The Guterres Disarmament Agenda and the Challenge of Constructing a Global Regime for Weapons

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ABSTRACT
On 24 May 2018, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres launched his new “disarmament agenda” in an address at the University of Geneva. The UN’s Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) simultaneously released a 73-page “non-paper” that elaborated this new agenda. In October 2018, UNODA issued the agenda’s implementation plan. This article will describe the key themes and specific proposals of this disarmament initiative. It will identify those features that represent both continuity and change relative to past proposals by other Secretaries-General. It will also discuss the agenda’s initial impacts, obstacles encountered, and future opportunities for progress. Finally, it will offer some reflections on the broader role of the United Nations, its Secretariat, and its Secretary-General in advancing global disarmament objectives.

Context
The work of the United Nations in disarmament is evolutionary in nature, rather than determined by specific mandates in the UN Charter, which was negotiated before the first test of a nuclear weapon – a term that not surprisingly does not appear in the Charter. While the Charter did contain references to both disarmament and the regulation of armaments, it assigned these mandates to the General Assembly and Security Council, not the Secretary-General. Nor did the Charter define “disarmament” and “regulation of armaments”. Yet due to the combined effect of customs, traditions, ad hoc mandates, responses to events, responsibilities delegated by multilateral treaty arenas, General Assembly resolutions, personal initiative and leadership, and other such influences, all the Secretaries-General have been supportive of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, and have treated it as having special significance for the United Nations.

Most recently, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon took many steps to raise the profile of disarmament at the United Nations and in other international arenas. Their leadership established the setting for the development and implementation of the Guterres initiative.

Kofi Annan frequently addressed disarmament themes in his speeches, including in several lengthy addresses devoted exclusively to this subject. He re-established the Department for Disarmament Affairs, headed by an Under-Secretary-General. He often stressed the interdependence of disarmament and non-proliferation as mutually

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reinforcing goals. He emphasized the norm-setting role of the UN and its contributions in strengthening of the “multilateral principles of disarmament” (Annan 2006).

Ban Ki-moon was one of the most prominent advocates inside the UN for disarmament. He was the first Secretary-General to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, and the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. He created the post of “High Representative” in a new independent Office for Disarmament Affairs. And he was the first Secretary-General to offer his own detailed disarmament proposal, which emphasized nuclear disarmament but also addressed conventional arms, missiles, space weapons and military spending (Ban 2008).

The disarmament views of the previous Secretaries-General show considerable continuity on many issues: the importance of disarmament in the maintenance of international peace and security; the central role of the UN in deliberating and advancing multilateral disarmament objectives; the norm-setting function of the UN; the dangerous and unpredictable threats posed by the unstable international environment; disappointment over the lack of progress in this field; recognition of the potential of science and technology to address disarmament challenges; concern over the burdensome costs of mounting military expenditures for social and economic development; the horrific dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons; the conviction that disarmament efforts are the responsibility of all Member States not just the great powers; and recognition that among disarmament priorities, nuclear disarmament must remain paramount.

There were, of course, many nuanced differences in their approaches, as seen in some contrasting priorities. These include: the potential of science and technology to deal with disarmament challenges; the social and economic costs of arms races; the role of the UN in publishing disarmament studies and in verification; the role of disarmament in UN peacebuilding efforts; the relationship between non-proliferation and disarmament; the dangers from nuclear terrorism; and the place of disarmament as a priority within the UN institution. The Guterres initiative has contributed to this ongoing dynamic process of raising disarmament – including both the elimination and control of weapons – as a major UN priority.

The full context for the Guterres disarmament agenda also requires some recognition of the existing mandates of UNODA (Secretary-General’s Bulletin 2008). Its primary missions currently include: advising the Secretary-General; assisting Member States in deliberations and negotiations; promoting disarmament norms; assisting other parts of the UN disarmament machinery (First Committee of the General Assembly, UN Disarmament Commission, Conference on Disarmament, as well as at meetings of parties to multilateral treaties); promoting efforts in non-proliferation and counter-terrorism; supporting regulation of conventional armaments; providing expertise in confidence-building efforts in the conflict-prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding fields; promoting openness and transparency in military matters; assisting regional disarmament efforts; developing disarmament communication strategies and education; serving as liaison with permanent UN missions, other parts of the UN system, and civil society; providing training to diplomats from developing countries; and promoting gender-mainstreaming policies.

**The Guterres Disarmament Agenda: A Thematic Summary**

Because there is considerable overlapping between the Geneva speech, the UNODA non-paper, and the implementation plan, this analysis will seek first to identify broad themes
that together make up the agenda, and second, to describe specific proposals for each substantive issue. With regard to the quotations below, most are from the more detailed non-paper with parentheses to identify the page number. Excerpts from the Geneva speech are marked “GS”, while the implementation plan will be discussed in a separate section. This approach is intended to prevent repetition and extensive footnoting.

Structurally, Guterres framed his agenda to advance three basic priorities: disarmament to “save humanity” (eliminating weapons of mass destruction); disarmament to “save lives” (advancing conventional arms control); and disarmament “for future generations” (addressing challenges posed by emerging issues and new technologies). Yet interwoven throughout his new agenda are some central overarching themes that to a large extent transcend his three broad disarmament priorities.

**Broad Interpretation of the Scope of Disarmament**

At Geneva, Guterres emphasized that the focus of his new disarmament agenda was on “the threat posed by weapons of all kinds”, not just nuclear weapons. In an age often consumed with debates over “partial measures” and an incremental “step-by-step process” for disarmament, Guterres offers a distinctly more holistic approach, one that is much more akin to the longstanding ultimate objective of the United Nations, called “general and complete disarmament under effective international control” (GCD). Yet he refers to this concept only once in his non-paper, calling vaguely on the international community to “reconceptualize” it. Like GCD, the Guterres disarmament agenda covers the abolishment and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological), the regulation of conventional armaments, controls to reduce military spending and militarism, tools for the peaceful resolution of disputes, and strict observance of the Charter’s fundamental norms regarding the prohibition of the threat or use of force to solve disputes.

