to reach this goal.¹⁷ In 1976, President Ford and Brezhnev signed the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty. This treaty has also not been ratified.¹⁸

In June 1979, President Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT II Treaty with provisions for considerable limitations on strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, their warheads and even called for the dismantling of and destruction by the Soviet Union of almost 300 of their ICBMs.¹⁹ The SALT II Treaty has also not been ratified by the United States. The main reason for its rejection by the US Congress was it did not increase American security. The Treaty was seen by the critics as having put limits at a higher than the existing levels. This they believed would have let the Soviets go forward with a wide range of new weapons programmes, which would have destabilised the superpower strategic balance.²⁰

It had done nothing to reduce the number of Soviet Union's land based ICBMs. The critics argued that allowing the Soviet Union 308 heavy ICBMs would destabilise the the strategic balance between the superpowers.²¹ The Soviet Backfire bombers were also not included in the Treaty, inspite of the fact that it could reach the mainland United States.

The SALT II was finally shelved for good after the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in late 1979. Conservative critics were

16. Seymour Weiss, "SALT in Soviet Eyes," in John F. Lehman and Seymour Weiss, *Beyond the SALT II Failure*, (New York : Praeger, 1981), p.38.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Earle, *op.cit.*, p.546.

19. *Ibid.*, p.547.

20. John F. Lehman, "Why SALT II Failed". *op.cit.*, p.98.

21. *Ibid.*, p.104.

of the opinion that "the United States would be imprudent...to enter into a SALT agreement without at least contemplating Soviet activities in Afghanistan, Cuba, the Horn of Africa, and Eastern Europe, and the overall build-up of Soviet offensive land and naval power".²² The U.S. President Ronald Reagan, during his 1980 presidential campaign had spoken vehemently against SALT II, it was therefore not surprising that he approached the arms control issue with caution.²³

On May 9, 1982, the Reagan Administration announced its Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) proposal which aimed at drastic reductions of nuclear warheads rather freezing present deployments.²⁴ Reagan proposed to reduce the number of ballistic missile warheads by about one-third below the present level.²⁵ The next day it was stated in Tass that this plan was merely a stratagem to ensure American superiority. It also mentioned that President Reagan had been silent on the issue of MX missiles, strategic B-1 bombers and Trident nuclear missile submarines.²⁶

On May 18, 1982, the late Soviet President Brezhnev declared he was interested in resuming arms negotiations with the United States, but he found Reagan's proposal as "unrealistic" which would only preserve "American superiority" Brezhnev, in his turn proposed a freeze on the modernization and deployment of strategic weapons as soon as the talks resumed. He also stated that the talks should genuinely strive to limit and reduce strategic arms instead of being "a cover for the continued arms race...".²⁷ On January 1, 1983 it was expressed in Pravda that "the USA was attempting to limit reductions first of all to ballistic missiles and to leave itself free to develop

22. *Ibid.*, pp.106, 107.

23. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p.214.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives: Record of World Events* Volume XXXIX, No. 2, February 1983. (Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1983) p. 31982

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p. 31983.

cruise missiles and bombers which meant an arms race for years to come...".²⁸

What Moscow was interested in was a START accord that would effectively bar deployment of new intermediate range missiles in Europe and place a limitation on all the other cruise missiles.²⁹ That was because of the NATO decision of 1979 to deploy by the end of 1983, 108 Pershing II missiles and 464 ground launched cruise missiles which can hit Soviet cities. The NATO decision was to counter the Soviet deployment of triple warhead SS-20 IRBMs, capable of striking cities in West Europe. The Soviet Union has at present 340 SS-20s, 250 of which are placed west of the Urals.³⁰ Together with the 260 single warhead SS-5 missiles, the SS-20 gives the Soviet Union a first strike force against European targets of 1,300 warheads.³¹ With a view to forestalling NATO deployments, the Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov proposed that Moscow would reduce its SS-20s in Europe to 162 (the total number of British and French missiles) if NATO agreed not to deploy the planned 572 new IRBMs. But Andropov's proposal was rejected by NATO because in effect, it would hardly make any difference : the rest of the SS-20's would be redeployed east of the Urals, from where they could still reach targets in West Europe.³²

The U.S plan formulated on November 18, 1981, known as the Zero-Option called for the Soviet dismantling of all its 340 SS-20s, and 260 SS-4s and SS-5s. As a concession, NATO would not deploy any of its 572 Pershing IIs and ground launched cruise missiles.³³ The Soviet Union immediately rejected this proposal. According to Tass, it would mean elimination of the Soviet defence potentials in

28. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 10, p. October 1983, p. 32466.

29. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

Europe, whereas the United States will have its forward based systems intact. Also, the British and French submarine based missile bases and nuclear bombers will remain untouched.³⁴ But NATO and the United States refused to accept the Soviet precondition, because that would mean interfering with the decisions of independent states.³⁵

The START negotiations which opened on June 29, 1982 in Geneva between the United States and the Soviet Union were suspended when the Soviet negotiators walked out in protest of the deployment of NATO missiles toward the end of 1983.

Rationale for Superpower Arms Control

Although both United States and the Soviet Union have interests in carrying on arms control talks, their rationale for such talks differs, involving a number of factors. Essentially, the superpowers are interested in arms control talks because of the talks' potential for maintaining the strategic stability by "providing a deterrent at lower level of armaments."³⁶ By stable strategic balance is meant a situation where neither superpower can launch a nuclear attack on the other without receiving an unacceptable retaliation, and neither party feels either that it can attack successfully, or that the other side can launch such an attack.³⁷ In an age of rapid technological change, arms control has become imperative. Technology, while making a deterrence relationship between the superpowers possible, has made it 'both necessary and possible to place restraints on superpower armaments'.³⁸

The Soviet interests in arms control are mainly economic and strategic in nature. Even though the Soviet military technology and defence production sectors of the economy compete well enough with

34. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, February, 1983, p. 31979.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 31982.

36. Pfaltzgraff, *op. cit.*, p.4.

37. Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

38. Pfaltzgraff, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

the West, the civilian sectors, particularly agriculture, is beset with problems. The ideological appeal of the Cold War years is gradually fading away, and the younger generation of Soviet population seeks greater economic benefits. Thus, the Soviet leaders cannot afford to ignore its economic woes without endangering their position.³⁹ The external factors influencing Soviet foreign policy are firstly, the awareness of the need to avoid nuclear confrontations, and secondly, to relax tension with the West in order to give total military concentration on the Sino-Soviet border.⁴⁰ The Soviet leaders clearly remember World War II, which cost them 20 million lives. The Soviet Union has no real allies excepting for Cuba. It is doubtful whether the East European countries, for instance Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Rumania can be relied on in case of war.⁴¹

While moderate analysts hold the view that economic problems compel the Soviet leaders to strive for an end to the superpower arms race,⁴² conservative Western critics, however, are most sceptical about such a theory. In the words of Seymour Weiss, "the Soviets do not see [the arms control process] as an exercise in mutual give and take, they see it as consisting of US-give and Soviet-take. The Soviets do not seek to stabilize strategic parity through [arms controls talks] rather, they see it as one technique that is useful in their design to achieve nuclear dominance".⁴³ According to Norman Podhoretz, another staunchly anti-Soviet critic, since the Soviet Union is a nation whose main foreign policy goal is to "overturn the existing system and to replace it with a new system in which it will enjoy hegemony", it would not be wise for the West to conclude arms control agreements with Moscow⁴⁴.

39. Thomas W. Wolfe, "Soviet Interest in SALT", on Kintner and Pfaltzgraff, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

41. Sheila Tobias *et. al.*, *What Kind of Guns Are They Buying For Your Butter?* (New York : William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 165.

42. Wolfe, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

43. Weiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 56.

44. Podhoretz, *op. cit.*, p.29.

Thus, it is seen that critics of arms control talks indicate that the Soviets are using arms control talks as a front while scheming to attain a strategic superiority. While it is true that Soviet strategic literature does not accept the idea of strategic parity with the United States, but emphasizes the need for the Soviet Union to achieve and maintain qualitative and quantitative superiority, it may also be true that the Soviet leaders merely pay lip service to such ideological considerations, and are genuinely interested in arms control talks. What the Soviet leadership actually plans to do is a matter of speculation and interpretation of their words. In the words of Admiral John M. Lee of the US Navy, "One simply cannot know whether the Soviet civilian leadership believes what some Soviet military theoreticians write [about] being prepared to fight nuclear war at all levels".⁴⁵ It is therefore not quite fair to subject Soviet interests in arms control to such a harsh treatment as the critics do. In the case of the United States strategic military, technical, political, psychological, economic, and bureaucratic factors all play important roles in influencing it to limit strategic armaments.⁴⁶ However, the principal factor affecting the US decision to conduct arms control talks has been strategic in nature.

