

A Note on Disarmament

COMMON INTEREST

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In his *magnum-opus* Goethe wrote :

“The little god of earth remains the same queer sprite
As on the first day, or in primal light.
His life would be less difficult, poor thing,
Without your gift of heavenly glimmering ;
He calls it Reason, using light celestial
Just to outdo the beasts in being bestial.”

FAUST

Goethe was convinced about the primordial instinct of mankind, about what he saw as its inclination to war and discord and its extraordinary ingenuity in putting all that intellect to the invention and production of the genie of destruction. While mankind is the most wonderful being of the creation, endowed with the nobility of soul and the intellect of mind, its self-destructive instinct is at times all-pervading. It is not surprising, therefore, that Goethe's Mephistopheles complains that since “men drown in evils.....I find it boring to torment them.” One finds the same strain in what Bertrand Russel said “man is by nature pugnacious”.

Thomas Aquinas and most of us would, however, demur with what looks like rather depressing view of human nature ; homosapiens are not lemmings ; they do not necessarily move inexorably towards self-extinction.

* The author prepared the note in August 1983.

The two great wars, unparalleled in their magnitude of death and destruction brought us nearer to one inevitable realisation : all efforts must be made for preventing another global war. The First World War, thus produced the League of Nations. The League of Nations, however, could not measure upto the challenge of the time because of its inherent weakness. Salvador Madriega's efforts were doomed to failure from its inception.

The Second World War was all but inevitable because of the inability of the League of Nations to act. When the guns fell silent after the war, the victors moved towards creating a body which will be more universal and flexible than the League of Nations and more comprehensive in its scope than the covenant. Thus was born the United Nations ; the Charter was signed on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco with the participation of all great powers. The Statute of the International Court of Justice formed integral part of the Charter.

Wars start in the minds of men ; it is in the minds of men, therefore, that the fortress of peace, must be constructed. The preamble to the Charter said :

“We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our life-time has brought untold sorrow to mankind.” Article 1 in Chapter 1 states—“The purposes of the United Nations are to maintain international peace and security, and to that end, to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression and other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of Justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.”

From this stems our efforts at reducing the arms race and thereby creating an atmosphere congenial to the preservation and maintenance of international peace and security.

Efforts of the international community in restricting arms race have met with rather limited success. Zorin-Moloy Agreement didn't see the light of the day. The signing of the PTBT in 1963 was an important landmark in our disarmament efforts. The Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 was another bold step towards that direction. But much to our dismay, the arguments of realpolitik prevailed resulting in phenomenal proliferation of nuclear armaments both horizontal and vertical, inspite of the unambiguities of the relevant Articles of the NPT.

1978 was an important dateline. The Non-aligned countries, by then about two-thirds of the United Nations members, successfully negotiated the convening of the First Special Session on Disarmament. The Declaration—a part of the consensus document—stated “Genuine and lasting peace can only be created through the effective implementation of the security system provided for the Charter of the United Nations and speedy and substantial reduction of arms and armed forces, by international agreement and mutual example, leading ultimately to complete and general disarmament under effective international control.” It further said, “The arms race impedes the realisation of the purposes, and is incompatible with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, especially respect for sovereignty refraining from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, the peaceful settlement of disputes and non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of states.. therefore, the role and responsibility of the United Nations in the sphere of disarmament, in accordance with the Charter must be strengthened.” The Action Programme adopted in the SSOD I sets out guidelines for disarmament measures ; it also acknowledged the intrinsic link between disarmament and development. The Final Document states, inter-alia, “In a world of finite resources there is a close relationship between expenditure on armaments and economic and social development.”

As a developing non-aligned progressive country, Bangladesh has played an active role in all efforts towards reduction of armaments,

both nuclear and conventional, and redirecting resources thereby saved, towards socio-economic development of developed and developing countries alike. The importance Bangladesh attaches to this field was highlighted by the participation of Bangladesh in the SSOD II held in June 1982 at the highest level. The leader of the Bangladesh delegation stated "The issue that takes foremost priority is that of disarmament...."

The position of Bangladesh was further elaborated in the 7th Non-aligned Summit when the leader of Bangladesh delegation said—

"Recurrence of flash points across the world has led to the fact that international security, particularly the security of smaller states, cannot be guaranteed without effective implementation of disarmament measures. The failure of the Second Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, devoted to disarmament has caused us much disappointment.

We are committed to General and Complete Disarmament (GCD). We support Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Our decision to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty was based on our firm conviction that there can be no durable peace except through the elimination and destruction of nuclear weapons and its stockpiles. We believe that the limitation of nuclear armaments and other weapons of mass destruction is an important first step in creating an atmosphere of trust and confidence and the relaxation of international tensions.

Our continued interest in the final adoption and implementation of the CPD (Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament) has led us to express our intention to seek membership of the Committee on Disarmament."

The international community has witnessed with increasing concern the diversion of scarce resources for the production of armaments, both nuclear and conventional. The current expenditure on armaments stands at a staggering figure of \$ 800

billion. This unrestricted use of scarce resources for military purposes has created a sense of uncertainty among nations; this has also led to universal social opportunity cost.

We have noted the commencement of negotiations between the two super powers—both for TNF as well as strategic weapons. The other militarily significant countries could also contribute to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the reduction of peace and security, based on the Charter of the United Nations : this is in our common interest to work towards that end.