He adopts what he calls a “whole-of-system” approach, but only explicitly applies it to improvised explosive devices and small arms, yet this approach could well apply across the board to all of his objectives. He makes it clear that this holistic approach applies not only to comparisons across different types of weaponry, but also to approaches inside the United Nations and other multilateral arenas: he is trying in effect to explain to his own bureaucracy the extent that the future work of the entire UN organization is affected by the fate of disarmament, for better or worse. He posits that disarmament “offers policymakers with a strategic set of tools that can be applied in the widest variety of situations and contexts [including elimination, destruction, prohibitions, restrictions, non-proliferation, regulation, reduction, limitation, transparency, CBMs, remediation].”

**The Deteriorating Conditions of International Peace and Security**

He describes the world as “on the brink of a new cold war”, characterized by a “deteriorating international security environment”, “unrestrained arms competition”, and “surreptitious interference in domestic political processes and the increasing pursuit of malicious and hostile acts just below traditional thresholds for the use of force.” (3) Furthermore, “Multilateral disarmament negotiations have been deadlocked for more
than two decades, and bilateral channels have been allowed to stagnate. Limits on major conventional forces have been left aside. No measures are in place to prevent rapid escalation resulting from strategic threats in new domains, including cyberspace and outer space.” (3) A “re-emergence of strategic tension between the major powers is taking place against a resurgence of civil conflict.” (3) “Today’s armed conflicts are more protracted, more lethal for civilians and more prone to regional rivalries and external intervention, including by major powers.” (3)

“The international system is becoming more multipolar. This entails multiple spheres of power and influence, a growing multiplicity of interests, conflicts and asymmetries. The resulting lack of clarity in power relations has led increasingly to greater unpredictability, fragmentation and at times unilateralism.” (4) He warns of “a multitude of actors with various motives and means of violence, including low-level insurgents, extremists and terrorists, criminal organizations, well-trained militias and every possible combination of these.” (3) He sees growing militarization and military spending, and “increasing risks from new weapon technologies.” (4) “[T]here is a widespread perception that progress towards nuclear disarmament has stalled and there are troubling signs that the nuclear agenda is now moving in the wrong direction.” (16–17) “International consensus over a common path for the elimination of nuclear weapons has been strained by decades of paralysis in multilateral negotiating bodies.” (17) “The current nuclear risks we face are unacceptable, and they are growing.” (17)

**Strengthening the Norm of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons**

“President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev agreed that ‘a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought’. This maxim remains an inviolable truth today.” (20) “Any effort to expand the possible range of situations in which nuclear weapons are designed to be used could be destabilizing and jeopardizes the 72-year practice of non-use.” (20 and GS) “The preservation of the norm against use is clearly in the interest of both humanitarian and security objectives, especially in the States that possess nuclear weapons.” (20) “Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the States that possess nuclear weapons should pursue policies to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, lessen the danger of nuclear war and contribute to the non-proliferation and disarmament of nuclear weapons.” (21)

**Challenges inside the United Nations and Multilateral Institutions**

The Guterres initiative includes a rather withering critique of the shortcomings of approaches to disarmament at the United Nations. He declared, “The total elimination of nuclear weapons is in the DNA of the United Nations.” (GS) Despite disarmament’s long unfinished agenda and deteriorating conditions of international peace and security, the UN still remains relevant in these fields, but it needs many reforms both in the disarmament machinery and the Secretariat itself. “My agenda … integrates disarmament into the priorities of the whole United Nations system, laying the foundations for new partnerships and greater collaboration between different parts of our organization and Governments, civil society, the private sector and others.” (viii)
“Our disarmament and international security institutions have not kept up with this change,” he argued, “and remain hobbled by archaic rules and practices designed for a simpler time.” (4) “Despite [its] proven benefits, disarmament is not well integrated in the work of the United Nations in conflict mediation and prevention. And its toolset needs to be brought up to date, especially in the collection and use of data.” (33) Progress “requires a more general effort to reintegrate disarmament into the peace and security pillar of the Organization, build effective partnerships and better deliver as one United Nations.” (34) Re nuclear disarmament: “We owe this to the Hibakusha . . . and to our planet.” (vii) “Eroding respect for international norms is weakening our international political, security and economic institutions.” (5) “Increasingly, our multilateral institutions are under threat.” (5) “[T]he total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations. But our efforts towards this end remain in a state of severe crisis.” (17 and GS) “Our world is going backwards.” (GS) For its part, “The Security Council has failed to live up to its responsibilities [re accountability for chemical weapon use in Syria].” (25 and GS)

With respect to small arms and light weapons, he argued that “There is a clear need for the United Nations to pursue a new model for sustained and coherent funding for international assistance for the control of small arms and light weapons.” (41) Yet “The current paradigm of short-term and compartmentalized projects to address small arms control is not keeping up with the seriousness and magnitude of the problem,” (41) and “our work has been spread across twenty different agencies. It is fragmented and limited.” (GS)

**The Humanitarian and Urban Dimensions of Disarmament**

He stated, “Human security, national security and global security are indivisible” (GS), yet “Civilians continue to bear the brunt of armed conflict around the globe.” (34) “We must put people at the centre of our disarmament efforts”. (vii) “...[N]ew measures are necessary to ensure humans always maintain control over the use of force.” (xi) “Since the end of the Second World War, a central disarmament concern has been the protection of civilians from the effects of armed conflict.” (7) “The changing nature of armed conflict in the past few decades and the unspeakable human suffering it has caused gave rise to the concept of placing human beings at the centre of security. Today, it is well understood that our concept of security must ensure the protection not only of the State, but of its human population as well. In the 21st Century, mutually reinforcing notions of human and national security guide our efforts to further develop multilateral and collective security institutions, based on the rule of law and the norms that the international community has developed over centuries.” (12)