From 1950 to 1966 the American superiority in strategic weapons vis-a-vis the Soviet Union was overwhelming. From 1967 to 1969 that superiority still had a wide margin, but was in no way overwhelming. Since 1969 the Soviet Union has been maintaining a rough parity with the United States.⁴⁷ After 1969, the United States had three options open to it for dealing with the changed superpower strategic balance. It could either expand the strategic strike force and/or reinforce strategic defences in order to achieve superi-

45 Admiral John M. Lee, "An Opening Window for Arms Control", *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1979, (New York : Council on Foreign Relations Inc., 1979), p.128.

46. J. I. Coffey, "American Interests in the Limitation of Strategic Armaments", in Kintner and Pfaltzgraff eds., *op.cit.*, p.55.

47. *Ibid.*, p.57.

ority. But that would have been extremely costly. Robert McNamara, the former U. S. Secretary of Defence, was of the opinion that, "In all probability all [the Americans] would accomplish would be to increase greatly Soviet expenditures and ours without any gain in real security to either side."⁴⁸ A second alternative was to adopt force portures that would bar the Soviet Union from attaining superiority, without necessarily trying to maintain U. S. superiority.⁴⁹ A third alternative for the Nixon administration was to ward off threats from the Soviet Union and maintain strategic stability through agreements, formal or tacit, to limit nuclear weapons. Limitations on weapons could smother the arms race that would demand resources, talents, and energies better used in satisfying growing domestic needs. They could relax tension and hostility between the United States

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and the Soviet Union, and as a result reducing the chance of a nuclear war.⁵⁰ In the words of the then US President Richard Nixon, "Through negotiation we can move toward the control of armaments in a manner that will bring a greater measure of security than we can obtain from arms alone."⁵¹

The United States decided to opt for arms control. It also took into account the changed international environment. There were four significant changes. Firstly, the major powers were more concerned about economic matters rather than political ones; secondly, there was increasing communication between the West and East European countries; thirdly, the probability of a nuclear war was decreasing and there was an increasing aversion toward the cold war; fourthly, the

48. *Ibid.*, pp.58,59.

49. *Ibid.*, p.59.

50. *Ibid.*, pp.59,60.

51. *Ibid.*, p.60.

underdeveloped nations of the Third world were demanding a larger share of the world's resources and were discontent with the fact that the big powers were spending huge amounts of resources for arms buildup which which could have been used for their welfare.⁵²

Thus, it is seen that both the superpowers have interests involved in pursuing arms control. They have to consider the health of their social systems, and they may find it difficult to go on building up massive armaments at the cost of their peoples. It is time the United States chose between welfare needs, and unbridled, and also wasteful, expenditure for creating an impregnable unclear shield. The Soviet leaders too have to give the Soviet people "some 'butter' as well as 'guns' ".⁵³ The arms race between the superpowers is not only crippling the Eastern (communist) economies, but is also creating fissures in the body politic in the West.⁵⁴

In both the United States and the Soviet Union it is the people with hawkish views in the military sector that impede the proper functioning of the arms control process. The U. S. military sector has a vested interest in creating new weapon systems. This sector is perennially worried about falling behind in the arms race with the Soviet Union ; they somehow keep this notion alive, and thereby encourage research and development of new weapon systems. Those with vested interests in this sector somehow sustain the belief that high military expenditure is beneficial for the economy. Admiral Gene R. La Rorque has given the following points for demolishing this myth. Firstly, for the last quarter of a century inordinate importance given to military schemes in the U. S. has resulted in a strong military-biased sector which is just as concerned with jobs as with national defence.

52. Coffey, *op. cit.*, pp.61,62

53. Kenneth J. Twitchett, "Strategies for Security : Some Theoretical Considerations", in Kenneth T. Twitchett ed., *International Security*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.72.

