

Preface

Richard Butler

THE MODERN ERA of arms control and disarmament began over 50 years ago, immediately following the advent of nuclear weapons—the most devastating of weapons of mass destruction. Since then, the process has been tortuous, uneven, and often halting. Of its many features, two are outstanding. First, the significant corpus of treaties and agreements that now exists would not have been possible had reliance been placed solely, or even substantially, on the work of governments and their professional officials. Non-governmental actors and other groups of citizens (often amateurs) were the driving force behind many crucial accords—from the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to the 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention. Second, these actors have shown great determination, which has often been exercised at significant personal cost. Their reward is the sense of accomplishment they can feel at having spoken truth to power in the name of all humanity.

Yet many of those involved in the arms control enterprise during the Cold War—one of the most constructive achievements in an intensely difficult and potentially catastrophic period in international relations—believe that there is still work to be done. They know that, at the moment, the tapestry of treaties is neither complete nor acceptably reliable.

All of the major arms control and disarmament regimes share three fundamental characteristics:

- a moral, consensus-based value that a given weapon is inadmissible in a civilised world;
- a binding legal document in which states make a political and behavioural commitment to that view; and
- the construction of a means of verifying that treaty partners meet their obligations and commitments.

If this system is to survive, all three elements—like a three-legged stool—need to be maintained. Instability in one part could bring down the entire structure.

Sadly, in recent years, we have witnessed attacks on the fundamental moral consensus about the worth of arms control and disarmament, particularly by Iraq. Also of increasing concern is the reluctance of other states to join certain treaties—thereby refusing to make an initial basic political commitment—and some nations' failure to sustain their obligations under accords already adhered to. It was a reasonable expectation that, with the passage of time, such concerns would diminish.

These developments have put additional pressure on the third element of the system: verification. I have been involved in the negotiation and implementation of major arms control and disarmament treaties for more than 20 years, but two issues have persistently caused great anxiety. The first is whether or not compliance with undertakings can be verified. The bases of such doubts range from the technical to the motivational. In large measure, the answer can be gained by recourse to science and technology. It is possible to achieve high levels of verification by applying appropriate monitoring and inspection methods. These are known and/or can be designed, and they can be successfully implemented if states allow them to be applied to their relevant activities. While the question of access can be sensitive, it can be eased by resourceful design of verification modalities and technologies. But such ingenuity may not be sufficient to overcome a situation in which a treaty member's motivation has waned dramatically or has changed completely, in contradiction to its treaty undertaking.

The verification aspect of arms control and disarmament treaties is by far the most difficult. It is essential to bear in mind that the purpose of verification cannot be to prevent cheating, but to deter it through the possibility of detection. Verification is a continual process that grows in strength over time. Every report delivered to treaty partners confirming that a state party is in compliance, strengthens that particular treaty. This builds long-term confidence. It is the gift of verification.

The second source of anxiety is more problematic, and the one to which the answer is least developed: what happens if it becomes clear that a treaty partner is cheating? And—at its simplest—who will enforce the law? The answer usually given today is that the 'international community', as represented by the UN Security Council, will solve the problem.

Conceptually and legally, that is the right answer. Sadly, and for good reason, it is not one that fills treaty partners with confidence. This is a political question that urgently requires attention. The Security Council needs to agree to exclude the enforcement of arms control treaties from the veto power of its five permanent

members—from politics as usual. Were there to be reliable enforcement of treaties whenever a credible, verified report of an infraction was received, the three-legged stool would be transformed into a solid four-legged table.

A key requirement for this to become possible is the existence of credible verification. VERTIC’s achievements in fostering the continuing development of such instruments have been of irreducible importance and have exceeded its modest budget. It is an outstanding example of the invaluable role played in arms control and disarmament by non-governmental actors. VERTIC’s research and its effort to conduct training and to disseminate information in the field of verification naturally has relevance beyond arms control and disarmament.

Other important fields of international endeavour, such as protecting the environment and implementing peace accords, are equally in need of good verification. Indeed, verification has become, and should remain, a critical element in attempts to ensure human safety. The *Verification Yearbook 2000* is both an illustration of, and an inspiration to, the continued efforts of those who are committed to the effective and efficient verification of international agreements—not only for its own sake, but also as a contribution to a just and more peaceful world.

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Richard Butler, former Australian diplomat, is Diplomat in Residence, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, US. From 1997–99, he was Executive Chairman of the UN Special Commission on Iraq. His book, *Saddam Defiant: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Crisis of Global Security*, was published in 2000.