

WHY DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS FAIL

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The most remarkable fact about disarmament negotiations, as they have been known from 1932 onwards with the 50th anniversary this year, is that they fail. By that is meant the following: they do not contribute to the reduction of the total level of destructive power possessed by participating states. The data immediately confirm this statement: there is an accumulation of disarmament conferences and disarmament resolutions, but also an accumulation in the participating states and the states associated with them of destructive power. Of course, the correlation between these two trends does not prove that disarmament conferences might not have had some limiting effect, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, on the armament process - but that is not the same as disarmament. In fact, it might be argued that disarmament conferences through that process have served to legitimize armament, or at least to conceal or mystify it as a process. From that there is a long step, however, to the hypothesis that disarmament negotiations actually may serve to stimulate armament, and even are deliberately used for this purpose.

The interesting question is what concretely there is about disarmament negotiations that might have such negative consequences, or at least not positive consequences. It does not help to say that there is an "absence of political will": if there had been "political will" there might have been no need for negotiations at all, matters would have been settled with more automaticity. Nor is it a question of blaming the goal of the conferences. "Disarmament" is not at all an impossible goal. It does not mean "disarmament down to zero level", one might have much more modest goals. Neither, indeed, is it a question of generalized scepticism against conferences or negotiations: not only so-called modern societies, but any human social formation would be possible without them. No, in the outer of a critical analysis would be some particular aspects of disarmament negotiations as they are known today. And the argument will be made that the hard nucleus in the

mass of phenomena that makes disarmament negotiations so unsuccessful is the basic rules, even axioms under which they take place: that any disarmament process will have to be balanced, mutual and controlled. To many these principles sound so obvious, so beyond doubt that only he who doubts them is to be doubted.

What follows is an effort to show how unlikely it is that negotiations undertaken with these principles as constraints could ever succeed. More precisely, three reasons will be given why the principle of balance stands in the way, three reasons why the principle of mutuality stands in the way and one reason for the control principle - and in addition to that two reasons more, all together nine. One might perhaps say that this is to over-explain the issue, but failure as a fact, in this case, seems so solid that a correspondingly solid theoretical basis for its explanation is called for.

(1) Balance is practically impossible to define. If there were only two parties and only one weapon system one might perhaps arrive at an agreement as to what interval/ratio constitutes balance, given that it is a somewhat looser concept than exact equality. But if the parties are (loose) alliances there is already the question of to what extent some of the parties should be counted - as example might serve the counting philosophies for France and for China during the last thirty years. Then, power is obviously multi-dimensional since the parties have more than one weapon system. How to compare one weapon system and its destructive power with that of another system? The destructive power, in turn, may be analyzed in terms of factors such as yield and skill of delivery, and again the problem of how much of one should compensate for how much of the others might arise.

There are two possible approaches out of this quagmire, both of them problematic, to say the least. The first would be to simplify the situation by trying to define it as close

to the "two parties, one system" model as possible, e.g. "middle range, land-based rockets possessed by superpowers in Europe". Within that model an agreement about what constitutes balance would not seem impossible; what seems difficult is to regard the model as an adequate model of reality. Hence the second approach, making the model more realistic, bringing in more parties, more systems so as to come closer to the real world. - When this is done, however, it becomes impossible to arrive at an agreement about what constitutes balance. Thus, as long as the injunction to operate under a condition of balance remains, the choice seems to be between an unrealistic world image where the concept can become operational, and a realistic world image where the concept remains non-operational. Efforts to solve this problem by fragmentation into types of weapon systems, "strategic", "theater", "conventional", may postpone some basic comparisons that are problematic. But that is not a solution.

(2) In the concept of balance the notion of degree of invulnerability does not enter. It can be argued that this notion is as important as that of destructive power - after all, nobody would bet on who would win of two knights duelling knowing only their lances, not their armour. Invulnerability also has many dimensions, such as psychological, cultural, social, political, economic, ecological. By and large the more modern or "developed" a society, the more vulnerable it also seems to be and it looks as if the more vulnerable a society, the more does it try to compensate by adding to its offensive, destructive power. This means that one country might reason as follows: "You on the other side of the table are much more invulnerable than we are, your population is more sturdy, more used to material deprivations; hence we are entitled to some compensation for this in the form of higher levels of destructive power". Needless to say such matters are not only difficult to measure, but even more difficult to make explicit during negotiations. It would actually mean using vulnerability as an argument for higher levels of armament; obviously unacceptable.

