

# The objectives of the arms control politics essay



For arms control to be an effective instrument of national security, its objectives “ must be determined by, and be in close harmony with, the broader objectives of national security strategy” (Larsen, 2002)

Traditional arms control theory was based on “ the premise that the super-powers inherently shared an area of common ground” (Sheehan, 1988) (avoiding nuclear war) and that this element of mutual interest could serve as the basis for limited cooperative arrangements involving reciprocal restraint in the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. In defining the scope and application of arms control, they set forth three general objectives: (Larsen, 2002)

Reducing the risk of war. Arms control was seen as a prime means of setting limits on and restraining strategic arms race behavior. For early arms control theorists, restraining certain types of technology was practically synonymous with reducing the risk of war. The underlying premise was that war was most likely to begin with a surprise nuclear attack made possible by unrestrained competition in ballistic missile, guidance and control, and nuclear weapon technology. Therefore, those weapon systems employing technologies that in theory most contributed to the ability to execute a surprise nuclear attack against the nuclear retaliatory forces of the other side, or that undermined the ability of either side to hold deterrent targets at risk, became principal candidates for arms limitation agreements.

Reducing the cost of preparing for war. Arms control theorists believed that “ controls would release economic resources otherwise squandered on military spending” (Bull, 1965). They believed that arms races were economically

ruinous and that disarmament or arms control would make possible the diversion of resources toward worthier objectives. If arms control succeeded in providing the same degree of security at lower levels of weapons than would otherwise be the case, it could lead to fielding fewer weapons and thus lower overall defense spending. Further, if certain types of technology were mutually outlawed, there would be fewer costs associated with defense research and development, weapons production, force deployment, operations, and maintenance. The savings thereby realized could be diverted to domestic economic priorities and promote overall prosperity.

Reducing the damage should war occur. If fewer weapons were fielded as a result of arms limitation agreements, and should war nevertheless occur, overall damage would be less than it would otherwise have been. But fielding fewer weapons is not the only way to reduce damage in the event of war. Damage also could be limited by developing certain types of active defense strategies and technologies, such as ballistic missile defenses.

In practice, the first of the three main objectives proposed by traditional arms control theory-reducing the risk of war or, more specifically, reducing the risk of surprise nuclear attack-came to eclipse and overshadow the other two. Achieving the first objective would also indirectly satisfy the other two. The process grew in complexity over the next four decades. It usually involved negotiations but was sometimes accomplished through unilateral decisions or reciprocated arrangements.

The main merit of previous arms control agreements was that “.. they created a situation that facilitated peaceful transformation in Europe and in

the rest of the world” (Rotfeld, 1996). Along with the treaties on the elimination of intermediate-range nuclear weapons and the reduction of strategic nuclear weapons, these agreements include:

The system of rules and export controls designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapon-usable material, of which the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) forms the legal basis; substantial reductions of conventional armed forces and manpower in Europe. This and other agreements have enabled the elimination of more than 60 000 heavy conventional weapons in Europe and in the Asian area of the former Soviet Union on the basis of accords reached in peacetime, not imposed by the victors on the vanquished. In recent years, a total of 20 000 nuclear warheads have been dismantled; thus their number was reduced from some 58 000 to 38 000. The process of destroying chemical weapons has been launched, although, because of the costs, it will last longer than expected.

### **The central problems of arms control today**

The central problems facing the arms control process at present can be summarised as follows.

#### Defining the role of the major powers

First, there is the problem of deciding who are the ‘ players’ that need to be assembled at the table when arms control is discussed. Arms control tradition- ally has been the preserve of those states that possess the weapons. It has depended on the ability of major powers to work together in pursuit of particular objectives. The cold war demonstrated that arms control

does not require that the interests and policies of these powers are aligned, but there has to be a willingness to cooperate.

The special role assigned to the United Nations Security Council in matters of peace and security and the fact that the five NPT-defined nuclear weapon states are permanent members of the Security Council tended to cement the impression that military power and major power status were two sides of the same coin. However, other states now claim to have a legitimate stake in the arms control process without either being in possession of extensive military capabilities or intending to develop such capabilities. The exclusion of countries such as Germany, India and Japan from a central place in discussions of issues affecting global peace and security may undermine the credibility of those discussions. While each of these countries will react differently to the fact of its exclusion, no doubt they will all react in some manner.

In addition, there is an important new actor on the international scene for which arms control is a crucial concern. With the establishment of the EU in 1993, a group of states (moreover, a group that is expected to expand in number) are developing, step-by-step, a more integrated approach to foreign and security policy that is likely to become increasingly influential in the future.

Need for a new organizing principle

A second problem arises from the need to consider the organizing principle for arms control in conditions where there is no longer any meaningful balance or symmetry between military capabilities.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-objectives-of-the-arms-control-politics-essay/>

Past treaties usually conferred equal obligations and status on participating states in line with the principle of sovereign equality. This often translated into a carefully calibrated balance in numbers of agreed items that were the objects of control. This balance may have been set at zero in the framework of disarmament treaties or at higher levels in other agreements. This organizing principle no longer applies at the global level, given the power of the USA. Moreover, agreements based on parity are not feasible at the regional level. They may not even be applicable at the subregional or bilateral level, where 'dyads' at the centre of conflict and instability have very different force structures and force levels.

