



**Address to Non-proliferation Studies students on the joint programme  
between Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (MIIS),  
Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), and PIR  
Center**

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It is a pleasure to be here and I want to extend my gratitude to the PIR Centre and MGIMO for inviting me today. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs has developed a strong relationship with the PIR Centre, largely through the active work of Dr Orlov as a member of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

I always appreciate the opportunity to speak to the students of today, or rather, the decision-makers of tomorrow. I am especially pleased to be speaking to students in my field – disarmament and non-proliferation. It is my hope that this education will prepare you to become the next generation of thinkers, practitioners and activists on these issues, devising innovative solutions to the complex problems of our work and building the bridges required to achieve them.

Historically speaking, the concepts of disarmament and non-proliferation date back centuries. The international efforts to strengthen the law of war are one of the important origins of disarmament work. Our work today is largely rooted in the terrible human consequences that resulted from two world wars, including the first and thankfully only uses of nuclear weapons in conflict at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We work to ensure the people of this world never have to endure such devastation again.

This humanitarian imperative converged with the international security architecture established by the creation of the United Nations. Disarmament is one of the founding principles of the United Nations. Article 26 of the UN Charter refers to the promotion of “the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources”. It also calls for a system to regulate armaments.

In 1946, the very first General Assembly resolution sought mechanisms to eliminate nuclear weapons and all other weapons “adaptable to mass destruction.”

So when we talk about disarmament in the UN context, we are talking about the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the strict regulation of conventional armaments in conformity with the principles of the UN Charter.

Today, I want to illustrate why disarmament – especially multilateral disarmament – is both relevant and necessary, and the role it plays in building a safer and more secure world for all people.

In doing so, I would like to touch upon 4 issues. The first is “Why disarmament today”, as some of you might argue that it is not the right time when we see the increasingly challenging international security environment. The other three issues are key substantive issues which are clearly a priority agenda to make the world a safer and more secure place.

### Why Disarmament today?

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are core elements of both conflict prevention and conflict resolution – whether we are talking about small arms and light weapons or nuclear warheads.

Some of you may remember that when he took the oath of office, Secretary-General Guterres described a world of new and old conflicts woven in a complex, interconnected web. He described how these conflicts have precipitated gross violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and forced millions of people from their homes.

Sadly, this is a trend of instability that has been growing over the last decade. Around the world, more than 1.5 billion human beings live in fragile and conflict-affected states or in countries with high levels of criminal violence. The number of civil wars in the world has almost tripled over the past decade: from four in 2007 to eleven in 2014.

At the same time, we have seen the rise of vicious non-state actors with global reach. Geopolitical instability is growing and inflaming regional tensions. Military spending continues to rise at unprecedented levels as countries accumulate massive stockpiles of increasingly powerful weapons.

The taboo against chemical weapons has been repeatedly broken in the Syrian Arab Republic – a gross violation of both international law and basic humanity.

Dangerous words have been spoken about the use of nuclear weapons, while nuclear weapon systems remain on high alert, available for launch within minutes. Nuclear-armed countries are modernizing and upgrading their arsenals. Several of these States are also continuing to build up the overall size and diversity of their warheads and delivery systems.

Finally, we are witnessing the rapid evolution of a suite of technologies that could have serious ramifications for international peace and security.

In this environment, there are many who have argued that prevailing global security conditions mean the time is not ripe for disarmament or arms control. They insinuate that disarmament is a utopian dream only possible with the achievement of world peace.

I would argue that this is a shallow reading of the lessons of history.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control play a pivotal role in reducing tensions and providing the breathing space for dialogue. Take, for example, the role arms control negotiations played in easing tensions at the height of the Cold War. The Partial Test-Ban Treaty was made possible only a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the NPT followed a few years later.

As an inherent part of conflict resolution, they can also help facilitate development. This link was recognised in Goal 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which seeks to significantly reduce illicit arms flows to enable socio-economic gains.

At a more human level they can alleviate the indiscriminate suffering caused by weapons. The Conventions against anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions are key examples in this regard.