54. John Downey, "The Ageing of Deterrence", in *The Year book of World Affairs 1986*, published under the auspices of the London Institute of World Affairs, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), p.23

Secondly, military expenditure as a means of stimulating the economy is nonproductive, wasteful and inefficient. Thirdly U. S. manufacturers are falling behind in efficiency and competitiveness in the international markets because talents are being attracted by research facilities offered by the military industry.⁵⁵

So, it is clear that decreasing the rate of military spending would not adversely affect the U.S. economy. The excessive dependence on the arms industry is rather an artificial creation. The late U.S. President General Eisenhower said in a speech that, "We have been compelled to create a permanent industry of vast proportions... In the councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence... of the military-industrial complex."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, he wrote that the desire for absolute security is not possible to satisfy. A country, if it tries to attain that goal through weapons alone, would be in the danger of pauperizing itself morally as well as economically.⁵⁷ The primary concern of the U.S. military establishment is to enhance U.S. security by maintaining a posture of military superiority. Supporters of such an attitude dismiss the notion that the Americans would really not like to see the United States militarily dominant.⁵⁸

On the Soviet side, too, there exists an ideological chauvinism. According to Ralph Earle, the United States need to take into consideration the following asymmetries between itself and the Soviet Union, which are pertinent to any arms control talks between the superpowers. Firstly, there is the geographical factor, The U.S. has long coastlines with full access to non-ice-bound ways. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is a huge land power, but has far fewer

55. James Avery Joyce, *The War Machine. The Case Against the Arms Race*,

56. Lester Pearson, *Peace in the Family of Man*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), pp.37,38.

57. "Out of Control", *New Statesman*, Vol. 106, No. 2740 September 23, 1983, (London; The Statesman and Nation Publishing Co. Ltd., 1983), p.20.

58. Seymour Weiss, "The Myths of SALT", in Lehman and Weiss., *op.cit.*, p.91.

ports, Soviet submarines have to pass close to Norway, Great Britain, Iceland, and Japan. This is why the Soviets insist on the importance of land-based missiles and the U.S. emphasizes on submarine force. Secondly, the United States and the Soviet Union have alliance systems that are different in nature. The Soviet satellite states have much less freedom of action and do not possess nuclear weapons of their own. The Western allies have, on the other hand, a strong economic basis, and enjoy a far greater degree of political freedom; two of them, France and Great Britain have nuclear capabilities of their own. Thirdly, the Soviet Union has to share a long and hostile border with the Peoples Republic of China, which is also a nuclear power. The United States has no such problem. Fourthly, it should be borne in mind that the Soviet leaders have different perceptions of the present international situation, and history in general. There is a certain degree of mutual misperception in both the superpowers concerning themselves. Finally, the fact cannot be ignored that there is a great difference between a nuclear and a non-nuclear world.⁵⁹

Dynamics of U.S. - Soviet Arms Interaction

Experts in strategic studies have forwarded two sets of theories concerning the causes of superpower arms interaction. One group of experts says that strategic plans and arms buildup in one country effects the other country's decision to initiate similar programmes. This "action-reaction" process occurs because of uncertainties on both sides about the other's plans; as a result of which both sides try to adopt "worst-case" contingency plans in order to maintain its destruction capability.⁶⁰ In the view of Robert McNamara, the former U.S. Defence Secretary, this inevitably leads to excessive, or possible destabilizing force levels which induce counteractions on the other side, with the result that the weapon competition continues to be fueled."⁶¹

59. Earle, *op. cit.*, p.548.

60. Kahan, *op. cit.*, p.104.

61. *Ibid.*

Another group of experts, however are critical of such an "action-reaction" theory of superpower arms interaction. According to them, U.S. and Soviet arms decisions are "determined primarily by internal bureaucratic concessions, organizational pressures, or technical momentum". Thus, in their "bureaucratic politics" approach, it is not the external threat perception but rather internal causes that lead to superpower arms decisions.⁶²

Technological innovation, which is aided by research and development plays an important role in the arms race between the superpowers, and has serious implications for arms control. The late

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Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev is reported to have once said that "In the competition between the two opposed world systems, science and technology plays a critical role. Further advances in science and technology will be of decisive significance".⁶³ Technology has greatly increased efficiency in strategic weapons in the span of a decade, and, if unchecked, this advancement will continue at a rapid rate during this decade.⁶⁴ Attempts at limiting the qualitative arms race has often been likened to "aiming at a moving target". A restriction on the testing of new weapons systems would be the best possible way of controlling arms technology.⁶⁵ It is a weak argument that the momentum of weapons technology cannot be stopped. Resources and energy devoted to research and development of new weapons system can be directed to solve the more pressing problems of the world, for instance, food production and health care, inter alia. It is only a matter of political will. Thus, it is clear that if the superpowers can create

62. *Ibid.*

63. William J. Perry, "Advanced Tehhnology and Arms Control", *Orbis*, Summer 1982, p.351.

64. William Epstein and Bernard T. Feld, eds, *New Directions in Disarmament*, (New York : Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 16.