“What these complex conflicts have in common is their increasingly urban nature, the massive loss of civilian life and the destruction of civilian infrastructure.” (4) “As armed conflict has moved from open fields and into villages, towns and cities, the humanitarian impact has been devastating.” (33) “The urbanization of armed conflict has resulted in devastating and well-documented impacts on civilians.” (34) “We are one mechanical, electronic or human error away from a catastrophe that could eradicate entire cities from the map.” (GS) In this respect, Guterres was the first Secretary-General to emphasize the specific relevance of disarmament to cities.
**Disarmament and Sustainable Development**

“Excessive spending on weapons drains resources for sustainable development. It is incompatible with creating stable, inclusive societies, strong institutions, effective governance and democracy, and a culture of respect for human rights.” (GS) “We must understand the role of disarmament measures in preventing major war and armed conflict and violence, contributing to sustainable development, upholding humanitarian principles and protecting civilians.” (73) “In recent decades, disarmament has largely slipped off the development agenda, despite the clear connection between disarmament and development in the United Nations Charter.” (46) “Beyond addressing illicit arms flows, there remains a vast potential to operationally link the implementation of disarmament objectives with many other Sustainable Development Goals, in order to bring the historical relationship between disarmament and development back to the forefront of international consciousness.”

“Measures for disarmament are pursued for many reasons, including to maintain international peace and security, uphold the principles of humanity, protect civilians, promote sustainable development, and prevent and end armed conflict.” (11) “The Charter reflects an explicit understanding of the link between arms and development.” (7) “United Nations studies have also shown that excessive military spending can negatively impact inclusive and sustainable growth and capital investment.” (7) “Mobilizing sufficient resources in support of disarmament and arms regulation is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

**The Link between Disarmament and Non-Proliferation**

Our dangerous times create a new reality that “demands that disarmament and non-proliferation are put at the centre of the work of the United Nations.” (vii) “The existing norms for the disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons are mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked.” (20) “Non-proliferation is central to the maintenance of international peace and security, and also remains essential for preserving an international environment that is conducive to disarmament. Disarmament remains essential for sustaining non-proliferation.” (20) “The two objectives are two sides of the same coin.” (20 and GS) The continued stagnation in disarmament “will increase strains on our existing security institutions, non-proliferation architecture and normative frameworks.” (6) He said the nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States “must work together to bridge the gulf that divides them.” (GS) The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is “central to the maintenance of international peace and security” and is “essential to preserving an environment conducive to disarmament.”

**Importance of Dialogue and Negotiations**

“Dialogue and negotiations are the only way forward and must guide our efforts.” (GS) Progress in disarmament requires “engagement, dialogue and negotiations” (5). It requires “constant communication, dialogue and negotiations” (10). “In order to realize an improvement in the international security environment, it will be necessary for the international community not only to work to devalue the role of military options in seeking security, but also to revalue the role of political dialogue and negotiations for
disarmament and arms control as the safer, smarter and more effective means for achieving the same ends.” (10–11) “Diplomacy and dialogue have prevented possible proliferation crises from escalating into armed conflict.” (15)

**Relationship between Disarmament, International Security and National Defence**

Disarmament is “a central means for addressing today’s sources of insecurity and violence.” (6) “Disarmament is at the heart of the system of collective security set out in the United Nations Charter.” (6) It is “a tool to help prevent armed conflict and to mitigate its impacts when it occurs” (ix) and “an essential tool to secure our world and our future.” (GS) “Peace and security are the central reasons why the United Nations pursues disarmament.” (6) “For decades, the critical driving force behind the pursuit of nuclear disarmament has been security.” (6) “At the national and local levels, arms control contributes to preventing armed violence more broadly.” (7) “World leaders during the first cold war were fluent in the language and logic of disarmament and arms control because these concepts were understood as integral to security.” (10)

**Challenges from New Technologies**

“Many technological advances, especially those resulting in greater autonomy and remote operation of weapon systems, could create perceptions of casualty-free warfare, lowering the threshold for the use of force.” (51) “Developments in artificial intelligence are one of the drivers of growing military interest in autonomous weapons.” (54) “We could even face the creation of cyberweapons of mass destruction.” (GS)

**New Partnerships and Constituencies**

“Disarmament initiatives have been most successful when they involved effective partnerships between all the relevant stakeholders – Governments, the expert community and civil society organizations – as well as strong interest and support from the general public and well-functioning international negotiation forums.” (61) He stated, “Disarmament works best when we work together: governments, experts, civil society and individuals.” (GS) He encouraged new “partnerships for disarmament” with diverse constituencies, including women; youth; business community; scientists/engineers; regional organizations; professional associations; and physicians. (61–69) “There also needs to be more efforts to include other actors with a stake in the disarmament processes, including from private sector and industry, in the work of the United Nations.” (70) “At the level of civil society, there is a need for conscious efforts to ensure full and equal participation from underrepresented communities, more effectively draw upon expertise and the private sector, and empower the next generation.” (61)

**The Guterres Disarmament Agenda: Specific Policy Initiatives Proposed**

Table 1 shows the robust contribution of the non-paper and Geneva speech in identifying specific goals or benchmarks to identify actual progress in disarmament.
Initial Assessment of the Agenda’s Impacts

As of April 2020, the agenda has begun to leave its mark in a number of international arenas, though its impact has necessarily been limited by the crucial role played by sovereign states in developing and implementing their own weapons decisions. While the agenda has gained wide recognition in the world community, its impact in advancing specific disarmament goals remains mixed, leaving it very much a “work in progress”.

The first question to ask in assessing the agenda’s impact is to see if it has figured in key official statements by senor officials in the UN Secretariat, in particular future speeches by the Secretary-General and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. In other words, was there any follow-up by UN officials? The answer is an unequivocal yes, as the UNODA’s web site lists dozens of statements made at this level, which explicitly address the agenda. This indicates a significant level of official support from at least the disarmament-focused parts of the UN bureaucracy.

Another primary indicator of the agenda’s impacts appears in the frequency of references to it in official statements of governments in key multilateral arenas. A recent review of disarmament-related statements in the General Assembly’s plenary General Debate, the General and Thematic Debates in the General Assembly’s First Committee, and a 2019 meeting of the state parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, shows the extent that the international community has recognized the agenda. While the nuclear-weapon states and states that belong to nuclear alliances have objected to parts of the agenda, especially those dealing with nuclear weapons, they have not condemned the overall initiative and some (e.g. China and France) have even welcomed certain of its proposed actions. Collectively, the European Union has also endorsed some specific features of the agenda, notably relating to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the fissile material treaty.

