

Pugwash Peace & Disarmament Conference
Working Group B: Nuclear politics – countries and regions

Chair: Mark Ingram, British Pugwash

Rapporteur: Andrew Gibson, Student/Young Pugwash UK

These notes were taken by the rapporteur, whom was asked to record some interesting points from the presentations and the ensuing discussions. They are not a comprehensive summary and do not necessarily reflect the views or emphasis of the guest speakers.

If you would like to contact a presenter, please enquire via syp@britishpugwash.org

Presentations (followed by discussion):

1. Arms control, nuclear confidence building and risk reduction between Pakistan and India - Mastoor Qurat-ul-ain, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad
2. Politics of the nuclear arms race in South Asia - Syed Adnan Athar Bukhari, University of Leicester
3. Nuclear Command and Control Norms - Dr Salma Shaheen, KCL
4. A nuclear-armed North Korea: Lessons from the past - Louis Reitmann, LSE
5. UK political parties on nuclear weapons: opportunities for cooperation? – Andrew Gibson, SYP

Rapporteur notes:

1. Arms control, nuclear confidence building and risk reduction between Pakistan and India

The Working Group (WG) heard about the volatility of South Asia, which has seen three major wars between Pakistan and India, and the risks posed by nuclear weapons in this context. It was argued that nuclear risk reduction and nuclear confidence building mechanisms (NCBM) are important to mitigate threats but that mutual mistrust has limited the results of such efforts in the past.

The speaker characterised the relationship as ‘wave like’, with periods of crisis (eg. Brasstacks exercise, 1987) and periods of peace-making / risk reduction (eg. Lahore Declaration, 1990). Policy recommendations for the future included: developing standardised nuclear terminology to escape from misconceptions; meetings between the Chiefs of Army Staffs (just like those between ministers) as proposed by Brig. Feroz; reviewing existing NCBM mechanisms and creating new ones as appropriate.

The discussion focused on the role of parties outside of India and Pakistan, primarily China but also USA and Russia, in influencing dynamics. There was also a

discussion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and a suggestion that India and Pakistan should sign simultaneously for maximum significance and impact.

2. Politics of the nuclear arms race in South Asia - Syed Adnan Athar Bukhari, University of Leicester

The Working Group heard that the nuclear weapons policies of India and Pakistan, previously based on 'minimum credible deterrence' postures, now seem to be developing into an arms race. The relationship appears to be driven by a traditional security dilemma but also as a 'security trilemma' involving China (i.e. actions taken by one state against another may make a third state feel insecure). It was noted that mistrust between India and Pakistan also involved a historical legacy of conflict and many unresolved issues, such as Kashmir, terrorism and drug trafficking.

An arms race in South Asia could undermine the utility of deterrence, which is based on mutual vulnerability. In particular, India's massive capability (combined with a Ballistic Missile Defence system) could damage stability.

It was argued that crisis management mechanism be developed, that the 'Composite Dialogue Process' be revisited and that states develop a Strategic Restraint Regime (including nuclear restraint, balanced conventional forces, and resolution of disputes).

3. Nuclear Command and Control Norms - Dr Salma Shaheen, King's College London

The Working Group heard that the unauthorised use of nuclear weapons remains a significant risk, with non-state actors (e.g. terrorists) and unresolved conflict between nuclear states contributing to the situation. The presentation looked at the early development of the nuclear command and control systems of the UK, China, India and Pakistan. It was argued that global command and control norms could and should be strengthened and based on standardised policies.

Command and control policies have three stages: inception (eg. financing), growth (eg. institutionalisation) and maturity (eg. rule development, habits formed). Avoidance of stagnation was noted as important. The aforementioned states had managed to avoid stagnation because their policies evolved in challenging international contexts and periods of technological innovation. It was noted that Pakistan and India were able to draw on lessons from break-out states like China and UK, helping develop coherent norms at the international level.

It was argued the formal and centralised command and control systems are helpful in peacetime but flexibility may be better in times of crisis. The group also discussed whether military or political institutions are better placed to be responsible for nuclear command and control.

4. A nuclear-armed North Korea: Lessons from the past - Louis Reitmann, LSE

This presentation explored the reasons for the apparent failure of twenty-five years of US strategy to North Korea. The US has tried many approaches over this period

(eg. carrots, sticks, nuclear brinkmanship) and made little progress. It was argued that the theoretical premise behind this strategy (realist, power politics) does not engage with the real aim of the North Korean regime (i.e. remaining a secure government) and can lead to deadlock or worse.

The Working Group heard that a paradigmatic shift is needed, aimed at reducing the risk of nuclear war and proliferation from North Korea. Louis suggested the relationship should be managed, with the US and ROK acknowledging North Korea's reasons for embracing nuclear weapons; ending talk of regime change; reducing military exercises; reducing sanctions and helping with economic restructuring; and a reduced role for nuclear weapons in the security strategies of both sides.

The discussion considered the importance of tight export controls to prevent proliferation and whether rapprochement between North Korea and ROK might be a tactic to push the US out of negotiations.

5. UK Opposition parties on nuclear weapons: negotiating options – Andrew Gibson, SYP UK

The Working Group heard about the current weakness of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, whom rely on support from the Democratic Unionist Party to pass their policy programme. Participants were asked to imagine a range of scenarios in which the current government were replaced at some point by another party or combination of parties in coalition. In particular, it was considered what the position on the Trident replacement programme would be, given the differences on the issue between and within the various parties.

Despite now being led by Jeremy Corbyn (a life-long supporter of nuclear disarmament), it was considered unlikely that a majority Labour government would oppose Trident replacement. When the issue last came up in Parliament, a majority of Labour MPs voted in favour of replacement and several influential trade unions (such as Unite) appear to support that policy. Nonetheless, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens all take strong stances against Trident. It was also noted that the Liberal Democrats have a position of opposing full replacement, preferring a reduction in submarine numbers and an end to 'continuous-at-sea-deterrence.

It was argued that, were a combination of parties to enter government in coalition, there would be political pressure for and scope for at least a reduction in the size of the Trident replacement programme.