

CHAPTER 6

ENGINEERING PROGRESS: A DIPLOMAT'S PERSPECTIVE ON MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT

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SUMMARY

The international climate is not conducive to multilateral disarmament. But states do agree conceptually on the broad principles of collective security. The difficulties that arise in translating this understanding into useful outcomes at the working level are not only due to politics. They are for reasons that are of an organizational and perceptual nature as well. Reform and progress are not impossible—but they do require more flexibility and initiative by disarmament diplomats themselves. This chapter considers options for multilateral disarmament practitioners to make their work more productive.

INTRODUCTION

Almost half a century ago, the pioneering conflict researcher Quincy Wright concluded that the main cause of war is the difficulty in organizing the institutions of peace.¹ Multilateral disarmament efforts fall within the purview of those institutions of peace. Over the past decade, in particular, these efforts have become notoriously difficult to consolidate, as seen in the consecutive failures of international meetings of the Conference on Disarmament, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the United

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Nations Disarmament Commission, and the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms. Moreover, the 2005 UN World Summit failed to agree on any issue linked to disarmament and simply omitted a chapter on this topic.²

There have been many views offered to explain these kinds of multilateral failure. In the uncertainties of the post-Cold War world aptly described as “new medievalism”,³ states have difficulty in agreeing on what the common challenges are, let alone the collective strategies to address them. Some states are too weak to be properly organized. Often they lack the ability to deal effectively with the consequences of sharply increased trade, transport, travel and technology. Moreover, many security threats recognize no national boundaries and have become asymmetrical—armed insurgencies and terrorism are prominent examples. According to the Report of the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change:

Differences of power, wealth and geography do determine what we perceive as the gravest threats to our survival and well-being. Differences of focus lead us to dismiss what others perceive as the gravest of all threats to their survival. Inequitable responses to threats further fuel division. Many people believe that what passes for collective security today is simply a system for protecting the rich and powerful. Such perceptions pose a fundamental challenge to building collective security today. Stated baldly, without mutual recognition of threats there can be no collective security. Self-help will rule, mistrust will predominate and cooperation for long-term mutual gain will elude us.⁴

In such surroundings, organizing the institutions of peace and enabling them to perform their tasks—with United Nations reform as its centrepiece—is a daunting task. Process-wise, obtaining results with such a large number of states around the table is difficult enough. But profound differences in perception and lack of trust further hinder the execution and transformation of processes meant to enable successful cooperation.

These days, collective solutions seem hard to find, especially as there seems to be limited inclination on the part of some key states toward effectively mobilizing multilateral instruments. Still, the UN Secretary-General drew the right conclusion from the High-level Panel’s Report:

Depending on wealth, geography and power, we perceive different threats as the most pressing. But the truth is we cannot afford to choose. Collective security today depends on accepting that the threats which each region of the world perceives as most urgent are in fact equally so for all.⁵

This acceptance of differing perceptions, as well as the inclination to compare them sympathetically to one's own, are prerequisites for better cooperation. States need to ensure, as Karl Deutsch, one of the pre-eminent scholars of international relations, realized, that signals from others are not "merely received, but would be understood, and that they would be given real weight in the process of decision-making."⁶ Crucially, collective security means advancing security for *all*. The term itself implies that it is not a limited number of states that would benefit from more dynamism and reform in multilateral diplomacy, but that such progress is for the good of every nation and their people.

Some progress in multilateral work is still possible. The new Human Rights Council and the UN Peace Building Commission, both agreed to in 2005, are cases in point. But the international climate is not conducive to multilateral reform and reforming disarmament seems particularly difficult. The issue touches on the core of state sovereignty, which is why in disarmament negotiations fault lines in perception and mistrust are always near the surface.

It could be argued that adapting the institutions and processes of disarmament to try to make them more effective should be left to better times since these are the least likely international bodies on which agreement to change will be found. Some diplomatic practitioners prefer focusing on preserving the institutional structures intact for later.