The most frequent references have come from the developing countries and those states that have been actively working to promote global nuclear disarmament, including Ireland, Sweden, Austria, New Zealand, Mexico, Brazil and others. These statements, however, have largely appeared in the form of brief acknowledgements of the existence of the agenda and references have been inconsistent even within this group of favourably inclined states.

For example, in the first General Assembly plenary of September 2018 after the agenda was launched, there were no references in the statement by the Secretary-General himself, nor in the statements by European Union, the Holy See, Austria, Japan, Canada, Egypt, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, New Zealand, Iran and Cuba. Meanwhile, Ireland, Sweden and Germany voiced their support for the agenda. For the nuclear-weapons segment (“cluster”) of the First Committee’s 2019 session, 29 disarmament-active countries and groups (including Japan, the Non-Aligned Movement, the New Agenda Coalition, Mexico, Egypt, South Africa Austria, Germany, Finland, Brazil, New Zealand, Sweden, et al.) made no reference to the Guterres agenda.

https://www.un.org/disarmament/sgstatement/(Secretary-General); and https://www.un.org/disarmament/hrstatement/(High Representative).

EU Statement to the First Committee, 10 October 2019, http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com19/statements/10Oct_EU.pdf.
Table 1. Specific disarmament goals identified in the non-paper and Geneva Speech.

| Weapon            | Objective                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Priority 1: Disarmament to Save Humanity**                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Nuclear weapons   | Reduce all types; ensure their non-use as an inviolable norm; reduce their role in security doctrines; reduce their operational readiness; constrain the development of new types; increase transparency; build mutual trust and confidence; make the nuclear test ban permanent; develop nuclear disarmament verification; end the production of fissile material for use in weapons; resume dialogue and negotiations for nuclear arms control and disarmament; extend the norms against nuclear weapons and their proliferation; prepare for a world free of nuclear weapons; reaffirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought; strengthen and consolidate nuclear-weapon-free zones; and support the JCPOA (Iran deal) and denuclearization of Korean Peninsula. |
| Chemical weapons  | Exercise the Security Council’s primary responsibility and act to halt further erosion of the norm against chemical weapons by ending impunity and ensuring accountability for any use; build new leadership and unity among the Security Council and Secretary-General to restore respect for the global norm against chemical weapons, including through the creation of a new and impartial mechanism to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. |
| Biological weapons| Strengthen our institutions to prevent any use of biological weapons, including by strengthening the implementation of the BWC, and ensure that we can mount an adequate response in case prevention fails; improve linkages with other relevant activities – for example in the domain of global health security – and oversight of dual-use research of concern, including in the context of the Sustainable Development Goal on health and well-being; establish a UN core standing coordinating capacity to conduct independent investigations of the alleged use of biological weapons. |
| Missiles          | Establish risk reduction measures including commitments not to introduce cruise missiles; reengage with the international community to give higher priority to addressing issues related to missiles, especially in the context of the disarmament process; conduct a study by UNODA and UNIDIR of the implications of long-range conventional weapons, including those using hypersonic technologies; encourage the US and Russia to “resolve their dispute” over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and to extend the New Start treaty (GS only). |
| **Priority 2: Disarmament to Save Lives**                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Conventional weapons | Collect data on civilian casualties to address concerns raised by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; introduce casualty-recording mechanisms among human rights components of UN peace operations; share among States policies and practices in peace operations; support the development of measures designed to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law; support efforts of Member States to develop a political declaration relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; engage and support parties to conflicts in their efforts to reduce civilian casualties; introduce civilian harm mitigation cells within the military structure of UN and Member States’ forces involved in military conflicts and take appropriate measures to address, mitigate and remedy harm to civilians; include in information from UN entities the types of weapons and their use on the battlefield as part of risk assessments in implementing the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy; promote within the UN a strengthened and coherent UN inter-agency coordination on improvised explosive devices to ensure a whole-of-system approach; increase transparency and accountability on the use of armed drones; explore common standards for the transfer, holdings and use of armed unmanned aerial vehicles in order to ensure accountability, transparency and oversight for their use; pursue a new UN model for sustained and coherent funding for international assistance for the control of small arms and light weapons; establish a UN multi-partner trust facility through the Peacebuilding Fund to provide a more sustainable solution with a strong development focus; examine at UNODA and UNIDIR how understandings of the impact of arms, especially excessive and destabilizing accumulations, can be incorporated into analyses of risk; promote more effective State and regional action on excessive and poorly maintained stockpiles; explore opportunities for regional dialogue on building confidence on military matters, including by encouraging mutual restraint in military expenditures and arms acquisitions, holdings and transfers. |
| **Priority 3: Disarmament for Future Generations**                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| New/emerging weapons | Prevent the emergence of new and destabilizing strategic weapons, including in outer space; foster a culture of accountability and adherence to norms, rules and principles for responsible behaviour in cyberspace; explore how UN entities can facilitate the exchange of information on new weapon reviews; facilitate the exchange of information and experiences between States on the reviews of new weapons; work with scientists, engineers and industry to encourage responsible innovation of science and technology; ensure that humans remain at all times in control over the use of force; make available the Secretary-General’s good offices to contribute to the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflict stemming from malicious activity in cyberspace. |

(Continued)
Table 1. (Continued).

