

# Reintroducing Disarmament and Cooperative Security to the Toolbox of 21st Century Leaders

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# Introduction

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To the vast majority of people, ‘disarmament’ may sound like an ancient practice developed by cold war rivals to maintain the balance of power. The concept itself has fallen into abeyance as it has failed to remain high on the agenda of policymakers. Now considered a second-class issue, disarmament affairs rarely attract society’s attention. Senior officials usually prefer to put them on the back-burner and focus on issues deemed more pressing.

If the issue were only the current lack of political will to put diplomatic muscle behind action points, this would not be of great concern. A reluctance to constrain national armed forces and an aversion to changes that might affect national military capabilities have always been the main reasons for states to slow down, if not derail, any progress on disarmament. More worrying than the predictable and expected deadlock in disarmament affairs, however, is the fact that the international community seems to have engaged in a dangerous backwards slide.

Several of the disarmament mechanisms on which an international cooperative security framework was built have either ceased to function or become shaky at best. The United Nations Conference on Disarmament, which has the mandate to negotiate disarmament treaties, has been deadlocked for almost 20 years. Its most recent product is the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty negotiated in 1996, which has not yet entered into force. Russia has ceased its participation in the Joint Consultative Group within the framework of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), which provided a platform for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries and Russia to discuss military issues. In the same vein, the United States and Russia have threatened to withdraw from the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate- and Shorter Range Nuclear Forces (INF) over allegations that the other side has violated the Treaty.

In addition to the disarmament and arms control architecture falling apart, the USA (see Arms Control Association’s fact sheet) and Russia (see US Congressional Service Report) have both embarked on expensive conventional and nuclear weapons modernization programmes. Other regional powers such as China, India and the Gulf countries have not waited long before following suit (see the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2015 Fact Sheet).

This increasing investment in military capabilities and the development of new weapon systems is symptomatic of a more competitive conception of national security. As enhancing national security becomes increasingly understood as modernizing and building up military capabilities while testing each other’s reaction capacities, the disarmament agenda has lost political ground and diplomatic traction. Short-sighted national security calculations have gained the upper hand over a more balanced, strategic approach to the long term and project a worrying shadow on to the future. Indeed, the conceptual fathers of the ‘security dilemma’ have long warned us that flexing muscles may make sense from a national perspective but is likely to result in an erosion of trust and further instability at the international level.

It is true that the cold-war dynamics of superpower confrontation no longer apply to the current international context and threats of major interstate wars have diminished as new threats have come to the fore. Nonetheless, the disappearance of major interstate wars cannot be taken for granted. From the South China Sea to Ukraine,

regional tensions are increasing while major conventional weapon systems and weapons of mass destruction lurk in the background of policymaking.

There is certainly no point in adopting alarmist rhetoric or giving in to hysteria but it would not hurt to remember what history has taught us: the potential costs of overlooking these issues are too high to be ignored. A failure to honour disarmament commitments will not only put at risk the entire disarmament and arms control regime, but also deprive leaders of mechanisms designed to defuse tensions and foster dialogue on sensitive security issues. This reminds us that it is worth revisiting the common ground on which we stood in the past and which led to groundbreaking multilateral and bilateral treaties to eliminate biological and chemical weapons, reduce conventional forces in Europe, ban nuclear weapons testing, eliminate certain categories of non-strategic nuclear weapons and reduce strategic nuclear weapons.

Some argue that we are drifting back into a cold-war mentality, but with one major difference. During the cold war, dialogue on disarmament and arms control was prominent even though armament was the dominant practice. Today, armament remains the dominant practice but there is limited dialogue on confidence-building measures, arms control and disarmament between conflicting parties. In other words, there has been a disconnect between disarmament and arms control and their benefits for the enhancement of national security and international stability. This is particularly well captured by the low level of interest in opening dialogue with competing parties. The reason given is usually that current security conditions are not ripe for the pursuit of disarmament and arms control. By following this logic, however, we run the risk of being locked into a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the absence of dialogue contributes to deteriorating conditions that seem even less favourable to dialogue.

While the climate for any form of arms control and disarmament may appear bleak, keeping on doing business as usual will not improve the situation. It is rare to find a case where the militarization of international relations produces a more stable environment and more cooperative partners. This begs the question: 'Do we see a soft landing for regional and global crises without the introduction of a discussion on disarmament and cooperative security?' The Strategic Concept for Removal of Arms and Proliferation (SCRAP) project developed by the Centre for International Studies & Diplomacy at SOAS, University of London addresses this issue. SCRAP has been designed to expand the idea of what is possible in the field of disarmament. Its joint product with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, 'Rethinking General and Complete Disarmament in the 21st Century', provides a clear roadmap for the practical implementation of a set of comprehensive disarmament measures, thereby highlighting the technical feasibility of disarmament. It is equally important, however, to show that disarmament and arms control are a political necessity that make sense in terms of national security and conflict resolution.

Thus, it is essential to re-establish the linkages between security/stability and disarmament/arms control. It is especially important for current leaders to get reacquainted with arms control and disarmament. Leaders will be better equipped to face contemporary security challenges with such proven instruments in their toolbox.

With this in mind, the Centre for International Studies & Diplomacy at SOAS and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute have developed a joint publication on disarmament and cooperative security. The rationale for this volume is to oppose conventional thinking that equates national security with the modernization and build-up of military capabilities; and to rehabilitate disarmament and arms control mechanisms as a cornerstone of national security and international stability.

This collective publication shows that a renewed emphasis on cooperation is badly needed to reverse potentially dangerous competitive security dynamics. It also aims

to highlight how dialogue and disarmament diplomacy can contribute to responding to and accommodating national security interests.

In part I, the authors share their views on the current security context and how disarmament fits into this context. Kane and Nielsen analyse how strategic stability is heavily influenced by a way of thinking that is blind to disarmament, arguing that measures on cooperation and disarmament could be infused into strategic stability to make the concept less confrontational. Duarte provides an overview of the disarmament architecture and the risks associated with any erosion of this architecture for the security of nation states and the stability of the international system. Minty addresses the issue of double standards in the disarmament field, and the consequences of their perpetuation for the security of the international community.

Part II focuses on opportunities for cooperative security and disarmament in the current security context. Thematic analyses explore how disarmament can contribute to the resolution of various security issues. Meyer investigates how cooperative measures can help to preserve cyberspace for peaceful purposes. Flor examines the relevance of arms control and disarmament in collective defence policies. Taking NATO as an empirical example, she argues for a strong arms control and disarmament element in NATO's overall posture. Tanner focuses on the role of arms control in times of crisis and highlights the relevance of confidence-building measures in crisis management. Wibowo shares his perspective on the prospects for disarmament in East Asia, demonstrating that disarmament can play a positive role in regional security dynamics, especially regarding the South China Sea and North Korea. Chan shares her perspective on the cooperative system in place in Latin America and the Caribbean, and analyses how Costa Rica has managed to ensure its national security while relying uniquely on cooperative measures and disarmament.