65. Kahan, *op. cit.*, p. 111

mutual trust and understanding and put a check on unbredded arms race between them they could do much to solve the problems that the majority of the world's population is facing.

Verification and Grey Area

The superpower arms control process involves two problems, namely, the verification issue and the 'grey area' of weapons identification, which are related to technological innovation. The matter of verification has greatly impeded arms control talks, because of Soviet objection to on-site inspection.⁶⁵ Hawkish US critics insist on on-site inspection of Soviet missile sites. They demand a perfectly "airtight" verification system to ensure Soviet compliance with arms control provision.⁶⁶ According to Malcolm Hoag, "A mutual ban upon weapons systems whose observance is not verified cannot be trusted."⁶⁷ This difficulty was partly overcome through the insertion in the limited arms control agreement of the provision of verification through national means—mainly by satellite reconnaissance systems and externally based sensors.⁶⁸ But R&D process cannot be verified through non-intrusive means.

The grey area in arms control raises another difficulty. This means that there are certain weapons which are deployed primarily as tactical and/or theatre weapons but can assume a strategic character through appropriate technical mutations. For example, the Soviet mobile IRBMs, the SS-20s, although do not have the required range to attack targets in the United States, could be conceivably turned into strategic weapons if fitted with smaller warheads or an extra booster stage. The same goes for the US cruise missiles, which could also be used for strategic bombardment.⁶⁹

66. Weiss, "SALT Verification" Lehman and Weiss, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

67- Donald M. Snow, *Nuclear Strategy in a Dynamic World: American Policy in the 1980s* Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981), p. 199.

68. Kahan, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

69. Richard Burt, "Implications for Arms Control", in Christoph Bertram ed., *New Conventional Weapons and East-West Security*, (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), p. 672.

The new Soviet Backfire bomber also belongs to this grey area category, because under certain conditions, it could attack targets in the mainland US.⁷⁰ Another grey area is the status of the British and French strategic forces, since superpower arms control process is a bitateral forum. The US forward based systems (FBS) in Europe, too, has ambiguous characteristics, thus making them fall within the scope of grey area. Even though the FBS have a nuclear and conventional theatre striking capability, they are also capable of strategic strikes against Soviet targets.⁷¹

Value of Dialogue Between the Superpowers

Whatever be the outcome of arms control talks between the superpowers, the fact that they are carrying on a dialogue is significant. The value of such a communication cannot be overestimated in an age of tense international environment. It would be sheer redundancy to state that armed peace is frail, that ultimately the nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the two superpowers would have to be dismantled.

Deterrence, based on the threat of mutual annihilation is a rather weak basis for peace and security; as long as the nuclear weapons exist, the danger of war breaking out through miscalculation, accident or irrationality will remain. The SALT process for well over a decade has laid the foundation for a system within which deterrence can be maintained while strategic forces are reduced in stages and the prospects of war diminished.⁷² If the superpowers could effectively carry on the arms control talks, they may eventually create a structure of peace which, in due course, will "make nuclear deterrence an outworn concept that future generation may safely discard".⁷³

The arms limitation negotiations have been beset by a host of problems, not the least of which is mutual mistrust and mispercep-

70. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Mason Wilrich and John B. Rhineland, *SALT: The Moscow Agreement and Beyond*, (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. 275.

73. *Ibid.*

tion. The arms control process thus provides a forum where two sides could exchange views and where mutual hostility can be

The arms control process provides a forum where two sides could exchange views and where mutual hostility can be dissipated, No matter how slowly it progresses or apparently how insignificant or ineffective its achievements may appear, the superpowers should have an interest keeping the process sustained.

dissipated. It is no mean achievement of the SALT process that, for the first time, in the SALT II Treaty the Soviet negotiators named their own strategic systems and provided overall data on their weapons systems. This step signifies that the Soviet leaders are no longer obsessed with maintaining secrecy in all military matters, and that they perceive that Soviet security is not jeopardized by the publication of some military facts and figures.⁷⁴ These are small steps indeed, but may lead to safer superpower relations. Uncertainties in the strategic relationship between them will remain for quite some time, but the task of the two superpowers will be to manage, and eventually to minimize the risks and suspicion through cooperation.⁷⁵