| Weapon     | Objective                                                                                                                                 |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| United Nations reform | In general: improve coordination and synergy among the principal disarmament organs; reduce redundancy in their deliberations; better utilize available expertise and achieve more equitable representation; undertake studies by UNODA and UNIDIR on ways to better coordinate and integrate the work and expertise among the various disarmament bodies.  
Conference on Disarmament: need stronger efforts to bring it back to its function as a standing body for negotiations.  
General Assembly: need a fourth special session devoted to disarmament; expand establishment of working groups by the First Committee.  
UNIDIR: play a greater strategic role, including in the convening and facilitation of multilateral engagement.  
Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters: could be more closely integrated into deliberative processes and negotiations; strengthen its strategic role in disarmament deliberations.  
UNODA: strengthen its capacity for supporting States to reach their security and disarmament objectives, including through its regional centres; work with States parties to develop concrete options for ensuring the financial sustainability and institutional viability of disarmament mechanisms. |
| Regional   | Facilitate strategic security dialogue at the regional level; revitalize existing regional forums or establish new ones aimed at developing common regional approaches to global problems; increase engagement between UNODA and the Department of Political Affairs to strengthen existing platforms for regional dialogue on security and arms control; encourage the establishment of new regional nuclear-weapon-free zones. |
| Women      | Ensure equal, full and effective participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament; make gender parity as “a moral duty and an operational necessity”. |
| Youth      | Establish more disarmament education and training opportunities for youth; facilitate their access to tools, training and networks useful for addressing local problems where measures for disarmament, demilitarization and the prevention of armed violence. |
| Civil Society | Formalize access and participation by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in disarmament forums; facilitate greater direct public engagement on security priorities, including on military spending; ensure that civil society investments do not assist, encourage or induce any action that would be contrary to customary rules of international law, UN principles and objectives, and the provisions of international treaties to which their States are party; engage entrepreneurs and business leaders to build further momentum for societal engagement in advancing the shared norms of humanity; achieve the greater integration of experts, industry and civil society representatives into the meetings of all United Nations disarmament bodies. |
Aside from statements, another indicator of support for the agenda is found in the disarmament resolutions introduced in the First Committee, and the record here is also mixed. Of the 23 nuclear-weapon-related resolutions adopted in 2018, only 4 mentioned the Guterres disarmament agenda (resolutions by Kazakhstan, Mexico, Malaysia, and South Africa), typically in brief preambular language recognizing (or at times welcoming) the agenda. Ironically, despite their germane subject matters, there were no references to the agenda in resolutions addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war, security assurances, fissile material treaty, several regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, “ethical imperatives” for nuclear disarmament, a convention to prohibit the use of nuclear weapons, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

In terms of national policy, it is noteworthy that UNODA has identified several states that have agreed either to be a “champion” or a “supporter” of 11 of the 13 specific Actions provided in the agenda for “saving humanity”.

It is of course true that even if all of these actions were implemented, there would still be no guarantee (or claim) that they would suffice to produce global nuclear disarmament; the crucial variable remains the behaviour and priorities of the nuclear-weapon states (and their allies).

Given the multitude of factors that enter into national decision making on weapons acquisition and disarmament, the impacts of the agenda on the national policies and practices of states will likely remain limited at best. And it also remains to be seen to what extent the agenda has affected the activities of other parts of the United Nations. For example, is disarmament turning up in publications or web sites in the UN system dealing with sustainable development, humanitarian or human rights issues, international law, the environment, gender issues, child welfare, and peacebuilding activities? While there is little evidence so far that this is occurring on any significant scale, this too will be an important future indicator of the impact of the agenda on the UN’s own organization.

While references to the Guterres disarmament agenda by states in multilateral arenas have been intermittent and quite brief, the statements by civil society groups hardly offer any improvement. Of the 16 joint statements by civil society groups during the 2019 session of the General Assembly’s First Committee, only three mentioned (or alluded to) the agenda and these dealt with youth, small arms and drones. None of the three nuclear weapons-related statements (humanitarian disarmament, ICAN and Global Zero) mentioned the agenda.

Despite this mixed record of the agenda’s impact, the views of the Secretaries-General can still advance longer-term disarmament objectives by helping to overcome obstacles and by exploiting new opportunities for progress.

**Obstacles and Opportunities Ahead**

The non-paper concluded, “There will be an implementation plan and progress will be monitored.” (73) Fully elaborated, any such plan would no doubt have to anticipate points of resistance and outright opposition, especially given the sweeping scope of the

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5https://www.un.org/disarmament/sg-agenda/en/
6Statements on 18 October 2019 in http://reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga/2019/statements.
proposed agenda. While the agenda addressed a wide range of weapons systems, the sections below will focus mainly on nuclear disarmament, consistent with the theme of this journal.

Economic obstacles will appear as efforts proceed to find funding for many of the proposed activities, such as the convening of conferences, the commissioning of studies, the launching of training programmes, and other such activities. The constraints of the UN budget are legendary, and the tighter the funding limitations, the more intense will be the competition within the UN system for the largest shares of this proverbially shrinking pie. Funds earmarked for X are often sought by removing them from Y, as the budget process takes on the form of a familiar zero-sum game.

The UN and all who support this agenda will also have to address technical obstacles, a point that both the non-paper and Geneva speech implicitly recognize, as apparent in their many calls to engage with scientists and other experts. There are many unresolved problems, for example, relating to the verification of nuclear disarmament and many of these will likely require technical fixes. These include the measurement of precise details about both the production and stockpiling of fissile material, how best to dispose of such material when it is removed from warheads and bombs, how to detect such materials over long distances, how to reconcile the need for transparency with the need to protect nuclear-weapon design information, and other such challenges. The UN itself also does not have a great depth of technical expertise on its staff nor does it actively encourage its staff to receive such training; in many ways (e.g. by its so-called “mobility” policy requiring staff to change jobs periodically) the organization does more to encourage the cultivation and use of generalist administrators rather than substantive expertise.

Yet the greatest obstacles of all will be political, especially in overcoming the anticipated opposition from States that possess nuclear weapons and their close allies. The agenda did not have much to say about the persistence of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence as an obstacle to disarmament or how to overcome it. And while developing countries have long supported global disarmament initiatives, even here there may be some resistance given that such countries will surely have to make their own contributions to this global cause, including in ways that their own militaries and political leaders might not support. These include restrictions on the arms trade, on the use of weapons in populated areas, constraints on military spending, and enhancing accountability for civilian casualties – all prominent elements of the Guterres agenda.

