

LKI *takeaways* are executive summaries of LKI events.

Ramesh Thakur on Nuclear Policy and Prospects for Disarmament in the New World Order

Reported by Malinda Meegoda*

March 2018

***Malinda Meegoda** is a Research Associate at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKI) in Colombo. These *Takeaways* summarise the insights and discussion at a recent LKI event. They are not the views of the reporting author or the institutional views of LKI, and are not a complete report of the event.

Three key takeaways from the APLN-LKI lecture delivered by Prof. Ramesh Thakur on “Nuclear Policy and Prospects for Disarmament in the New World Order”:

- 1. While the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), remains essential to disarmament, NPT member states with nuclear weapons have failed to meet their duty under Article 6 of the NPT to pursue disarmament in “good faith.”**
 - 2. The Nuclear Ban Treaty (NBT) could become a new norm setter in nuclear disarmament efforts, by delegitimising the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, which rests on a credible threat of nuclear retaliation to prevent an enemy attack.**
 - 3. The historical record suggests that a deterrence or other security-based argument for possessing nuclear weapons should be viewed with a degree of scepticism.**
-

Introduction

- Professor Ramesh Thakur, Director of the Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament at the Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, and Co-Convenor of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (APLN), spoke on “Nuclear Policy and Prospects for Disarmament in the New World Order” on 19 February 2018 at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute (LKI).
- Professor Nayani Melegoda, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at the University of Colombo, and member of the LKI Board of Management, made the introductory remarks.
- Prof. Thakur’s lecture was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. The panel included Dr. Li Bin, Director of Arms Control Program, Tsinghua University; Mr. H. M. G. S. Palihakkara, former Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka; Mr. Rakesh Sood, India’s former Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva; and Ms. Sadia Tasleem, of the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University.
- The event was attended by over 100 academics, government officials, military officials, private sector representatives, and diplomats, as well as by members of the APLN.

Takeaways from Prof. Ramesh Thakur’s Lecture

How the NPT Affects Disarmament

- The NPT recognised the category of Nuclear Weapons States (NWS); which includes the United States, Russia/Soviet Union, China, France, and the United Kingdom.
- This recognition has helped legitimise the nuclear status of the NWS, and transformed the NPT into a non-proliferation regime at the expense of nuclear disarmament.

- Since the NPT was signed 50 years ago, no nuclear warhead has been dismantled pursuant to the NPT.
- The ‘lowest common denominator’ approach used at NPT Review Conferences, which strongly encourages the consensus of parties, including the NWS, has prevented implementation of even modest proposals.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Nuclear Ban Treaty

- The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, also known as the Nuclear Ban Treaty (NBT), is a comprehensive treaty that builds on prohibition provisions in the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- The Nuclear Ban Treaty prioritises international security over national security and thereby counters arguments that nuclear weapons are needed for deterrence and security.
- The main shortcoming of the Nuclear Ban Treaty is the notable absence of NWS in voting to adopt or signing the Treaty.

Arguments for Disarmament

- From a security perspective, states will continue to pursue nuclear weapons so long as even one state possesses nuclear weapons.
- From a humanitarian perspective, neither countries nor international systems have the capacity to cope with the humanitarian impacts of nuclear war.
- From an international law standpoint, states that did not participate or vote on the Nuclear Ban Treaty may be considered in breach of Article 6 of the NPT, which requires good faith efforts towards complete disarmament.

Points from the Panel Discussion

The Growing Risks of Nuclear Weapons

- The decline in global stockpiles of nuclear weapons, from a peak of almost 65,000 to approximately 15,000 has not decreased the risks associated with nuclear weapons.
- Nuclear weapons have been around for over 70 years, and current assessments of their risks should reflect the greater technological capabilities of states to make and use nuclear weapons.
- The risks associated with nuclear weapons have increased due to the planned use between nuclear adversaries, the possibility of inadvertent escalation due to a lack of information sharing, threats to nuclear command and control mechanisms from cyber-attacks, and the threat of nuclear terrorism.

Disarmament Challenges in Nuclear Weapons Possessing Countries

- Nuclear Weapons States such as China should be cautious when reacting to the contents of the US Nuclear Posture Review, a document that outlines the role of nuclear weapons in the US' security strategy and which foresees the use of nuclear weapons with less powerful warheads (low-yield) in a non-nuclear conflict.
- Financially weak states such as Pakistan continue to rely on nuclear weapons as a means of cost-effective deterrence, and to maintain their relevance on the global stage.

Suggested Further Reading

Bin, L. (2018). Will US Nuclear Posture Review see a return to hegemony? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/26/will-us-nuclear-posture-review-see-return-to-hegemony-pub-75359>

Dhanapala, J. (2017). NPT 2020 Review Underway: Is the NPT Still Relevant? Asia Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament http://www.apln.org/briefings/briefings_view/Policy_Brief_38_-_NPT_2020_Review_Underway:_Is_the_NPT_Still_Releva

Meegoda, M. (2018). Navigating a Nuclearised Asia for Smaller States: Reviving Sri Lanka's Commitments to Disarmament. Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute. <http://www.lki.lk/publication/navigating-a-nuclearised-asia-for-smaller-states-reviving-sri-lankas-commitments-to-disarmament/>

Meegoda, M. (2018). The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute. <http://www.lki.lk/publication/the-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons/>

Sethi, M. (2018). Nuclear Weapons, Like Potato Chips – No One Can Just Use One!. Centre for Airpower Studies. http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_ExpertView_MS_06.pdf

Sood, R. (2017). Unravelling of the Iran Deal. The Hindu. <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/unravelling-of-the-iran-deal/article19891566.ece>

Tasleem, S. (2018). Non-NPT Nuclear-Armed States and the NPT: Closing the Gap. Asia Pacific Leadership Network for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament http://www.apln.org/briefings/briefings_view/Policy_Brief_No_55_-_Non-NPT_Nuclear-Armed_States_and_the_NPT:_Closing_the_Gap?ckattempt=1

Thakur, R. (2018). Nuclear Disarmament, The NPT and the Ban Treaty: Proven Ineffectiveness Versus Unproven Normative Potential. Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability. <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/nuclear-disarmament-the-npt-and-the-ban-treaty-proven-ineffectiveness-versus-unproven-normative-potential/>

Copyright and Terms of Use

© 2018 Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKI). LKI is not responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained herein. The views expressed are not the institutional views of LKI.