However, based on my experience in multilateral disarmament, initiatives for reform and progress coming from within this field could be of impact. And if they do fall on fertile soil, further steps in disarmament could positively contribute to international "climate change". Disarmament has much to gain by greater application of ingenuity and initiative from diplomatic practitioners, fully coordinated with their authorities in capitals.

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL

Difficult as it may be, reform and progress in the processes of disarmament is not impossible. The 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome Document showed that states agreed at the conceptual level about the importance of collective security measures. But states failed to agree on the concrete applications of those principles in the field of disarmament. In a time where many governments ideologically and strategically drift about, some might prefer the short-term gain of being seen as strong through the bold prevention of multilateral accords, as opposed to the longer-term gain of contributing to increasing security through non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control agreements. However, governments seldom come to conferences with the firm objective to block an outcome—even in disarmament. More often they will find in the course of negotiations that there is too little benefit to agree to a text that does not reflect their interests well enough. Yes, the wish lists of one group of states might have developed in a very different direction from that of another grouping, but most of the time a basic constructive approach is still there. It is up to diplomacy to somehow integrate these divergent wish lists, even as perceptions of interest have drifted so far apart and the task of finding common ground is becoming more daunting.

Disarmament diplomats play critical roles in the clearing away of obstacles to integrated, collective security outcomes. Although, for the moment, some might have given up on adapting set arrangements in order to create new opportunities for cooperation, their engineering can always make a difference. Political scientist Alexander Wendt advocated the view that the international system is socially constructed, arguing “people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them.”⁷ With his insistence that “[t]he process of creating institutions is one of internalizing new understandings of self and other, of acquiring new role identities”,⁸ Wendt underlined the continued “transformative potential” of international politics. This is an important contribution to understanding multilateral diplomatic practice—in particular to the field of disarmament:

Roles are not played in mechanical fashion according to precise scripts, ... but are “taken” and adapted ... by each actor. The fact that roles are “taken” means that, in principle, actors always have a capacity for “character planning”—for engaging in critical self-reflection and choices

... . But when and under what conditions can this creative capacity be exercised? Clearly, much of the time it cannot: if actors were constantly reinventing their identities, social order would be impossible

The exceptional, conscious choosing to transform or transcend roles has at least two preconditions. First, there must be a reason to think of oneself in novel terms. This would most likely stem from the presence of new social situations that cannot be managed in terms of preexisting self-conceptions. Second, the expected costs of intentional role change—the sanctions imposed by others with whom one interacted in previous roles—cannot be greater than its rewards.

When these conditions are present, actors can engage in self-reflection and practice specifically designed to transform their identities and interests and thus to “change the games” in which they are embedded.⁹

Certainly, Wendt himself stressed that change would be incremental and slow.¹⁰ But his analysis is a strong argument for the need for more dynamism in disarmament diplomacy, and for understanding the decisive role diplomats themselves have in bringing that about.

In essence, representatives must remain focused on opportunities, and on their continued responsibility for finding these openings. As this means an unremitting attention to flexible approaches, the following options for increased flexibility can be considered.

FLEXIBILITY IN REGIONAL GROUPS

In the disarmament context, regional groups generally operate at two levels. In the Conference on Disarmament there are Eastern European, Non-Aligned Movement and Western groups (China is a “group of one”). These groups are used mostly for information exchange and to allocate functions. However, sometimes these groups, and in particular the Non-Aligned Movement, issue joint statements on substance.

Within the United Nations, states assemble more often in “true” geographical regional groupings and organizations like the African Union, Arab League, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), European Union, Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC), Organization for

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Pacific Island Forum. These arrangements are important for dealing with the sheer quantity of states in the international arena: once they agree to a joint statement, states from a region feel themselves represented on an issue and consequently there is less need for statements from all individual members. Obviously, nothing prohibits states from national interventions or participating through more than one group statement, like Morocco in the Arab League, the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement or the Netherlands through the European Union and the OSCE.