Another political challenge will arise from within the UN organization, in particular as efforts proceed to integrate disarmament into the work of other parts of the UN system. Many of the proposals in this agenda may be derived from existing mandates given to the Secretary-General and UNODA. Yet organizational barriers remain that have prevented deeper interagency cooperation on disarmament issues. There is little evidence, for example, that disarmament is a high priority in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, apart from the collection of surplus or abandoned weaponry after civil conflicts. And despite the revival of a “humanitarian approach” to disarmament, many differences still remain inside the UN among the disarmament and humanitarian affairs and human

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7Two recent UN reports on peacekeeping and peacebuilding scarcely mention disarmament. See: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/446 and https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/07/300615_The-Challenge-of-Sustaining-Peace.pdf.
rights offices, with the latter rarely addressing disarmament issues. Some UN offices are reluctant to address disarmament issues that they view as impractical, unrealistic, utopian, or politically controversial – a syndrome that Angela Kane has called the “disarmament taboo” (Kane 2014a). At some point, new General Assembly mandates will be required to sort out who is to do what, how it is to be financed, and what becomes a priority. We have witnessed the launching of this disarmament agenda, now the job remains of keeping it in flight.

Despite these obstacles ahead, there will also be many new opportunities to advance many parts of that disarmament agenda. The emphasis throughout the Geneva speech and the non-paper on civilian casualties, cities, and the humanitarian consequences of using weapons in densely populated areas, potentially opens up a relatively new subfield in disarmament, namely its relevance to cities. Over 7,900 city legislators from around the world have joined the Mayors for Peace organization and more are joining each year. As elaborated below, city mayors would make a superb addition to Guterres’s list of future “partnerships in disarmament” as would other members of regional, state, and local governmental bodies.

The non-paper recognizes the merits of building on the accomplishments made by regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, including by advancing such an initiative in the Middle East. Scholars, think tank experts, and current and former government officials have also met at the University of Nagasaki’s Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition (RECNA) to explore the possible establishment of such a zone in Northeast Asia as part of a wider regional security regime (RECNA 2019). Both initiatives merit strong support from governments and civil society.

As for nuclear disarmament, and given the persisting resistance of the nuclear-weapon States to new progress in this field, perhaps the Guterres emphasis on dialogue and engagement might be the most propitious avenue to pursue. At present, the world is divided into a group of nuclear-weapon States and a larger group of non-nuclear-weapon States whose typical modes of communication vary from a “dialogue of the deaf” to a “dialogue of the like-minded”. The Guterres proposal to establish some informal platforms or settings for a genuine engagement to take place may well offer some possibilities for progress at least in deepening the mutual understanding of the participants. Perhaps one day the Presidents of the United States and Russia will meet once again at the famous “Hofdi House” in Reykjavik to resume the historic strategic dialogue that took place between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev in 1986.

The Implementation Plan’s Approach to Nuclear Disarmament

The implementation plan appears on the UNODA website not as a stand-alone document, but as a cluster of boxes grouped under the primary headings of the agenda.

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8A recent visit to the web site ([https://www.unocha.org](https://www.unocha.org)) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs found only a single passing reference to disarmament. The web site of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/ListOfIssues.aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/ListOfIssues.aspx)) displays a lengthy list of “issues” that are within its focus and disarmament is not one of them. It is noteworthy, however, that in October 2018 the UN Human Rights Commission adopted a new General Comment (number 36), which concluded that the threat or use of nuclear weapons “is incompatible with respect for the right to life and may amount to a crime under international law”. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CCPR_C_GC_36_8785_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CCPR_C_GC_36_8785_E.pdf).

9For details, see [http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/(as of April 2020)](http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/(as of April 2020)).
(relating to saving humanity, saving lives, serving future generations, and strengthening partnerships). Each box lists the key objectives under these headings. But to see the whole plan, one must open each of these boxes individually to reveal a list of proposed “actions” to achieve the Guterres agenda. Beyond this list, the website also has links to a brief video of Guterres explaining the agenda, various printed materials (a postcard, a pamphlet, and five versions of posters), and other links with information for the media (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs 2018b).

With respect to the actions proposed to advance the nuclear disarmament goals of the agenda, the implementation plan faithfully reflects the priorities addressed in the agenda. This is, unfortunately, both its strength and its weakness, since both the agenda and the plan do not identify specific concrete actions to be taken by the UN or even in some cases by Member States to achieve global nuclear disarmament.

These key documents also employ extensively the use of “soft” verbs that are either ambiguous or open to widely differing interpretations. These include verbs like: facilitate; engage; work with; affirm; and support – all of which appear throughout the implementation plan and the non-paper. While this approach may be helpful in assisting the Secretariat in identifying priorities, it is difficult to define what specific actions constitute “affirm” (or another such verb) or to identify circumstances when this mandate was not in fact performed. This weakens the value of the plan in achieving accountability, since routine office activity can suffice to document “implementation”, quite independently of its actual impact in achieving the specific nuclear disarmament objectives summarized in Table 1. In short, much of the plan resembles a restatement of many of UNODA’s existing mandates, put forward in a revised format. What is missing in the nuclear disarmament section of the plan is linkage between the ambitious goals of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons and “actions” (other than “dialogue and engagement”) to be undertaken at the UN or by Member States.

This shortcoming in failing to identify concrete actions for the UN in the field of nuclear disarmament is not, however, repeated in the parts of the implementation plan addressing other weapons issues. Quite the contrary, the plan elsewhere discusses the creation of new organizational entities, fund-raising necessities, hiring additional staff, and partnerships needed within the UN’s own organization – all subjects not addressed in the nuclear weapon section.

That section also suffered from several easily avoidable omissions or unfortunate phrasings. In discussing the goal of reducing the risk of use of nuclear weapons, the plan offers “Develop a plan” as one of its recommended steps and activities. It calls for UNODA to “work with” the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, but says nothing about cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency or indeed any other office or department within the UN Secretariat, a strange omission given the emphasis Guterres placed on raising awareness within the UN system of the importance of disarmament. The plan justifiably places the primary burden of implementing nuclear disarmament at the doorsteps of the nuclear-weapon States, and recommends that the Secretary-General “directly engage with” these States. And while elsewhere the plan places great emphasis on the importance of data collection and analysis, there is no reference in any of these documents to data collection on nuclear weapons, including the UNODA’s own “Repository”10 of information provided by nuclear-weapon States.

