BOOK REVIEW: Turning the Page on Pax Atomica

Arms Control Today

October 2015

Reviewed by Randy Rydell

The War That Must Never Be Fought: Dilemmas of Nuclear Deterrence
Edited by George P. Shultz and James E. Goodby Hoover Institution Press, 2015, 530 pp.

On June 14, 1946, U.S. representative Bernard Baruch addressed the UN Atomic Energy Commission and launched his country’s ambitious plan for global nuclear disarmament and international ownership of the nuclear fuel cycle.

The plan was not without its conditions. Actual disarmament would occur only after other steps had been taken, most notably the imposition of intrusive controls over the nuclear programs of every other country and the establishment of the International Atomic Development Authority. In 1961 the U.S. Department of State’s press release accompanying the McCloy-Zorin joint statement on “general and complete disarmament” referred to the attainment of that goal “in a peaceful world,” suggesting that disarmament would occur at the end of a very long road, essentially with the dawning of world peace.¹

A new collection of essays, The War That Must Never Be Fought: Dilemmas of Nuclear Deterrence, takes a somewhat more practical approach by outlining specific actions needed to achieve and sustain global nuclear disarmament. Although contemporary in focus, the chapters all illustrate the continuity of the primary challenges faced some 70 years ago in this field. Which must come first—peace and security or disarmament? How can sovereign states respond to enforce a nuclear disarmament commitment if it is violated? Does the “inalienable right” to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, as the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) puts it, extend to the technologies that produced the Little Boy and Fat Man atomic bombs? Is nonproliferation a precondition for disarmament or vice versa?

Taking Disarmament Seriously

Edited by George P. Shultz and James E. Goodby, this book is an exceptional contribution to the literature on nuclear disarmament and arms control. Yet, it is more than that. It also is a valuable addition to the wider political campaign to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

It achieves these goals by inviting contributions from authors of diverse backgrounds, including the military, academia, private research institutes, and many other fields of public service.

The book begins with chapters by Benoit Pelopidas, Goodby, and Steven Pifer that identify the fallacies of nuclear deterrence, including the myth that nuclear weapons are responsible for keeping the “long peace” during the Cold War. Although many self-described realists denigrate disarmament, Pifer offers a defense of the concept as practical, reasonable, and in the interests of the United States and the world community.

The second part of the book delves into specific challenges to disarmament emanating from four regions: Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. The omission of Latin America and Africa...
is unfortunate, given their long record of support for global nuclear disarmament and their many regional actions to advance that goal.

With respect to Europe, Isabelle Williams and Steven P. Andreasen explain the situation in NATO. They describe the dualism of NATO’s stubborn reaffirmation of the role of nuclear weapons as the “supreme guarantee” of alliance security and the organization’s recent recognition of the desirability of eliminating such weapons globally. Pavel Podvig offers an enlightened discussion of Russian interests and motives in nuclear arms control and disarmament, and in their jointly written chapter, Katarzyna Kubiak and Oliver Meier draw the reader’s attention to the critically important policy positions taken by Germany and Poland concerning the future of nuclear weapons.

The three chapters on the Middle East appear as a dialectic, with the thesis characterizing Israel as the responsible nuclear-weapon custodian (Shlomo Brom), the antithesis emphasizing the reluctance of Arab states to participate in regional peace talks as long as Israel retains its nuclear arsenal (Karim Haggag), and the synthesis being a proposal for a middle course incorporating regional negotiations on many dimensions relating to peace and to disarmament in particular with many timetables (Peter Jones).

In the one chapter on South Asia, S. Paul Kapur focuses on prospects for decoupling “deterrence” from nuclear weapons. He outlines how deterrence can persist even if nuclear weapons are excluded from the region.