As you can see, there are diverse imperatives for the elimination and control of weapons: security; humanitarian; and developmental and environmental imperatives.

The benefits of the security imperative are manifest. They include preventing destabilising arms races, prohibiting weapons that could undermine stability in times of crisis, and in preventing armed conflict in crisis-prone regions from re-emerging.

The humanitarian imperative derives from a desire to protect civilians from armed conflict, ensure that wars are fought in accordance with humanitarian principles and prohibit weapons that do not conform to these principles.

In recent times the norm enshrined in the UN Charter for “the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources” has largely disappeared. However, as the SDGs have recognised, the over-accumulation of arms undermines development goals such sustainable growth, life on land and gender equality.

Likewise, the environmental imperative for disarmament is clearly evident. The United Nations recently completed a study on the environmental impact of armed conflict. However, how to address the challenges raised remains an open question.

In order to prevent and address these diverse challenges, the international community has created diverse disarmament instruments.

Broadly speaking, the disarmament and non-proliferation regime is a complex matrix of dialogue forums, transparency and confidence-building measures, and legally binding frameworks. This is reflected in a network of multilateral, plurilateral, bilateral and even unilateral treaties, instruments and arrangements.

Let me turn now to the substance of disarmament areas, i.e., three of the most serious challenges facing international peace and security and how the disarmament and non-proliferation regime is helping, or should help, to address those challenges.

## “Disarmament that can actually save lives”

The first relates to what the Secretary-General calls “disarmament that can actually save lives”, and I would like to mention a couple of concrete issues in this category.

Let’s start with the use of so-called ‘conventional weapons’. By some estimates, between 2008 and 2014, annual casualties from armed conflict grew from fifty-five thousand (55,000) to one hundred and eighty thousand (180,000). These unacceptable numbers are fuelled to a large degree by the global arms trade – both legitimate and illicit.

Global military spending has ballooned to around 1.7 trillion US dollars. Inadequate controls on arms transfers have led to widespread availability and misuse of weapons. I cannot stress enough how important it is to ensure that all rules and norms related to the arms trade are fully implemented.

The Arms Trade Treaty, which entered into force in 2014, seeks to govern the supply of arms by placing conditions on sales, such as ensuring weapons will not be diverted for criminal purposes and taking gender-based violence into account.

One hundred and thirty (130) states have signed up to the ATT, but only ninety-two (92) have ratified so far. If the treaty is to be effective it needs universal buy in and application.

There is an equally immediate need to contain the illicit arms trade, which – inter alia – fuels civil wars, violent extremism and criminal violence. Under the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA), governments have agreed to improve national small arms laws, import and export controls, and stockpile management – and to engage in cooperation and assistance. This too requires vigilance and capacity building to ensure all States are able to meet their commitments.

Ammunition diverted from poorly guarded ammunition stocks are sourced for improvised explosive devices. In many countries, attacks using improvised

explosives now kill and injure civilians and combatants more than any other type of weapon. All countries have a responsibility to address this issue, but those countries with the largest economies must show leadership.

The problem of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is becoming increasingly dire. In 2016, there were more than forty-five thousand (45,000) recorded deaths and injuries from the use of explosive weapons. Of that number, around thirty-two thousand (32,000) were civilians. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, civilians accounted for 92 per cent of casualties.

This is why the effort to seek a political commitment on the use of these weapons is an important step and should be brought to fruition.

In an environment of increasing military budgets, the over accumulation of heavy weapons and regional tensions, the importance of confidence building measures such as the UN Register on Conventional Arms and the UN Report on Military Spending cannot be understated.

CBMs remain key measures to avoid conflict, decrease tension, increase understanding of others' positions and allow information sharing on, for example, military budgets, strategic outlooks and troop movements. This was, and will always be, essential to preventing conflict.

### Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament

Let us now look at the threat posed by nuclear weapons. It is, to paraphrase the Secretary-General, a threat that is not abstract today.