In general, regional groups in both manifestations are useful in multilateral disarmament in making possible a balanced distribution of formal functions and in managing the complexity of multilateral action. But their huge drawback is that their existence tends to foster polarization. During the Cold War there was benefit in adding as much gravity as possible to a standpoint and sticking closely together as long as feasible. It was like dividing a bunch of children over a large seesaw: the more kids cling to one end, the more weight they produce as a group.

Not anymore. In twenty-first century multilateral diplomacy, untying the set regional frameworks here and there could make disarmament processes more effective because the old bipolar relationship has been replaced by more cross-cutting divides on lines that differ according to the issue. The myriad subjects for which multilateral solutions are needed, the ever-diversifying interests that develop in an increasingly interconnected world and the fluidity of international affairs impel governments to seek more diverse opportunities to cooperate in pursuit of their interests. For every challenge there might be a different solution, and it is often worth the effort to try to find the right coalition for it.

Diplomats should be less timid in developing ad hoc coalitions beyond regional group consultations. For instance, regional group politics unchanged since the Cold War dominate the Conference on Disarmament, and the constraints this places on member states help to explain why it has not successfully undertaken substantive work in nearly a decade.¹¹ Yet cross-regional cooperation has been demonstrably helpful in other disarmament-related processes. States have found each other in the New Agenda Coalition, the Human Security Network, and other cross-regional groupings and ad hoc coalitions with results that have sometimes been modest but usually tangible. There is room for further improvement, for

“smart” ad hoc cooperation, exploring possibilities of practically working together on issues of joint interest. Deutsch has argued that the best result is attained when a party offers cooperation, ends this cooperation when the offer does not elicit a favour in return, but then immediately offers it again.¹² That is the model which structurally offers most possibilities for progress—for representatives from all groups.

Box 6.1. The European Union as a regional group

When the Presidency of the European Union speaks in a negotiation on behalf of some 30 countries representing half a billion people (often, EU-associated states join up to statements), it displays the European Union’s political, economic, military, and financial weight.

How effective is the European Union as a regional group in disarmament? At the outset it should be noted that EU member states are in very different situations. Two EU members possess nuclear weapons, a number of EU states belong to NATO, while others are “militarily non-aligned” and foster a foreign policy tradition focusing on nuclear disarmament. Within the Conference on Disarmament the profile of the EU has been limited, although joint statements have been possible. On biological weapons, and on human security-related issues such as curbing landmines and the illicit trade in small arms, the EU finds a great deal of common ground.

The challenge is to cooperate overtly only when it adds value, and not to when the EU operating as a bloc does not help matters. Flexibility in the EU’s approach to cooperating in disarmament-related negotiations is difficult to manage, but is crucial in obtaining results for its members.

In general, member states should jointly formulate the goals of any given disarmament negotiations as much as possible. But, after having framed the best possible outcome for the EU, more flexibility in attaining these goals would be beneficial. As stated earlier, the high-profile actions of a large bloc are not always helpful in present-day negotiations. In a low-trust international environment without clear ideological poles, there is often more to be gained from unthreatening initiatives by smaller coalitions, and from interventions during discussions that do not carry the weight of so many.

Box 6.1 (continued)

It is, to a large extent, an organizational question. The European Union has internal procedures for coordination in place, and since they are there they tend to be made use of. What adds to this automaticity is that states in the rotating EU Presidency have an understandable wish to want to be seen working actively. In view of this, increased flexibility in the interests of a negotiating outcome requires conscious joint decisions to refrain from working systematically towards combined positions, interventions and standpoints at every stage of a negotiation.