East Asia justifiably receives significant attention in this book. This includes an informative chapter on China’s nuclear policies by Michael S. Gerson, who draws attention to the “increasingly important—and potentially dangerous—interplay between nuclear and conventional forces in the modern era.” Li Bin’s chapter refreshingly mentions Article VI of the NPT. He explains the lack of progress in U.S.-Chinese nuclear arms control and disarmament as largely due to what he calls the contrasting “security paradigms” of the two countries—that is, their fundamentally different perspectives on defense policy and strategy. Peter Hayes and Chung-in Moon go beyond the familiar, customary assessments that simply describe the tensions between North and South Korea. They offer a concrete fix for such tensions in the form of a broad regional security regime that includes but is not limited to a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone. Nobumasa Akiyama discusses how Japan has sought to reconcile its support for global nuclear disarmament with its embrace of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

Goodby and Pifer wrap things up with a conclusion setting forth various conditions for the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. Their proposal emphasizes the role of the great powers, in particular Russia and the United States, the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals. Goodby and Pifer emphasize the importance of a multidimensional approach, arguing that conventional arms control and nuclear disarmament goals must be pursued together. The two analysts argue that these goals must be pursued at the highest level of government in summit meetings, supported politically in many international forums, and advanced through a “joint enterprise,” a term used in a series of Wall Street Journal op-eds written by Shultz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn, involving a coalition of like-minded states. The authors also offer a draft communiqué and work plan to advance their proposals.

**The Joint Enterprise in Practice**
One of the key purposes of this book was to put some flesh on the bones of the joint enterprise proposed in the *Wall Street Journal* op-eds on nuclear disarmament. The authors deserve credit for focusing on how to achieve it. The Goodby-Pifer proposal places a strong emphasis on summit meetings between key states with nuclear weapons and their allies. Fair enough; as Pelopides wrote, “engage the expected veto player.”

A popular alternative these days is to build a coalition of like-minded states to advocate a nuclear weapons ban, an approach actively being advanced by many nongovernmental groups. Yet, the great weakness of global nuclear disarmament proposals that involve “coalitions of the willing” minus the nuclear-weapon states is in their inability to establish an irrefutable link between the actions of those coalitions and the necessary achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. It is difficult to achieve the norm of global nuclear disarmament without the participation of states possessing such weapons. A universal norm, after all, implies universal application.

Aside from the predictable difficulties of engaging the nuclear-weapon states, proponents of this book’s approach will also need a strategy to ensure that the proposed summits will remain focused on nuclear disarmament and not get sidetracked by endless discussions on nonproliferation and nuclear security issues. Most non-nuclear-weapon states oppose the idea that the commitment in the NPT to undertake negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament is conditional at all. They are not interested in discussing progress toward disarmament; they want to see progress in disarmament.

These states certainly oppose expanding nonproliferation commitments in the face of what they see as the failure to fulfill the disarmament side of the NPT bargain. While the nuclear-weapon states and their allies are demanding numerous preconditions for fulfilling their disarmament commitments, the non-nuclear-weapon states have not responded in kind by attaching provisos to their own nonproliferation commitments. The longer that disarmament is deferred, however, the more likely it is that this game of “conditions” will be played in the nonproliferation field. The book’s proposed joint enterprise can most successfully address such challenges by remaining a global enterprise with an equitable balance of obligations among all states.

Therefore, it seems that the road to nuclear disarmament will have to involve some players other than the nuclear-weapon states and their allies. In particular, non-nuclear-weapons states and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have important roles to play, as do national legislatures. How they can all fit within the summit proposal offered in this book is unclear.
Non-Nuclear Deterrence

As for the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, its frailties are exceptionally well documented in this book by many authors. Yet, the book’s subtitle, Dilemmas of Nuclear Deterrence, unintentionally diverts attention from another important challenge facing nuclear disarmament, namely, the dilemmas of non-nuclear deterrence.

As the Clinton White House put it in 2000, “Because of [U.S.] conventional military dominance, adversaries are likely to use asymmetric means, such as WMD [weapons of mass destruction], information operations or terrorism.”2 Earlier, Secretary of Defense William Cohen similarly stated that “a paradox of the new strategic environment is that American military superiority actually increases the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical attack against us by creating incentives for adversaries to challenge us asymmetrically.”3

As these comments suggest, the unconstrained production and improvement of conventional arms can serve as a driver for the proliferation of nuclear and other nonconventional weapons. Thus, the notion that the United States can comfortably rely on expanded and more-capable conventional forces for purposes of deterrence in a nuclear-weapon-free world does not seem to take into account all the possible international responses to this dominant U.S. capability. It is by no means clear that these responses would be fully compatible with global nuclear disarmament.

