



UN'S NEW DISARMAMENT AGENDA 'TO SECURE OUR WORLD AND OUR FUTURE'

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The United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, announced a brand new vision for global disarmament in May, this year, to help eliminate nuclear arsenals from a world that he described as only “one mechanical, electronic and human error away” from destruction.¹ While recently, delivering a speech on global disarmament at the University of Geneva, in Switzerland, he emphasised on the need of ‘eliminating war’ as an instrument of foreign policy as a part of his new agenda, entitled, *Securing Our Common Future*. The agenda mainly focused on three priorities; first, to save humanity from the weapons of mass destruction; secondly, to save human lives from the scourge of conventional weapons and lastly; to restrict the improvement of new battlefield technologies in order to save the future generations. Disarmament can prevent and end violence. It can support sustainable development and comply with the values and principles of the United Nations. Hence, the UN Chief called for an

urgent need to eliminate all kinds of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, biological and chemical, from the face of earth.

The United Nations priority in dealing with this issue has been evident from its first resolution on disarmament. The General Assembly in 1946 [A/RES/1(I)], had called for “the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.” In spite of that there are approximately around, 15,000 nuclear weapons stored around the world and hundreds of them are set up ready to be launched within minutes to destroy civilizations. Countries possessing such weapons have well-funded, long-term plans to modernize their nuclear arsenals and more than half of the world’s population still lives in such countries that either have such weapons or are members of nuclear alliances. Though as of now deployed nuclear weapons have been reduced compared to the Cold War, but neither there has been a physical destruction

of a single nuclear warhead nor as required by a treaty, bilateral or multilateral, nor is there a single nuclear disarmament negotiation underway.

Way off Target

In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution that called for global negotiations on a “legally binding instrument to completely prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of earth².” Termed as the “Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons” or simply the “Nuclear Ban Treaty”, it prohibited State Parties from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, or stockpiling nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Although negotiated by more than 130 states, the principal source of disagreement comes from the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament by states that possess nuclear arms. This group of states encompasses the five official nuclear weapon states recognized by the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the four other nuclear-armed states: India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan. These states have expressed explicit opposition to the 2017 treaty as according to them accession to the treaty was “incompatible with the policy of nuclear deterrence, which has been essential to keeping the peace in Europe and North Asia for over 70 years. On the other hand, many of the non-nuclear-armed members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), along with

Australia, and even Japan who is supposed to be one of the pioneering ambassadors of nuclear disarmament was also resistant to the ban treaty. These states contend that the treaty will be ‘ineffective in eliminating nuclear weapons’ as it will distract attention from other disarmament and non-proliferation initiatives, such as negotiating a fissile material cut-off treaty or ratifying the CTBT. The Treaty was opened for signature at United Nations headquarters in New York on 20 September 2017 and will remain open indefinitely, and shall only enter into force once 50 nations have ratified or acceded to it. But as of now only 58 nations have signed it and 10 nations have ratified it.³

The treaty which could have been a historic accomplishment but might suffer a doom because; according to Matthew Costlow⁴, “the document simply has too many fatal flaws. First, it lacks effective verification and compliance protocols, in addition to ignoring the reasons why states fail to comply to begin with. Second, all nuclear weapon possessing states are condemned equally under the treaty, when in reality the United States has done more than any other state to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Third, the time and effort non-nuclear states spend on promoting this treaty are much better directed toward advancing concrete non-proliferation objectives, not on a doomed treaty.”

What could be done?

Hence, the Chief stated that the States that possess nuclear weapons have the primary responsibility for avoiding catastrophe. To kick-start the process, he expressed the UN's desire to resume dialogue and negotiations with Russia and the US to resolve their dispute over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, to extend the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)⁵ treaty on strategic offensive arms, which is due to expire in just three years, and to take new steps towards reducing nuclear stockpiles. Secondly, he called upon the time, he mentions, for the UN to focus its efforts on eliminating the spread of nuclear weapons, to maintain world peace and security. He also mentioned that banning some traditional weaponry would yield positive results if based on restricting the effects it has on civilians who are otherwise killed and injured, in large numbers, and are often deprived of food, healthcare, education and any means of making a living.

Global disarmament has been a UN aspiration for a long time. However, security realpolitik has always hampered any meaningful step in this direction. UNSG has once again made a fervent appeal and released an agenda. But, it remains to be seen if any of the nuclear weapons possessors is listening.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily

reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ "UN Chief Launches New Disarmament Agenda 'to Secure Our World and Our Future'." UN News. May 24, 2018. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/05/1010551>.

² Pandey, Hina, Ms. "BANNING THE BOMB: INDIA WILL WAIT AND SEE." South Asian Voices, December 16, 2016. Accessed May 31, 2018. http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_HP_17.pdf.

³ "Signature/ratification Status of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons." Ican. <http://www.icanw.org/status-of-the-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons/>.

⁴ Costlow, Matthew. "The Nuclear Ban Treaty Is Way Off Target." War on Rocks. July 28, 2017. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/07/the-nuclear-ban-treaty-is-way-off-target/>.

⁵ START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) was a bilateral treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms. The treaty was signed on 31 July 1991 and entered into force on 5 December 1994

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