Linked to this internal element, there is an external one to be considered when contemplating tactics for optimum results. Because of the “natural” process of intensive cooperation within the EU, there is a danger of individual member states not being as open to other coalitions—cross-regional ones—as they could be. Diplomats from EU countries may be so focused on the process of EU-internal coordination that they fail to identify and exploit opportunities for ad hoc coalitions of the like-minded more broadly. But European states almost always stand to gain from the bridging of global differences in disarmament negotiations.

All in all, the European Union states could serve their own jointly formulated goals better by plotting different courses in getting there—a strategy which requires high trust and good individual diplomatic skills.

FLEXIBILITY IN PROCEDURES

The recent Review Conference on the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms (26 June–7 July 2006) was a fascinating exercise in time management—but not a unique one as it unfolded not unlike other negotiations. As usual, each UN working day has only six effective working hours: 10am to 1pm, and 3pm to 6pm. This conference’s two-week agenda was cut short to nine days due to a UN holiday, and a formal UN General Assembly session on the entry of Montenegro into the UN family cut another half day from the roster. That left 52 hours. But the first day was needed to cover agenda points such as election of the President and Statement by the President, address by the President of the General Assembly, address by the Secretary-General of the UN, adoption of the rules of procedure, adoption of the agenda, organization of work, election of officers other than the President, presentation of credentials of representatives to the Conference, confirmation of the Secretary-General of

the Conference, and submission of the report of the Preparatory Committee. More importantly, the “general statements” by states and by representatives from international organizations and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) covered the whole first week and a day of the second week. All in all, some 20 hours remained for actual negotiations between 192 states with rather diverse interests. And many of these minutes ticked away while representatives discussed the timely provision of translations, the chapter of the final document with which to start, or the method of work: in plenary only or allowing for parallel working sessions. This conference did not come close to finishing negotiations on its final document, and it remains possible that with a greater shared responsibility on substance intelligent compromises could have been worked out.

In an international environment where suspicion of the intentions of others has been steadily on the increase, and in which many states do not feel themselves listened to, dealing with procedure has the tendency to receive disproportionate attention. Moreover, the more difficult it is to deal with complex and multi-faceted issues on substance, the more alluring it will be to stick to one’s view on “the rules of the game”.

But rules of procedure are meant to help enable processes, not to hinder them. Strikingly, states that wish to cooperate are more reticent about applying rules of procedure of the processes they operate within in their favour, although that would be perfectly legitimate and potentially beneficial to them.¹³ A constructive interpretation of rules could, for example in the case of the Conference on Disarmament, mean the following: if a substantial majority of its member states want to start work, but there is no agreement on the mandate, a start could be made anyway *without a mandate and without an agreement on a subsidiary body where this discussion should take place*. How? By conscientiously organizing among this large majority of states that on certain dates specific issues will be discussed, or even negotiated, in the plenary—by those who want to. That includes agreeing among these states which delegation would be responsible for drafting and adapting the negotiating document. This is an inclusive model: it would be designed to welcome every state to participate. And states that initially do not join this process retain the right to bring up their points of concern on other issues. They could speak on any item at any time during those meetings; the states that consider themselves in negotiations will then politely listen, after which time they would take up

their deliberations again. The President of the Conference on Disarmament would be back in the role originally intended for them; that is, leading the discussion on items states want to discuss, but not being primarily responsible for the result. Most importantly, the negotiations would create new dynamics, in which those few states that opted not to take part would feel a growing interest to participate.

There would be advantages in diversifying the Chair or President's role as well. A creative, knowledgeable and steadfast Chair helps tremendously in obtaining results. But the task of making progress happen really remains with delegations. All too often, representatives simply look to the Chair for solutions. In the Conference on Disarmament, years have been wasted because it was expected that the President would find a way out of the deadlock. But that is not the Chair's prime task. In a stalemate, it is up to the diplomats who have interests in the process to organize informal deliberations on possible ways forward.