There is another approach: the country could also be admonished to reduce its vulnerability. But that would obviously be "interference in internal affairs" as the dimensions of vulnerability cut so deeply into internal politics. In this there is something tragic: very important aspects of the whole balance of power equation cannot be mentioned for the simple reason that they are seen as belonging to the intra-national not the international domain. Moreover, they are also seen as belonging to the nationally private rather than the nationally public, if such a distinction can be made. For an ambassador from a superpower to say that "recent blackouts in my country have shown how vulnerable the population is, how easily panic strikes when electricity disappears, how theft and even vandalism takes on epidemic, even endemic dimensions - hence we simply cannot afford to have such calamities happen" would be very difficult indeed. And yet that type of unspoken argument may be under the table and above the table, only not on the table, for the many reasons indicated. However, to disregard vulnerability level would make the negotiations border on the absurd in their lack of realism. In this, however, they are supported by the leading yearbooks in the field: neither the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London, nor the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute give any information about this aspect, nor is there any indication that they are conceptually aware of it. And the count weapons more than destructive power.

(3) The principle of balance presupposes that both parties pursue balance. Granted that "balance" means approximate equality or "parity" there is a blurred line beyond or below which "superiority" or "inferiority" is located. Assuming that we are dealing with the kind of parties that are not pursuing inferiority they can be seen as pursuing either parity or superiority. If both pursue parity, no problem. But what if they don't? They could still participate in disarmament negotiations under the principle of balance, only trying to define

the concept in such a way that were it ever to be institutionalized it would nevertheless be compatible with their pursuit of superiority. Whether this is done by focusing on one weapon system, gaining or retaining superiority through a highly limited parity obtained at the expense of neglecting all other weapon systems, or by a much more multi-dimensional approach where the realities of power become hidden in the complexities of the comparisons is of less importance. The point here, incidentally, is not that parties to negotiations may cheat, pretending to work for disarmament whereas they actually pursue the opposite; that is nothing new in human history. The point is that the principle of balance itself makes it so easy to do this, almost encourages deceit because of the impossibility of defining in any mutually acceptable way the key concept of balance.

(4) Mutuality means a de-emphasis on what governments can do on their own. Mutuality means doing it together. In principle this sounds fine, but not when it is interpreted as "doing only that which both parties can do as a result of cooperative negotiations, and in a parallel manner". The United Nations is the ideal setting for institutionalizing this kind of approach, with its emphasis not only on internationalism and governmentalism but also on negotiations, cooperation and parallelism - the latter as a consequence of the universalism implicit in the whole UN approach to world politics. Rules should be for all Member States, otherwise they are not rules, just political behavior. The purpose of the UN machinery is to produce rules, and to produce the kind of circumstances under which they are adhered to. As a result of this the principle of mutuality may serve as an excuse never to engage in any unilateral action, however minute, gradual and stepwise. Why should one, if multilateral action may be just beneath the horizon? On the other hand, that multilateral action will not come about unless through one's own consent, which means that

what might be called "the Geneva process" not only blocks unilateral processes, but also has built into it efficient mechanisms to block multilateral processes. It may be objected that this also applies to other multilateral negotiations, which is true. But in other negotiations, e.g. in the field of health, own gains through cooperative negotiations on multilateral agreements may be more immediate, more clear, and advantages from blocking multilateral agreements negligible or totally absent.

(5) Mutuality invites comparison of power profiles, and comparisons invite armament. Weapon systems profiles, giving for each qualitatively different system the quantity possessed by the parties to a disarmament conference, are hardly ever identical, nor do they run parallel to each other. They will tend to intersect. On some systems one party is superior, on the other system the same party is inferior. There are "gaps", defined as excesses or deficits, dependent on the vantage point. Such comparisons are indispensable and indeed the necessary outcome of any negotiation process under the heading "mutual and balanced". If there is no consensus about how to simplify the situation through some kind of power index, a unidimensional concept of power, one can only obtain balance proceeding system by system in two ways: reducing gaps by eliminating excesses, and by eliminating deficits - the latter usually called "catching-up". The former would lead to disarmament, the latter, obviously, to further armament and even more so if the parties agree to meet at a point above their present level of destructive power as in SALT I. And they would tend to eliminate deficits rather than excesses not only because they prefer production to destruction, but also because they pursue the upper rather than the lower ranges of parity - this is where the theory of arms race dynamics enters.

The net result of all this is a quantitative arms race, also stimulated through the disarmament negoti-

ation process itself, if not necessarily by it. It is difficult to understand how it could be otherwise: the daily confrontation with minute and considerable power discrepancies would necessarily lead to a desire to catch up given the tendency to focus on deficits rather than on excesses. Moreover, it would lead to long-term thinking: what will happen if these gaps are reduced, if in fact parities are obtained? Would that not mean that my power is neutralized? How can I justify working for the paralysis of my own power, thereby reducing my own political space? Would I not have at the same time to consider the expansion of the power spectrum through the introduction of one or more so far unthought of weapon systems so as at least to be ready where research is concerned if negotiations under the heading of "mutual and balanced" should lead to nearly identical power profiles? And with that simple line of reasoning qualitative arms races are also stimulated through participation in disarmament negotiation processes, if not necessarily caused by them. Conclusion: the whole weapons system moves towards higher and more "modern" levels - the older systems being sent to the Third World.