As a specific and acute threat, the six nuclear tests and continued ballistic missile activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as the increasingly heated rhetoric related to the Korean Peninsula, is deeply worrying. The Secretary-General has stood firmly with the international community in condemning the nuclear and ballistic missile activities by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

I have previously stated that the crisis in Northeast Asia should serve as a wake-up call. It is a stark reminder of the need to ensure the global nuclear non-proliferation regime is watertight and able to keep pace with evolving developments.

It is also an urgent reminder of the need for a political solution to seek a comprehensive and sustainable settlement through diplomacy and dialogue. Only by finding amenable solutions at the negotiating table can we prevent a potential humanitarian disaster.

In this context, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear issue is a demonstration of what can be achieved through direct engagement and a shared commitment to dialogue and cooperation in good faith. Sustained commitment by all participants to the agreement will be critical for its continued viability and stability in the entire region.

The requirement for diplomacy and dialogue is as compelling now as it has ever been. More than seventy years after the use of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we still find ourselves in the shadow of an existential nuclear threat. It is critical that we now re-position disarmament/non-proliferation as a key integral part of international political, peace and security agenda.

At a more general level, after decades of leadership and bilateral efforts, especially by the Russian Federation and the United States, nuclear disarmament appears to have stalled.

Beyond the New Start Treaty there are no envisioned negotiations on strategic arsenal reductions. The hard won arms control gains of the Cold War are under threat. Concurrently, modernisation campaigns are underway that are effectively a qualitative, if not quantitative, arms race.

I am worried that we are slipping backwards from the universally agreed goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. I am equally concerned about a growing division over how to achieve this goal, which is leading to a mounting frustration among many non-nuclear weapon States.

This sincere frustration was one of the driving factors behind the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. A justified anxiety about the



devastating humanitarian consequences of the use of even one of these weapons was another important motive.

The TPNW is an historic achievement – as a matter of fact, it is the first multilateral treaty agreed in the area of nuclear disarmament in more than 20 years. It is an important step in building additional norms for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

In moving beyond the development of norms to achieve a nuclear weapon-free world, we will need inclusive dialogue, renewed international cooperation and, above all, practical measures for irreversible, verifiable and universal nuclear disarmament.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains a central mechanism to achieve these goals. Every State party has benefitted from the provisions of the NPT. It is every States parties' responsibility to ensure the Treaty's continued vitality.

This requires full implementation of all the NPT's provisions, including concrete steps in nuclear disarmament. The current review cycle provides an opportunity for the nuclear-weapon States to demonstrate leadership by fulfilling their obligations under multiple Review Conference outcome documents, not least the 2010 Action Plan. I hope it is an opportunity that they will take advantage of.

“Frontier issues coming to our front door”

The final issue I want to touch upon briefly is the impact that a suite of emerging technological innovations are having on international peace and security.

We are bearing witness to an era of unprecedented innovation that is transforming healthcare, education, transportation and manufacturing. However these same technologies can also be used for military purposes, be they enabling – such as artificial intelligence or information technology – dual-use – such as synthetic biology or additive manufacturing – or strictly military – such as long-range precision conventional weapons.

The cumulative effect of these innovations has the potential to fundamentally change how wars are fought, possibly lowering the threshold for conflict and increasingly endangering civilians. In the near-term they pose significant challenges to international law, international stability and human rights.

The international community, including through the UN, is attempting to grapple with these challenges. However, we are faced with a dangerous paradox – on the one hand, we do not necessarily have a clear understanding of the combined impact of these innovations, yet on the other, the application of these technologies moves at a much greater pace than our deliberations.

In other words, we need to get up to speed and quickly if we are to develop and implement the norms and frameworks that will prevent these potentially game-changing innovations from sparking conflict or being used for unintended purposes.

I I have provided a rough outline of the historical role the disarmament and non-proliferation regime has played in preventing war and maintaining international security.

I also hope that I have provided some context as to why the path to peace does not lie in waiting for the right security situation to materialize – it requires constant actions, and indeed increased efforts in the time of tension and crises.

The United Nations will always be a forum for the dialogue, negotiations and norm building needed to maintain international peace and security, including through the essential pillar of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

After all, this was the very reason for which it was created.

Thank you.