Furthermore, although the rules of procedure describe what the Chair's role is, this is always a matter of interpretation. As stated above, the Chair should not be seen as primarily responsible for the outcome. But he or she can have a decisive hand, remaining the master of business. So, if the Chair is responsible for a text, it would most often be unwise to allow for bracketing of passages in the course of discussions, which is a sure way of losing control: delegations would focus on "their" text proposals not being deleted. The Chair in charge of a text would do better to listen carefully, openly discuss advantages and drawbacks of proposals, appoint so-called friends-of-the-chair wherever helpful to hammer out compromises in informal gatherings, call meetings with key players including regional representatives, and issue a new text under the Chair's responsibility whenever appropriate. And since it is also the responsibility of the Chair to have the meeting conclude in time, the person in charge can choose from the outset to take a firm steering role in discussions.

FLEXIBILITY IN RELATIONS WITH HEADQUARTERS¹⁴

One interpretation of multilateral diplomacy is that authorities instruct their representatives, who faithfully read out these instructions and report back on what others read out. But if diplomats simply repeated their national positions, consensus would never be reached. It is in the grey zones where

agreement is to be found. These can be deliberately created in instructions, when room for manoeuvring is explicitly spelled out. But preferably Headquarters leaves some unspecified leeway to their representatives (see Box 6.2).

In the Conference on Disarmament this leeway has been lacking in key respects. Diplomats repeat in different wordings their standing instructions from the capital, and these positions are often made more rigid by the development of regional positions. There seems to be little interest in breaking the deadlock or reviewing the purpose of those positions. Mistrust and disappointment have led to a waning of bottom-up initiatives, which are fundamental for finding new ways forward. This situation is exacerbated because delegations increasingly lack the capacity in human-resource terms to be able to cover disarmament issues in a comprehensive and in-depth way. Over the years, a number of capitals have drawn the conclusion from the prolonged standstill in disarmament that engagement on this topic has limited use. Disarmament diplomats nowadays tend to carry a portfolio that includes trade, human rights and other topics; many spend only a small or declining proportion of their time on disarmament issues.

To be sure, a decade ago this was not radically different: capacity in this technical field has always been an issue. But the trend is downward, and it becomes clear that capacity is an underrated factor in hampering progress in multilateral disarmament. Many disarmament practitioners feel their contribution could be stronger if they were able to devote more effort to the subject. In their situation, understanding the present status quo is already quite challenging, let alone being able to contribute meaningfully to the search for new approaches and solutions.

It would be unrealistic to expect governments to suddenly increase their diplomatic presence in multilateral disarmament without seeing results to justify renewed investment. But what can be stressed is that disarmament diplomats, in particular those in the Conference on Disarmament and their colleagues in capital, remain aware of the disadvantages of passivity. National representatives are not in Geneva only as spokespeople for their national governments. They are sent to a *conference* to influence or even broker an outcome. That is the central reason for their attendance, that is why they always need some room for manoeuvring on substance, and that is why the allocation of human resources to Geneva remains of importance.

FLEXIBILITY IN INVOLVING NON-STATE PARTNERS

There is a fourth element of flexibility that is important, which is widening the scope of partners involved in disarmament issues. Multilateral disarmament suffers from the fiction that states are the sole organizing structure in the field of security. To this end, it has been argued:

Greater non-state actor input into disarmament and arms control processes—like the Conference on Disarmament or the NPT, for instance, in which such input is currently highly circumscribed—may make some states uncomfortable. But inviting a broader range of input, whether it be humanitarian mine clearance operators in the Mine Ban Convention or physicians and civil nuclear scientists in the NPT, should not be seen as some sort of favour to transnational civil society. In fact, a richer flow of information and of knowledgeable perspectives is a practical means to making multilateral processes more effective, especially if they lead to questioning features that have lost their purpose of utility.¹⁵

More than ever in a globalizing world, whether states face up to it or not, international security matters involve other kinds of actors as well. Business, groups of states, non-state groups, academia and international organizations can contribute interest, expertise, and a broadening of the relevance of the issues in general by their involvement, which ultimately strengthens disarmament processes and agreements:

- The best known example, and often referred to, is the Mine Ban Convention process, in which member governments and civil society have forged a strong partnership (although not without its problems).
- In connection with this, Geneva Call is an innovative initiative involving non-state armed groups in complying with the anti-personnel mine ban.¹⁶
- NGOs, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Acronym Institute, often offer the best reporting of direct use for disarmament practitioners (which they publish openly, for instance on the World Wide Web) on developments in the General Assembly and other United Nations forums.¹⁷

- Before UN states agreed on measures to mark and trace small arms in 2005, they sought the advice of industry on the future agreement's substance.
- The contribution of academic experts to the work in the Conference on Disarmament has shown to be of strong practical value and should be further examined by diplomats.

More substantial participation of civil society in disarmament meetings would be valuable. This currently varies from process to process. The Conference on Disarmament does not allow for any sustained civil society involvement in its deliberations (although there is agreement that NGO participation will be improved once the Conference finds a way out of its stalemate). There definitely are advantages to such greater involvement, including that of NGOs and international organizations, which often bring much-needed institutional knowledge and field experience. This is especially welcome in a technical field like disarmament in which diplomats struggle with the subject matter. Increased civil society involvement would also help to improve the flow of information from non-governmental and inter-governmental experts to diplomats and capitals. All too often, even the best expert reports on disarmament from civil society or international agencies do not reach the desks where policy is made, and integrating their contributions to the process could help in addressing that.

If a further opening up of meetings and a better flow of information are useful, NGOs should also realize that their most effective contribution to issues that concern them is often in lobbying parliamentarians, who in turn pressure governments to adjust their policies. In concluding agreements among themselves, of course, governments ultimately make the decisions in multilateral processes—a role that civil society cannot subsume. But, as David Atwood has argued, NGOs and international organizations can help in the shaping of opinion and in the formation of consensus by “being in the middle by being on the edge”.

Box 6.2. A flexible approach to a First Committee resolution

In 2005, the Netherlands tabled a resolution (eventually UN General Assembly Resolution 60/68) on the link between small arms and development in the First Committee of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Box 6.2 (continued)

The resolution text was prepared over the summer in Geneva through a series of informal meetings with experts from international organizations and civil society (including the United Nations Development Programme, UNIDIR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Small Arms Survey, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue and the Quaker United Nations Office). Through their input, a number of elements were developed, the most important of which was the novel concept of integrating armed violence prevention programmes into national poverty reduction strategies.

In New York, meanwhile, the United Nations General Assembly was working on the 2005 Summit Outcome Document. The Dutch resolution was intended to bridge the upcoming outcome of this UN Summit with the review conference of the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, to be held the following summer, in June–July 2006. The expectation was that the Summit would produce new thinking on the inter-linkages between security and development. Then, gathering soon after, the First Committee could translate those conceptual baselines into action in the field of small arms.

With a first proposed draft text for the resolution, the Netherlands Geneva disarmament delegation approached The Hague, arguing that a UN resolution on this subject would strengthen Dutch efforts to achieve its national interests, for instance within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, to better integrate security questions into development policy.

At headquarters, the idea was welcomed and the go-ahead was given—even although the Summit Outcome was not yet known.

This was a crucial moment: a green light in fully unpredictable surroundings. The goal was clear—to link security with development meaningfully in the context of the small arms. Unknown factors were:

- the outcome of the Summit;
- what an outcome (or failure to achieve an outcome) would mean for the draft of the resolution; and
- the actions needed—and the coalitions that would have to be formed—to get the resolution agreed.

In Geneva, EU delegations were informed of Dutch intent, without expectation of their full support immediately, since the text would probably evolve significantly

Box 6.2 (continued)

in the weeks after. But the *goal* was for a text to eventually emerge that EU states could support. In the meantime, early EU co-sponsorship could lend too much Western weight to the resolution (potentially alienating some other countries) and was thus not sought.