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10https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/repository/.
established pursuant to a mandate adopted at the 2010 NPT Review Conference\textsuperscript{11}. The last data submitted by these States were in 2015, surely an area ripe for improvements. And while the non-paper addressed in passing the newly adopted Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, this was not a subject in the implementation plan\textsuperscript{12}.

There are also some curious inconsistencies between the speech and the non-paper and some other shortcomings. The speech specifically calls upon the United States and Russia to resolve their dispute over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty\textsuperscript{13} (now abandoned) and to extend the New Start treaty, subjects not addressed in the non-paper. While both the speech and the non-paper emphasize the importance of new disarmament “partnerships”, neither refers to the past, present, and future contributions of religious groups. While the non-paper supports the negotiation of a ban on the production of fissile nuclear material for use in weapons, it is silent on both the issues of the production per se of fissile nuclear material (regardless of declared use) and the status of past production (stockpiles) of such material. The initiative supports the convening of a fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament, but offers no insight into how to overcome longstanding political obstacles to such an event, nor does it give any reason to believe that even if such a special session does occur, it will result in a positive outcome, as opposed to the disappointing outcomes of the previous two special sessions (Rydell 2016).

A New Dimension for the Implementation Plan

The Guterres agenda recognizes that mobilizing new constituencies can help in expanding the political base for future progress in disarmament. By helping to bring multilateral disarmament goals down to earth and to acknowledge them at local, city and national political levels, these new urban constituencies can contribute much in strengthening the “political will” needed to advance disarmament. While the Guterres agenda strongly emphasized the implications of disarmament (and the lack of it) for cities, it did not address roles for these particular actors; yet this may well prove to be one of the most useful avenues to pursue in future elaborations of the implementation plan. Given the crucial role of national decision-making in the disarmament field, cities – through their resolutions, petition drives, speeches, conferences, and media outreach – have much to contribute in shaping future impacts of the agenda through state policies.

In terms of practical actions, there are several actions that the UN and the world’s mayors could take in cooperation with other parts of the UN system and with Member States and civil society. In particular, the heavy emphasis in the Guterres agenda on cities

\textsuperscript{11}The specific mandate is in Action 21 of the Final Document of that conference: “As a confidence-building measure, all the nuclear-weapon States are encouraged to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information without prejudice to national security. The Secretary-General of the United Nations is invited to establish a publicly accessible repository, which shall include the information provided by the nuclear-weapon States.” https://undocs.org/NPT/CONF.2010/50%20(VOL.I), p. 24.

\textsuperscript{12}While the non-paper recognized the lack of an international consensus over this treaty, it declared, “the frustrations and concerns that underlie it must be acknowledged and addressed.” (19) Nevertheless, the plan did not address any such responses.

\textsuperscript{13}On 19 October 2018, President Donald Trump declared that the United States had decided to withdraw from this treaty. (New York Times, 19 October 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/19/us/politics/russia-nuclear-arms-treaty-trump-administration.html).
and humanitarian themes opens up new possibilities for action to address the subject of “disarmament and cities”, especially given the horrific effects of using nuclear weapons in densely populated areas. These actions are summarized in Table 2.

Fortunately, the agenda’s implementation plan “is a living document,” according to the plan’s introduction. It acknowledges that “new steps and activities will be added as needed” during the course of monitoring implementation. The plan is clearly a work in progress and will evolve in the months and years ahead. Despite its limitations, the implementation plan still offers a useful framework for guiding future work in this difficult field of nuclear disarmament. “Disarmament and Cities” is an auspicious new avenue to pursue.

Conclusion

The Guterres disarmament agenda cannot be criticized for its lack of ambition. It is an enlightened, far-sighted examination of what the world (and the United Nations) needs to do to advance long-agreed disarmament objectives. Answers to remaining questions

Table 2.: Practical actions for the UN and mayors to advance “Disarmament and Cities”.

| Actions by the United Nations |
|-----------------------------|
| (1) The Secretary-General could host an international conference on “Disarmament and Cities” to draw attention to the unique threats posed to cities by weapons of mass destruction and other indiscriminate weaponry, and the many benefits to cities from progress in disarmament. |
| (2) The Secretary-General could join with selected mayors from all continents in published opinion-editorials on this subject. |
| (3) The Secretary-General could arrange the ceremonial planting on the grounds at UN Headquarters – perhaps at the Peace Bell – of a tree grown from a seedling or cutting of a tree damaged by the atomic bombings at Hiroshima or Nagasaki. |
| (4) The Secretary-General could address major national conferences of mayors, including the United States Conference of Mayors, on disarmament and cities. |
| (5) The Secretary-General could address key parliaments of the world on the comprehensive scope of his disarmament agenda as a means to strengthen international peace and security while promoting sustainable development. |
| (6) The Secretary-General could publish an article on “Disarmament and Cities” in a leading international journal of urban affairs and an op-ed in major newspapers on this subject. |
| (7) The Secretary-General, in the course of his further elaboration of his disarmament agenda’s “implementation plan”, could include specific contributions from the world’s mayors, as well as state and local government. |
| (8) The Secretary-General could include references to disarmament and cities in his annual Reports on the Work of the Organization. |
| (9) The UN Under-Secretaries-General with responsibilities relating to disarmament, development, humanitarian affairs, human rights, and the environment could publish a joint opinion-editorial on “Disarmament and Cities”. |
| (10) The United Nations Security Council, encouraged by the Secretary-General or a Member State, could dedicate a meeting to address the issue of “Disarmament and Cities” in all its aspects. |
| (11) The General Assembly could include the issue of “Disarmament and Cities” on its permanent official agenda. |
| (12) The General Assembly could consider inviting the Mayor of New York, the host city of the United Nations, to address that body upon the commencement of each new annual session. |
| (13) UNODA could encourage the formation of “partnerships” with groups of mayors to advance the urban and humanitarian aims of the Guterres disarmament agenda. |
| (14) UNODA could publish an Occasional Paper or other reports on “Disarmament and Cities”, a fitting subject also for UNIDIR publications. |
| (15) The UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) could convene a forum or other special event focused on “Disarmament and Cities”. |

(Continued)
about how to achieve these proposals will presumably have to await the further elaboration of the implementation plan and actions by governments.