#### Responding to non-compliance

A third major problem for arms control is the need to develop responses to unambiguous evidence that some states are cheating on their legally binding obligations and commitments. Cheating does not include inadvertent or accidental failures to implement an agreement or differences of interpretation about the obligations contained in an agreement. These issues are important but manageable within the framework of arms control processes because the good faith of the parties is not disputed. Rather, cheating means that a state promises to take a course of action while at the same time intending to behave in ways known to be proscribed and that violate the basic principle of the agreement.

None of the main 'compliance crises' revealed in the 1990s—the Iraqi violation of its NPT commitments, the North Korean violation of its safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the

Soviet violation of the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has been fully resolved. This fact remains a serious problem and has contributed to undermining the international community's confidence in the efficacy of multi-lateral arms control instruments.

## **Conclusion**

In other words, arms control can play a significant role by becoming an integral part of the new international security system. However, it cannot be boiled down simply to international legal instruments (treaties and conventions); rather, it should constitute a part of security policy and defence at the national level and of conflict resolution at the global level. Treaties and conventions remain central because they provide transparency about the obligations of states and an institutional framework within which resources can be mobilized and organized. However, treaties and conventions need to be supplemented with a habit of dialogue and discussion that assists in making actions consistent with agreed norms.

The current binding normative order is the point of reference for seeking solutions that would tackle the challenges and situations of today and tomorrow. This normative order provides a platform on which to build but should not itself be placed in question. It must then be asked how the activities of those states which for different reasons have found themselves outside the current order can be regulated—in particular, how the world community should respond to the activities of states which violate important norms codified in arms control agreements to which they are not parties. Ways must be considered for including in the arms control process those states, which have an eroding influence on it.

The states whose leaders believe that the current normative order is inadequate or even wrong will not participate in cooperative arrangements on an official level. However, individuals from this group of states can and should participate in the wider discussion of the role and impact of arms control. Moreover, in these states public information can play a valuable role in making possible a debate on the merits and demerits of cooperation.

Despite these accomplishments, there remains much ‘unfinished business’ on the arms control agenda. (Rotfeld, 1996)

First, with the exception of the NATO and European Union (EU) member states, the security of the territories extending ‘from Vancouver to Vladivostok’ is not based on a collective, common or cooperative security system. Threats and armed conflicts have moved to Europe’s peripheries (the Balkans and the Caucasus) and to Central Asia.

Second, neither the continuous step-by-step reduction of nuclear weapons in those states that possess them nor diminishing the likelihood that new nuclear weapon states will emerge can be ensured at present.

Third, the legally binding ban on nuclear explosions has yet to enter into force, amidst signs that the no-testing norm codified in the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty is not universally accepted.

Finally, the level of confidence in the implementation of treaties and agreements to eliminate biological and chemical weapons remains low in many quarters.



With the end of the bipolar world order, the role of arms control and disarmament has changed fundamentally. The international security system based on bipolarity and mutual nuclear deterrence was one of high military threat and at the same time of relatively high stability. As a result, in the cold war period arms control and disarmament were seen as the highest priority in the policies of the global powers. Arms control was considered to be a pillar that supported strategic stability and maintained the balance of power between the superpowers and their respective allies. The predominant goals of traditional arms control theory, as developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was to enhance security, and the major powers shared an interest in avoiding global nuclear annihilation. These twin goals helped the powers to transcend their deep ideological and political differences and engage in a strategic dialogue. Thus the main objectives of arms control were to reduce the risk of nuclear war between the two great antagonists, maintain the equilibrium of forces, reduce the costs of the arms race, and seek to limit the damage should war occur.

### **Different approaches to arms control**

1- Fundamental changes in the existing arms control framework should be avoided. Radical changes could put at risk existing processes that are not yet completed without any assurance that a new framework can be constructed to substitute for them. In the view of this group, the future of arms control will consist of implementing, strengthening and further developing existing agreements and processes.

2 - Accepts the objectives of the current arms control agenda but argues that these objectives cannot be realised through existing agreements and

processes under the present conditions. An extension of this view is the argument that focusing narrowly on existing agreements in conditions where political relations are strained may diminish security by amplifying disagreements. The impact of the debate over the relationship between the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty) and missile defences on relations between China, Russia and the USA could be pointed to as an example. For this second group, arms control processes need to be supplemented by other types of political, economic and even, under certain conditions, military initiatives if the objectives of arms control are to be achieved.

3- The current objectives of arms control processes are too narrow and fail to address new challenges and problems that represent the primary threat under the new international conditions. For this group, the arms control agenda should be expanded to include more types of weapons (small arms and light weapons), more types of equipment (non-lethal 'high technology'), more issues (humanitarian issues, economic issues and governance issues) and more actors (international organizations and non-governmental actors). In their view, this widening of the arms control agenda is a paramount task, even if the consequence is that existing processes are scaled back or discontinued to release resources for reallocation.

#### Current problems and new challenges

The different approaches to arms control described above are not commonly exclusive. The task of finding common ground among the groups supporting them will be facilitated if arms control can make progress in solving

problems, demonstrate its relevance to the new security environment and adapt itself to new challenges.