

Revisiting the Baruch Plan

Developing a realistic strategy to control the proliferation of nuclear arms.

C. Paul Robinson

Will we ever be able to banish the nightmare of nuclear war? With an increasing number of nations threatening to 'go nuclear', it is easy to conclude that the world is destined to live with the threat forever. Yet more than 50 years ago, the US statesman Bernard Baruch presented the world with a sober, well-thought-out solution. It may be wise to reconsider his ideas in the context of today's world of nuclear proliferation.

It is possible to be optimistic even when we consider the difficulty that has surrounded our attempts to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In retrospect, it is remarkable that the nuclear devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945 — and the subsequent development of far more powerful weapons — did not generate a lasting international conviction that such weapons should never be used again. Sadly, the victors in that war did not immediately focus on either 'learning to live with the bomb' or preventing its further use. After the uneasy alliance of the former Soviet Union with the West collapsed and Moscow successfully tested its own bomb, there was a scramble to seek and maintain the nuclear high ground.

An idealistic start

It was not so at the very beginning. In the Acheson-Lilienthal report of late 1945, Robert Oppenheimer and others suggested turning over nuclear-weapon work to an international agency. As a result, US representative Bernard Baruch went before the first session of the Atomic Energy Commission on 14 June 1946 and proposed a radical plan that would give the United Nations oversight of atomic weapons and nuclear power.

The Baruch Plan marked the culmination of several international 'summit' meetings that were held immediately after the end of the Second World War, each seeking to prevent warfare and the further use of nuclear weapons. Such ideas generated a fleeting euphoria, originating from the hope that this war had been so terrible that the international community would be prepared to go to extreme lengths



Bernard Baruch (right) warned that fear alone would not prevent the rise of nuclear weapons.

to prevent another. This vision is not dead, but slumbering fitfully after the trauma of the cold war.

In the Baruch Plan, the United States was prepared to hand over its atomic monopoly to a new UN Atomic Development Authority. The ultimate goal was the international control of nuclear research and the elimination of nuclear weapons.

"Terror is not enough to inhibit the use of the atomic bomb," Baruch said. "The terror created by weapons has never stopped man from employing them. For each new weapon a defence has been produced, in time."

The Baruch Plan proposals might have gone farther had it not been for the fact that the former Soviet Union was developing its own nuclear weapon capability. For this reason, the plan was not accepted, and eventually, a UN

organization with considerably less power, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), was vested with limited powers of supervision over nuclear activities.

The former Soviet Union tested its first nuclear weapon in 1949, followed in short order by Britain, France and China. Once the nuclear genie was out of the bottle, the idea began to emerge that — in a world of perpetual vulnerability to nuclear attack — the best hope was to find ways that would restrain any nation state from contemplating deliberate and major war. From this was born the concept of nuclear deterrence. The idea emerged slowly, as a 'derived truth' rather than from any thesis, writings or doctrine. It does seem to have worked during the cold war. But how sure can we be that it will continue to work for the future?

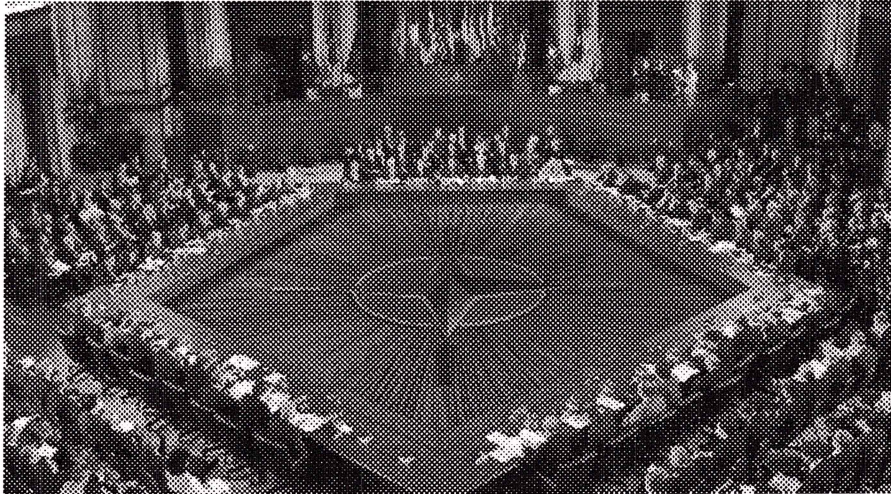
Deterrence carried a cost. It left behind not just thousands of surplus bombs and tons of fissile materials, but the widespread perception of the nuclear weapon as an icon that is symbolic of national greatness.

We saw this way of thinking explode over India and Pakistan. We saw it glimmer and die in South Africa (for domestic reasons) and Iraq (as the result of international pressure). Now, as a number of states consider the prospects of 'going nuclear', we are attempting to deal with new outbreaks in North Korea and, almost certainly, Iran.

It is important that we do not view nuclear deterrence as an enduring solution, but rather as a practical expedient until we can find a route to permanent peace. It does not address the underlying factors that lead to a crisis in the first place. In addition — as we have seen in the Indian subcontinent — it can have the unfortunate result of encouraging nuclear weapon development in nations that think that they are being 'deterred against'.