The resolution draft was also circulated in an informal meeting of the cross-regional Human Security Network states, with a request for support in due course, but in time for First Committee. Some other key states received an early copy in Geneva as well.

After the Summit Outcome was agreed to, the draft was finalized and circulated in New York at the outset of the First Committee. The Dutch delegation decided it would remain the only chief sponsor of the draft resolution for the moment, until regionally balanced support was found.

At a first meeting the Netherlands convened to discuss the draft resolution during the First Committee, it stressed that the draft resolution should not be regarded as fixed text to which any addition or deletion would be considered an assault. Instead, it was a work in progress, for which, unusually, five informational meetings were planned in the course of the First Committee.

This approach worked well. The draft was substantially altered in the weeks that followed. In particular, its structure was simplified and more emphasis was given to what could be expected from states in a position to render assistance to others. Actually, the text improved.

New versions were shared with the United Nations Development Programme in order to make sure the resolution retained its substantive value, despite evolution of the text.

Process-wise, as this was very much a developing text, the most challenging part for capitals would be that they would not be able to keep pace with the content of new versions issued from day to day. This might make it difficult for them to instruct their delegations to support the resolution. Still, the requests for co-sponsorship grew steadily as the direction of the resolution became clear.

When support from all continents was ensured, the draft was opened up for co-sponsorship by others. In the end, all delegations except one voted in favour.

EVER-INCREASING COMPLEXITY

The treatment of disarmament in seclusion by a caste of governmental professionals has become disconnected from what is needed in practical terms to improve security. There is no present-day benefit in working in an ivory tower of state security, nationally or internationally. In the twenty-first century, the causes of insecurity are such that governments *need* other perspectives than solely their own in order to address in more productive ways international security issues like small arms proliferation or a ban on the production of fissile materials. The multifaceted nature of these issues means that state-centred responses may simply be at the wrong scale to make much difference. And, they may have unintended consequences that nullify their value. Other perspectives—such as from the field and from academics—are also required. Those denying this should not be surprised by a continued lack of progress in multilateral disarmament diplomacy, including on the issues *they* want to bring forward.

In organizing the institutions of peace, individual diplomatic efforts are essential. In full coordination with capitals, delegations need allow their approaches to become more flexible—to “loosen up”. This is more easily said than done, of course. What makes it such a challenge is not only the prevalence of top-down command structures in many national foreign services that discourage initiative and flexibility in disarmament diplomacy. Leaving the beaten track is simply difficult to manage in terms of the new uncertainties it introduces for individual negotiators. There are more potential coalitions to evaluate and to work within, more initiatives to consider, more contributions from non-state partners to digest, as well as many alternatives for formal or informal negotiating interaction. However, speaking from my own experience, the rewards outweigh initial risks. In a tough multilateral environment, the instinct of many diplomats and other policy makers is to be risk averse. But this simply is not helpful in exploiting precious opportunities to cooperate, which in turn could create greater confidence and further new prospects for cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the last decade, the tendency of practitioners in multilateral disarmament has been to accept lack of progress in the greater interests of keeping institutional structures intact.

But sitting back and waiting is not enough, especially for diplomatic professionals entrusted with such important responsibilities for the security and protection of the peoples they represent. There needs to be collective recognition that current diplomatic practice is sometimes not helpful to problem solving. Psychologist Erich Fromm famously stated that “[t]he history of man is a graveyard of great cultures that came to catastrophic ends because of their incapacity for planned, rational, voluntary reaction to challenge”.¹⁸ More recently, the scientist Jared Diamond outlined the historical fate of societies that fail to respond effectively and imaginatively to collective problems like environmental damage, which in turn can fuel insecurity and conflict, in his book *Collapse*.¹⁹ Diamond stressed that this failure is not inevitable. Yet it is precisely this incapacity to respond to collective problems that is so visible in multilateral disarmament. A critical mass of well-informed representatives is required, alert to manoeuvring toward solutions of value to them nationally and collectively.