Beyond Deterrence Alone

In short, deterrence by conventional arms is not necessarily the enabler for global nuclear disarmament that some might wish. More likely, realists in the foreign and defense policy communities will recognize that the global elimination of nonconventional weapons must be accompanied by the regulation and limitation of conventional arms as well as the reduction of military spending.
Furthermore, the realists will have to concede that great progress is needed in establishing mechanisms to advance some fundamental goals of the UN Charter, especially the peaceful resolution of disputes and the ban on threats or use of force. These mechanisms logically would include greater reliance of states on such measures as mediation, adjudication, fact finding, and the “good offices” of globally recognized resources such as the office of the UN secretary-general and regional organizations for international peace and security. Yet, are these institutions prepared to perform that role? This is a work in progress at best, totally dependent on the political will of states to use such resources.

Ironically, WMD disarmament, conventional arms control, the peaceful resolution of disputes, reductions in military expenditures, and strengthening the norm against threats and use of force together comprise the goal of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control,” which is already recognized by all UN member states as their “ultimate goal.” Many authors in this volume reach for some form of a “big picture,” but none recalls this particular goal—hence the reader sees Podvig’s “new security framework,” Goodby’s “new global commons,” Brom’s “comprehensive cooperative security regime,” Haggag’s “comprehensive arms control framework,” and Jones’s “inclusive regional security system in the Middle East.” It is not clear what these alternatives offer that are not already intrinsic to the concept of general and complete disarmament, which has been recognized by the General Assembly and enshrined in a dozen multilateral treaties, including the NPT. The key recommendations in this book with respect to nuclear disarmament and, to the extent they are addressed, conventional arms control are fully consistent with general and complete disarmament. What is missing is some recognition of the global support that already exists for this ultimate goal.

Old Challenges, New Openings

Pessimists and optimists will find material in this book to support their views on disarmament. Pessimists will be informed that there is no hope that India, Israel, North Korea, Pakistan, or NATO will give up its nuclear weapons anytime soon. Reading between the lines, they could also deduce that the absence of nuclear disarmament agencies in the nuclear-weapon states, coupled with the lack of national disarmament legislation, regulations, policies, timetables, and plans, provides some rather compelling grounds to be skeptical about the whole global nuclear disarmament project. To his credit, Gerson addressed this specific challenge in his chapter on China, but the point is valid throughout the nuclear-armed world. Disarmament simply has not been “internalized” in the nuclear-weapon states; until it is, the goal will be all that more elusive.

Catalysts for change, however, should not be underestimated. The determination of NGOs and non-nuclear-weapon states to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament remains strong and is expanding. The rapid growth of the “humanitarian approach” to disarmament is a good case in point, as the vast majority of UN member states have now adopted a joint position in opposition to nuclear weapons on humanitarian grounds, a subject already of three major international conferences with more no doubt to come. Although national leadership from within the nuclear-weapon states is indispensable, the willingness of such leaders to launch disarmament initiatives will certainly be shaped by the wider political climate—a climate that includes public opinion and pressure from the diplomatic community. The more persistent and diverse these forces become, the greater will be the incentive for leaders to adopt a more constructive approach to disarmament. Pressure can shape summits.

Material for a Sequel

Without using the term “pax atomica,” this book dissects the doctrine of nuclear deterrence and exposes it for the anachronistic fantasy that it is in the 21st century. It is less strong in identifying the dilemmas of non-nuclear deterrence in a world without nuclear weapons. It does not take very seriously the role of civil society in advancing the global nuclear disarmament agenda and says very little about the international campaign now underway to advance a humanitarian approach to disarmament.

Yet, none of these are critical shortcomings in this excellent book. They are instead guiding lights for a sequel to build on this solid foundation pulled together by Shultz and Goodby, who continue to
demonstrate through their actions and principled leadership that nuclear disarmament not only can work better than any alternative response to nuclear weapons threats, but also is the right thing to do.

ENDNOTES


Randy Rydell is an executive adviser to the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation (Mayors for Peace) and a member of the Board of Directors of the Arms Control Association. He served from 1998 to 2014 as senior political affairs officer in the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and was a nonproliferation aide to Senator John Glenn (D-Ohio) from 1987 to 1998. He was report director and senior counselor to the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, headed by Hans Blix, from 2005 to 2006, when he was also senior fellow at the Arms Control Association.