There is in fact a definite need for such a plan, both in identifying concrete actions and in developing standards that are susceptible to gauging progress. An implementation plan will be the best avenue for filling in such details.

In general, both the speech and the non-paper are quite strong in identifying worthy global goals to pursue – both existing commitments and future ambitions – yet the agenda does not explain how to bring national laws and policies in line with formal international commitments of States. This lack of “congruence” may well be the largest obstacle to future progress.

Table 2.: (Continued).

| Actions by the United Nations |
|-------------------------------|
| (1) City governments could join others that have divested themselves of any financial holdings or stake in any entity involved in the production or deployment of any weapon of mass destruction or the means of their delivery. As a starting point for identifying such entities, they could consult the resources offered by the non-governmental “Don’t Bank on the Bomb” initiative. |
| (2) Mayors could work with their city councils to adopt resolutions or proclamations opposing the development, production, stockpiling, deployment or use of nuclear weapons. |
| (3) City governments could adopt policies designating their cities as zones free of nuclear weapons, where such weapons may neither be stored, deployed, transited, nor promoted in any way. |
| (4) City governments could promote wider public understanding and support for disarmament through such measures as resolutions by civic urban groups (labour unions, business associations, chambers of commerce, religious groups, professional associations, environmental groups, and human rights organizations), citizen petitions, musical events, marches, art and poetry contests, races and marathons, educational events at local schools and universities, films, use of social media resources, and the publication of brochures and posters. |
| (5) Mayors worldwide could work with their city councils to adopt resolutions or proclamations opposing the development, production, stockpiling, deployment or use of nuclear weapons. |

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14https://www.dontbankonthebomb.com/nuclear-weapon-producers/.
in disarmament (Kane 2014b). At times, the proposal's emphasis on the “non-use” of nuclear weapons appears as an end in itself, detached from the hard work of actually reducing, eliminating and abolishing such weapons. And finally, the treatment of “new technologies” as an issue of concern to “future generations” sidesteps the many dangers that such technologies pose today in both the weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms fields.

Many of these concerns will, no doubt, be addressed as the implementation plan evolves. None, however, should cast doubt on the path-breaking nature of this new disarmament agenda. It has taken a bold step toward reviving, without explicitly recognizing, the strengths and legitimacy of the longstanding UN goal of general and complete disarmament. Its holistic or comprehensive approach has tremendous potential to rebut the 12 most common criticisms of disarmament, what former UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Sergio Duarte once called the “dirty dozen” (Duarte 2010). It has established a solid foundation for future UN work on the new subject of “disarmament and cities”. Its holistic approach has great potential for expanding the “constituency base” of disarmament, by encouraging more diverse groups in civil society and even parts of the UN system to support disarmament efforts. The agenda is fully consistent with and helps to reinforce the UN Charter, while also offering an eloquent defence of the importance of the rule of law and long-agreed ethical norms and principles. It reaffirms the longstanding role of disarmament as part of the very identity of the United Nations and the extent that the fate of disarmament will have real impacts upon virtually all the UN does as an organization. Its emphasis on reforms needed inside the United Nations also deserves recognition both for its honesty and its wisdom.

While recognizing the vital role of the United Nations in disarmament, the Guterres agenda clearly recognizes that the main agents of change and progress remain at the level of the governments of the Member States. Nevertheless, the UN can influence many aspects of international deliberations on disarmament matters – by helping to set priorities, raising questions, gathering and reporting data, educating the public, providing a forum for smaller countries to voice their concerns and preferences, defending relevant multilateral treaties, and providing a common central forum for the negotiation of new treaties. The Guterres agenda addresses many if not all of these functions.

The agenda also goes far in refuting a common misperception that progress in this field requires the prior resolution of all relevant political disputes: the fallacy that peace is a prerequisite for disarmament. Such a stance neglects entirely the many ways that disarmament itself contributes to international peace and security, by building trust and confidence, reducing threat perceptions, liberating resources for social and economic development, reducing the consequences of armed conflicts, preventing arms races, enhancing regional and strategic stability, and preserving human civilization and the planet from total extinction.

With respect to the titanic challenge of constructing a “global weapons regime”, three alternatives are available. The first is “revolution”, or the establishment of an entirely new set of norms and institutions. The second is “evolution” or the adaptation of existing norms and institutions to meet current and emerging challenges through incremental reforms. And the third is “devolution” or the abandonment of global goals in favour of action at the regional or national level.
While the Guterres agenda is in the evolutionary category, it is certainly not focused just on preserving the status quo. It accepts that, by and large, existing norms and institutions are “fit for purpose”, and that the reforms that are needed can be accomplished within the constraints of our current international system of sovereign nation states. The Secretary-General is calling not for the end of the nation state, but a rehabilitation of the ends of the nation state. Through his words and actions, he has reaffirmed the extent that disarmament remains a “hardy perennial” at the United Nations and a noble part of its identity as a global institution. This, alone, is a great achievement and a welcome contribution in our turbulent times. As the agenda is implemented, its impact will be even larger.

Future efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament will certainly be affected by scepticism or doubts about the efficacy of recommended actions. At times, these concerns can lead to inaction, which is actually worse than well-intentioned actions that fail to achieve a specific result. But this dilemma has long been with us and is deeply part of the reality of day-to-day work in this difficult field, if not life in general. Perhaps Hamlet put it most eloquently in his famous soliloquy:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er, with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (Hamlet, Act III, scene 1)

This offers the ultimate standard for assessing what is undertaken under the implementation plan: does it qualify for the “name of action”?

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Mayors for Peace.

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