No matter how slowly the arms control process progresses, or apparently how insignificant or ineffective its achievements may appear; the superpowers should have an interest keeping the process sustained. It may be mentioned that arms control can possess a dynamism of its own (just as an arms race can), and the momentum can be increased through prudent agreement.⁷⁶ Even though arms control accords cannot by themselves eliminate the precariousness of peace; by having the basic conflict unresolved they can at least reduce the danger involved in arms race between the super powers.⁷⁷

74. Lawrence T. Caldwell and William Diebold Jr., *Soviet-American Relations in the 1980s : Superpower Politics and East West Trade*, (New York : Mc Graw Hill Book Company, 1981), p. 133.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Coffey, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

77. Arnold Welfers, *Discord and Collaboration : Essays on International Politics*, (Baltimore : The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 142.

Joseph J. Kruzel has eloquently, and also elegantly, expressed the leitmotif of superpower arms control talks in the following words: "Arms control is much more than two teams of negotiators glaring at each other across a table. It is primarily a way of thinking about the consequences of weapons and doctrines on the military environment, an effort to give some modest coherence and structure to an interstate relationship that involves the risk of war. It is an attempt, in an imperfect world, to establish guidelines for behavior and rules of engagement between adversary nations. Occasionally this effort involves formal negotiations aimed at producing treaties, but more generally it is an intellectual effort to anticipate and avoid the most dangerous aspects of military competition."⁷⁸

Suggestions For Improving The Arms Control Process

Till now the strategic arms control process has not really done much to limit the superpower arms race. But that does not necessarily mean the process has ceased to have any utility. There are still ways in which the superpower arms control process can be significantly improved.

Firstly, the United States and the Soviet Union must base their strategies on "minimum deterrence". That is, it should be borne in mind that at present each of the countries has the capacity to inflict unacceptable retaliatory damage on the other. It would be meaningless to further deploy nuclear weapons or add to their nuclear arsenals.

Secondly, it is high time that both the superpowers realize that all nuclear testing should be prescribed. In simple terms, there should be a comprehensive test ban treaty. It may be mentioned that the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty excluded underground nuclear testing from its scope.

78. Kruzel, *op. cit.*, 157.

Thirdly, both the superpowers should renounce the policy of first-use-of-nuclear weapons. A no-first-use pledge could lessen the pace of nuclear arms race and lead to a reduction in nuclear weapons. Although the possibility of conventional war is not being disregarded, this policy of no-first-use would reduce the likelihood of a nuclear war between the superpowers.

Fourthly, along with the pledge of no-first-use, the superpowers must seek to create nuclear weapons-free-zones, e.g., in the Indian Ocean. Such zones could lead to a reduction of the number of likely areas where there could be superpower confrontation and conflict.⁷⁹

The American negotiators have come to institutionalize the concept of linkage in the arms control talks, that is, in their dealings with the Soviet Union, arms control and Soviet activities in other spheres are coupled. They have almost become symbiotic. For instance, the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan in late 1979 was one of the reasons for the U.S. Congressional refusal to ratify the SALT II Treaty. But the fact that curbing the superpower nuclear arms race is an important goal in itself, and should not be allowed to be influenced by other areas of U.S.- Soviet relations has not received its due importance.⁸⁰ According to Paul C. Warnke, arms control talks are to be used to promote detente, but other issues should not affect arms control.⁸¹

Deterrence cannot be said to be a positive way of maintaining peace and security—it is only a negative way. Nuclear deterrence could fail due to accident, miscalculation or irrationality on the part of the decision-makers. What is now urgently needed is a method that would positively contribute to the maintenance of international peace.

Arms control talks, even if they do not lead to any formal agreement or meaningful results, are necessary for creating an environ-

79. Louis Rene Beres, *Apocalypse*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 213-221.

80. Betty Goetz all "Initiatives For Helping Governments to Stop the Nuclear Arms Race", in Epstein and Feld eds., *op. cit.*, p. 184.