Creative, innovative bottom-up approaches to disarmament can turn the principles of collective security all states agreed to in the 2005 World Summit Outcome into meaningful action. To be successful in managing progress, a critical mass of diplomats and other civil servants must recognize that changing the ways in which they approach multilateral problems would be of real benefit to them.

Flexible attitudes are essential. This always includes being clear about one’s own goals. But constant repetition of these goals is not an effective part of such an approach—continuous, thorough consideration of the goals of others is needed. That does not equal a naïve or soft attitude. It requires a state of mind the Austrian novelist and political thinker Manès Sperber described beautifully: “The window is made of glass, and the mirror is made of glass. When we look out of the window, we see the others, but in the mirror we only see ourselves. Nonetheless, we must educate ourselves to observe the same image in both. For in the others, I am as well; and in me are the others.”²⁰

Notes

- 1 Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, University of Chicago Press, 1965.

- 2 Draft resolution referred to the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly by the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session: UN General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome*, document A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005.
- 3 “New medievalism” is a term that appeared initially in debates about European integration, but which is better applicable to the developing world according to John Rapley. See John Rapley, “The New Middle Ages”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 3, Council on Foreign Relations, 2006, pp. 95–103.
- 4 Report of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World; Our Shared Responsibility*, United Nations, 2004, pp. 9–10.
- 5 UN General Assembly, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, Report of the Secretary-General, document A/59/2005, 21 March 2005, paragraph 79.
- 6 Karl Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 67.
- 7 Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics”, *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 396–397.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 419.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 418.
- 11 For more discussion, see Vanessa Martin Randin and John Borrie, “A Comparison between Arms Control and other Multilateral Negotiation Processes”, in John Borrie and Vanessa Martin Randin (eds), *Alternative Approaches in Multilateral Decision Making: Disarmament as Humanitarian Action*, UNIDIR, 2005, pp. 67–129 and John Borrie’s chapter, “Cooperation and Defection in the Conference on Disarmament”, in this volume.
- 12 (“Was am besten funktioniert, ist Kooperation anzubieten, und wenn sie nicht auf Gegenleistung stösst, sie abubrechen, aber dann sofort abermals anzubieten”). Karl Deutsch, “Der Einzelne und der Friede”, in Hans Jürgen Schultz (ed.), *Was der Mensch Braucht. Über die Kunst zu Leben*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989, p. 59.
- 13 For detailed discussion of the different ways in which multilateral negotiators may deploy procedure see Rebecca Johnson’s chapter in this volume.

- ¹⁴ Here, “headquarters” is used as shorthand. Who these authorities are (usually foreign ministries, at least) and how many domestic actors are involved in preparing instructions depends on the issue and on the system.
- ¹⁵ John Borrie, “Rethinking Multilateral Negotiations: Disarmament as Humanitarian Action”, in John Borrie and Vanessa Martin Randin (eds), *Alternative Approaches in Multilateral Decision Making: Disarmament as Humanitarian Action*, UNIDIR, 2005, pp. 30–31.
- ¹⁶ See <www.genevacall.org>.
- ¹⁷ See <www.reachingcriticalwill.org> and <www.acronym.org.uk>.
- ¹⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*, Harper and Row, 1968, p. 62.
- ¹⁹ Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Viking, 2004.
- ²⁰ (“Das Fenster ist aus Glas, und der Spiegel ist aus Glas. Blicken wir durchs Fenster, so sehen wir die anderen, doch im Spiegel betrachten wir nur uns selber. Indes müssen wir uns dazu erziehen, in beiden die gleichen Bilder wahrzunehmen. Denn in den anderen bin auch ich; und in mir sind die anderen”). Manès Sperber, *Ein Politisches Leben: Gespräche mit Leonhard Reinisch*, DVA, 1984, p. 110.