

Unshackle the Burden of Contradictions

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The Middle Powers Initiative has a 15 year history of producing substantive policy briefs and convening relevant parties to engage in meaningful discussions from which creative policies have emerged. We believe that we were helpful in building the consensus policies to which all parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty committed to achieving at its 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences.

However, we have not been successful thus far in helping to achieve the fulfillment of those commitments made under the authority of the NPT.

I have pondered and reflected deeply on the reason for this distance between aspirations for a nuclear weapons free world, a more secure world, manifest in sober commitments made in good faith by many of the world's best diplomats and the actual policies arising in the states with nuclear weapons.

I suggest that part of the reason is that there are distinctly different directions being pursued in the policies of the states with nuclear weapons.

First, of course is nonproliferation and disarmament. Diplomats have demonstrated exceptional skills in finding common interests and articulating policies that would make the world so much safer. Some are set forth in excellent road maps for progress in the 13 Steps of the NPT Review of 2000 and the expanded commitments of 2010. They embody both strengthened nonproliferation and progress in fulfilling the commitment to nuclear disarmament found in Article VI of the NPT.

The second direction is expressed as the necessity of strategic stability. The US has not changed from the position clearly stated in President Reagan's initiated Commission on Strategic Forces: "Stability should be the primary objective of both modernization of our strategic forces and arms control proposals." Or, President H.W. Bush's 1991 letter regarding the START treaty that was sent to the US Senate: "The fundamental promise of START is that despite significant differences, the US and Soviet Union have a common interest in. ...ensuring

strategic stability.” These principles have continued in numerous similar statements from all nuclear weapons states.

Stability is surely a value. Allowing the illusion that there can be sustainable security based on the inherent risks of keeping nuclear weapons at the ready for use in order to ensure they are not used is morally questionable and unreasonably dangerous.

Strategic stability rests on the confidence that robust reliable arsenals ensure that no party can believe it advantageous to instigate a nuclear exchange since retaliation from its adversary will inflict unacceptable harm. This obviously precarious posture is the basis presently for much nuclear policy. This posture overlooks inevitable computer and human errors as well as human irrationality and the possibility of misunderstanding during crisis. It was developed to address a simpler world during the Cold War with far less actors than today. Now the world is more complicated, multivariate, with unpredictable nations and cultures, and dramatically asymmetric force postures and numerous new crisis-producing situations. A rational person must question what exactly does strategic stability mean in the complex world of today?

The third direction being pursued is simple and predictable. Military planners are always looking for the capacity to dominate potential adversaries and thus pursue with passion policies and weaponry that will provide advantages. In fact one can find US military documents calling for “full spectrum dominance.” But this is really not odd for any military. It is in the DNA of military thinking to obtain dominance. What is odd is that there is so little discussion about the unavoidable difficulty in obtaining substantial forward movement in disarmament while pursuing policies and deployments aimed at achieving advantage and ultimately dominance, despite diplomatic articulations of commitments to achieve legally required nuclear disarmament, all the while ensuring strategic stability.

For this reason, calls for heightened clarity in commitments to pursue nuclear disarmament, whether through a convention or a ban, will fall on deaf ears in the security establishments of the capitals of nuclear weapons states until a decision is made that achieving nuclear disarmament, to which they are already legally required, is more important than attempting to maintain the status quo based on strategic stability and its contradictory pursuit of military advantage.

I believe it necessary that there be a clear challenge that demonstrates that continued reliance on contradictory policies unnecessarily burdens efforts to make progress in achieving the peace and security of a nuclear weapons free world. We must challenge the logic of deterrence, strategic stability where it impedes disarmament, and the dangerous pursuit of dominance when it impedes cooperation and the pursuit of global common security.