81. Paul C. Warnke, "Improving the SALT Process", in *ibid.*, p 37.

ment of mutual understanding and amity. The fact that the United States and the Soviet Union intend to continue the dialogue is in itself significant; this may be the first step for laying a sound foundation

Superpower arms control process should be regarded only as a preliminary to a more meaningful arms limitation. Even though arms control may reduce its cost, it does not entirely stop the race.

for a cordial superpower relationship, which in turn could lead to genuine arms control, and eventually reduction. Some critics point out that arms control is an extremely slow moving process. This is certainly correct, but in the present circumstance, where the two superpowers are not by any means friends, only a step-by-step process is possible.⁸² Superpower arms control process should be regarded only as a preliminary to a more meaningful arms limitation. It may be mentioned that even though arms control may reduce the cost of the arms race, it does not entirely stop the race. For instance, from 1972, when the SALT I was signed, to 1977 the total superpower arms expenditure has been calculated to be more than US \$ 1 trillion.⁸³

It is imperative that arms race must be reversed; first there should be freeze on nuclear arms, then their gradual reduction, and ultimately elimination. It may be pointed out that freezing the *status quo* could give one side or the other a temporary advantage. But this is not an insurmountable problem. In the words of Bernard T. Feld, "such advantages, in the current state of military superabundance, can not be decisive in any meaningful sense...over a period of time each side will probably benefit in some instances and be at a disadvantage in some others, so the net advantage will average out in the long run".⁸⁴ Ultimately, arms race should be totally halted, a partial halt

82. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

83. Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and Eugene R. Wiltkopf, *World Politics: Trend and Transformation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1981), p. 411.

84. Bernard T. Feld, "Is Nuclear Arms Control Possible?" in Epstein and Feld eds., *op. cit.*, p. 48.



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will not suffice—in that case the arms race will be diverted into a new course.⁸⁵

The aim of the arms control process, at least for the time being, should be to try to maintain a superpowers weapons parity or balance based on a reduction of nuclear armaments at a lower than existing level. The essence of this concept is to reverse the escalating process of the superpower arms race.⁸⁶ The two superpowers should be aware of the fact that in the nuclear age, unbridled arms race could never lead to security. A miscalculation or accident could lead to a conflagration in which there cannot be any winners. If the United States and the Soviet Union could agree to limit and, eventually reduce arms buildup, resources thus saved could be possibly used for solving the more pressing problems of the day, which are non-military in nature.

Wasting billions of dollars for arms buildup by the superpowers is clearly a gross "distortion of priorities" in a world where the majority of the people live in abject poverty and hunger. The superpower arms race is essentially a political problem, and should therefore be politically solved. In the words of Louis Rene Beres, "The superpowers must jointly attempt to promote a just world order, a global society embodying the values of peace, social justice, economic well-being and ideological stability".⁸⁷ The superpowers must learn to link their own security with that of the rest of the world. They must stop to seek ways to maintain their bipolar dominance of international politics and take into account the security interests of the Third World countries also. Incentives must be given to the latter countries not to go for nuclear proliferation. Proliferation of the number of nuclear states would only aid in creating a more insecure world. The mutual consent of the superpowers to curb the vertical nuclear proliferation would encourage the non-nuclear states not to

85. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

86. George Ignatieff, "Suggestions For Improving the SALT Process", in Epstein and Feld eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 39.

87. Beres, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

bring about any horizontal expansion of nuclear weapons. Thus, the superpowers, by agreeing to a shift in global power, could do much in assisting in the effort at nonproliferation, which will consequently add to their own security as well.⁸⁸ Unless the will to prevail and to maintain primacy is replaced by the will to survive, there cannot be any genuine superpower arms control. Both the countries need to be imbued with a keen sense of global obligation.⁸⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that while it is a calculated endeavour on the part of both the United States and the Soviet Union, the path toward arms control is not without hazards. On the American side the arms control process is subverted to a great extent by the ultra-conservative military "experts" who seek to maintain US military superiority. Likewise, on the Soviet side, too, there are dogmatic theoreticians who strive to uphold the concept of the inevitability of the victory of the Soviet system. It appears that arms control has "essentially failed", but that does not preclude the possibility of overcoming the impediments in the path of the superpower arms control. The difficulties are not insurmountable—they can be

The vital question in analysing the process of arms control is not how smooth it has been, but whether both sides were willing to carry on arms control talks and whether in future reasons would prevail over rhetorics.

overcome provided there is the will to do so, and provided the two sides take advantage of the avenues that are open for the improvement of the process. Another important factor in any successful arms control negotiation is the de-linkage of the issue of the superpower arms control talks and their behaviour elsewhere.

An overview of the history of the superpower arms control process shows that during the last twenty years, the process has

88. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

somehow continued to function, even if crippled by intermittent crises. Arms control is basically a bargaining process—a matter of give and take, something which requires time and patience. The vital question here is not how smooth the process has been, but whether both the sides were willing to carry on arms control talks and whether in future reasons would prevail over rhetorics.