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(6) Mutuality proceeds on the basis of what governments agree on, and that may block for discussions of crucial factors in disarmament/armament processes. Security concepts based on reliance on armament, even on offensive arms, and even on weapons of mass destruction at that, are deeply rooted in the structures of modern societies - particularly the web of bureaucratic-intelligentsia-corporate interaction often referred to as "technocracy". These are the concrete structures that not only produce weapons, but also the conditions under which weapons are seen as the answer. Under the negotiations technocracies are represented by governments, and they are likely to see themselves as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem. Without taking a stand on the issue, positions to the effect that "disarmament will be served through less centralized patterns of government rather than more government", "building down MBIC



complexes", will not easily emerge in a setting of governmentalism. Hence, such negotiations will tend to leave intact the structures that produce the conditions that are so much lamented, and it may perhaps even be argued that this very point is a major function of the entire exercise.

However, not only governmentalism, but also inter-governmentalism will be built into the untouchable kernel of the mass of negotiation material. In the current world system, as it is reflected in the United Nations, this means superpower ascendancy. Whether it takes the expression of having the superpowers as co-presidents of disarmament negotiations, or having them negotiate all alone "on behalf of" the others, it not only reflects but also reinforces the status quo. Again, one might argue that this leaves intact a basic structure producing the conditions that are lamented, and precisely as an outcome of the mutuality assumption. It becomes very much like having the major drug dealers as co-presidents of a conference to curtail the traffic in drugs.

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(7) In the dialectic between efforts to control and efforts to cheat the latter are likely to be more successful. Even surveillance satellites have not made the earth opaque; they must have stimulated a tremendous amount of underground research, development and testing, production and stockpiling, even training and maneuvers and certainly deployment. Spy networks are certainly also operating, possibly less densely than before. At the same time there is a clear move in the direction of weapons that not only have very high yield and precision, but also are easily hidden the cruise missile "Tomahawk", about six meters long and with a diameter of short of one meter. Tougher control conditions or measures will stimulate more imaginative cheating measures and a possible new generation of mini-weapons. Control measures are likely to be more effective as stimuli than as impediments. The asymmetry between those who hide and those who seek will be even more pronounced.

(8) In spite of all of these factors disarmament negotiations have a demobilizing effect on the peace movement. There is considerable faith in the world population in negotiations. They are seen not only as instruments of agreements that may lead to progress in the field, but also as symbols of emerging peace processes: at the negotiation table peace begins. Such attitudes, however, are merely the result of confusion of this particular negotiation table with armistice talks or talks about, say, economic cooperation. Even talks about "development" have the advantage that there is at least one definition of "development", in terms of economic growth, that is precise, operational. There are conditions surrounding all negotiations, but it is not a general feature of conditions that they make impossible that which they are supposed to promote. The same applies to the outcomes. They are to be suspected, but the peace movement will tend to embrace them in frustrated search of a "victory". Example: the partial test ban treaty of August 1963 - actually not even an environment treaty worth the name because of seepage - the lithosphere that was not included, and the use of tests for the preparation of even worse arms. Given this demobilization much of the outside pressure to produce results will subside before the work even starts, making it even easier to produce non-results. And in the meantime new weapons appear.

(9) The conditions stimulate the growth of a national and international disarmament bureaucracy with vested survival interests. Efforts to break the armament problem into small, neat and quantifiable sub-problems give rise to a hierarchic bureaucracy isomorphic with the problems. There will be a need for weapons counters, for system counters, for counters of parties to conflicts, and for synthesizers. With the flow of time these groups, national and international, centered in Geneva and New York, will grow. Each meeting will be an opportunity to design

the agenda for the next; each conference an opportunity to design the instruments for the next. The system becomes self-perpetuating having considerably more than its per diems to lose. If a solution should ever come up it would pass unnoticed, not only because it is not in the interest of the system but also because they would not know how to recognize it as a solution.

In short, the prospects are bleak indeed. This does not mean that the conferences will not occasionally arrive at some kind of agreements, only that the agreements will be seriously flawed. There will be exception clauses as with the efforts to control biological warfare leaving the laboratories untouched; the efforts to control chemical warfare that are compatible with binary gasses because they only become deadly when combined, over the enemy (where else should they become deadly?); the Tlatelolco treaty not ratified by the most important countries and in addition heavily biased in favor of the US, the nuclear power in the same hemisphere, and so on, and so forth. They will tend to leave the force motrice underlying the whole armament process untouched - the MBIC complexes. They will tend not to dig deeply into military doctrine, this being the prerogative of sovereign governments themselves. In short, they will tend to be non-productive - nay, worse than that: counter-productive. Which then should serve as a stimulus to come up with something better, keeping the goals, but searching for a new process.