I strongly believe that the advantage of nuclear deterrence reached a peak with the end of the cold war more than a decade ago, and has been fading ever since. The United States has been leading an international effort to reduce existing nuclear stockpiles,





Can regional alliances, such as NATO, be used to monitor and control the development of nuclear arms?

including its own, and is attempting to stem the tide of nuclear proliferation.

Realistic expectations

Where do we go from here? The nature of humankind is too complicated, and replete with examples of our inability to organize ourselves as world citizens, for us to put much hope in being able to truly 'outlaw' war and aggression any time soon. Thus, unlike the framers of the Baruch Plan, I have never put much faith in the notion that 'complete and total disarmament' is a realizable goal in the near-term.

Instead, the path to peace probably lies in forging alliances along the lines of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This model could then be extended to form multiple-country alliances in every corner of the globe, with priorities in Southeast Asia, then the rest of Europe and Asia, South America, then the Middle East, and Africa.

All indications point to Southeast Asia — where economic development and technical sophistication is burgeoning — as an area with the potential to become a significant problem in terms of nuclear proliferation. Abdul Qadeer Khan, the architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme, centred his illicit manufacturing operations in Malaysia — they included the production of centrifuges for highly enriched uranium. In addition, recent revelations about activities in North Korea and South Korea indicate that they have long been exploring the development of nuclear weapons. I would suggest that, in this respect, they are not alone among nations in this region.

It is worth noting that all NATO nations, including the most recent additions, are capable of building nuclear weapons, but have not done so because the alliance provides nuclear burden-sharing and protection. With time, the vast majority of the nations of Southeast Asia could acquire or build nuclear weapons, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) alone is not sufficient to stop

them from doing so. But a collective security agreement that includes a nuclear alliance could provide a solution. In this region, the South-East Asia Treaty Organization, in which the United States has been and remains a major supporter, represents a forum from which to begin wider security agreements.

One might naturally wonder whether an East Asian 'NATO' should (or could) include North Korea. On this point, drawing from the lessons of history, I am optimistic. Recall that NATO did not originally include all European nations. But given time without war, these nations turned towards democracy and, with the fall of Soviet communism, all applied for membership. A similar pattern could be repeated with regard to North Korea.

As for NATO itself, Russia's recent movements away from certain democratic ideals are major obstacles to its membership. However, these trends are easily reversible. For Russia remaining an ally of the West, rather than risking an adversarial relationship, is essential to a stable future.

Urgent action needed

At the moment, the Middle East presents the greatest challenge to the goal of stitching the world together and arriving at a plan analogue to that of Baruch. After a long history of state-to-state and domestic conflict, aligning its constituent nation states will present a difficult challenge. Clearly, Israel and its supposed substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons would have to be included in a Middle East security pact, rather than remaining (as seen through Arab eyes) an egregious exception.

The go-it-alone mentality that now pervades the Middle East needs to be replaced with a collective security viewpoint. Time is not on our side. I place Southeast Asia first in my pact-making priorities for the reason

that its technical sophistication, as well as its wealth, make it possible for any of its states to acquire a nuclear weapon in a year or two. It would take somewhat longer for Middle Eastern states to reach that point, but only 'somewhat' longer — years, not decades. Let no one doubt that there is real urgency here.

Trying to create a satisfactory non-proliferation regime in the near-term by fixing flaws in the NPT, although commendable, will probably fall short of what is needed. The treaty suffers basic structural problems, as it freezes inequities by naming just five states as legal possessors of nuclear weapons, but all others are not. The serious problem of what to do with the undefined situation for India, Pakistan and Israel — which are not recognized as nuclear weapon states in the treaty — needs to be solved, and soon. The treaty also suffers because it has insufficient checks on cheating, which has led to the emergence of major loopholes that must be closed.

Looking for leadership

In short, I believe the world is not yet ready to address and fix all the difficulties of the NPT, and that it would be naive to try to expand the NPT into a Baruch Plan regime at this time. Instead, we should concentrate on regional alliances, continent by continent, until a worldview of collective security has emerged.

The IAEA currently serves as a forum for debate on nuclear weapons issues for the

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nuclear haves and have-nots. My view is that everybody could become a 'have' by taking part in alliances based, more or less, on the NATO model. Intrusive nuclear inspection will become much more feasible once a global network of collective security agreements is in place.

This practice could result in a considerable reduction of fears concerning security. We could then begin to reformulate the NPT and strengthen the IAEA, so that it becomes an effective nuclear policing entity with worldwide jurisdiction.

The United States originally sought to implement the Baruch Plan through the United Nations, but unfortunately this is not now an organization that can satisfactorily demonstrate security leadership. In addition, there is no reliable mechanism through which UN resolutions can be effectively enforced through military means. Hopefully, international institutions will, with time, gain the level of competency needed to earn the level of trust to allow such a proposal to be seriously considered. In the meantime, there is much we can do to achieve the ideals of the Baruch Plan by incremental means. ■

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