



Global Common Goals and Goods: Security and Realism

By Jonathan Granoff

The footprints of science, technology, and human social organization have never disturbed the natural world as intensely as they do today. Their impact has created many threats unique to the twenty-first century, and we must recalibrate the way security is pursued. The threats ignore national boundaries, and they cannot be met without global cooperation and the rule of law. Policies inconsistent with that cooperation must be challenged, and new thinking is critically needed. This essay will address the new challenges and the steps needed to overcome barriers to success.

There are global public goals the cooperative pursuit of which will amplify the capacity of nations to work together and find common ground in addressing issues where current differences preclude critical short-term progress. Some of these goals are issues of critical importance to the quality of life for billions of people. These include: ending terrorism, preventing pandemic diseases, obtaining cyber security and stable financial markets, and bringing about peaceful democratization in transitioning countries. There are other issues that challenge the very existence of civilization. Success in these arenas is imperative. Cooperation is an existential necessity. We must, for example, cooperate universally to achieve success in stabilizing the climate, protecting the oceans and rain forests, and insuring that nuclear weapons are never used. None of these goals can be achieved without establishing international legal regimes.

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On the critically important issues, there are legal regimes emerging at global, regional, and national levels. On the existential threats, the norm currently is ad hoc. Imagine if commercial matters were approached on an ad hoc voluntary basis. The stability that the rule of law provides would be lacking and commerce ground to a halt. Do we have a rigorous treaty for elimination of nuclear weapons, as we do for biological and chemical weapons? No. Do we have a regime to adequately protect the very alkaline acidic balance of the oceans and their biodiversity? No. Do we have an enforceable, adequate set of laws in place to protect the very climate of the planet? No. Is it likely we will achieve these common goals without active advocacy of lawyers?

Achieving these goals, possibly even working cooperatively to move toward such achievements, will constitute global, public, common goods of the highest value. Failure to engage in such a new bold approach, commensurate with the unique challenges facing all of humanity today, will ensure immeasurable suffering. For example, predictions relating to a degraded climate by legions of credible scientists range from disastrous to downright apocalyptic. We know that any use of nuclear weapons will disrupt society in dramatic ways, but few recognize that a mere 100 blasts could push tons of material into the atmosphere, causing a drop in climate and massive famine sufficient to kill billions from starvation and render civilization a meaningless dream of the past. There are over 17,000 of these horrific devices in the world with thousands poised and ready to strike in short order. Moreover, these weapons constitute a wall of threat and fear between peoples and countries where bridges of trust and cooperation are required. The business community has figured out how to work in a coordinated manner, but the "security" community is still working with the mentality of existential adversity. Nuclear weapons exemplify this incoherence symbolically and in reality.

The only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used is to eliminate them universally. There are immediate, tangible steps that must be taken on the road to this goal: lower the political currency of nuclear weapons, as well as their operational military posture of hair-trigger readiness; strengthen institutional verification and monitoring systems to



inventory and control all nuclear-weapons-grade fissile materials; bring the test ban treaty into force; obtain a treaty ending any further production of weapons-grade fissile materials; reduce arsenals to minimal numbers; change the doctrines that guide policy decisions to eliminate roadblocks to disarmament progress; and, in diplomacy and law, establish the clearest framework for a legal, verifiable, enforceable, non-discriminatory, universal ban on these weapons. Without such steps, obtaining the cooperative environment required to address our critically important and existentially imperative concerns will remain problematic. We cannot at once threaten each other with annihilation and expect our pursuits requiring new levels of cooperation to succeed.

Our shared vulnerabilities require a redefinition of security. The new definition must include a global set of legal norms and laws that apply to all nations. In an interconnected world our fates are connected. This obvious truth should compel us to more energetically minimize and ultimately resolve our differences in a spirit of peace and common need. For the sake of our survival, we must succeed in obtaining the clarity of shared goals and galvanizing the creation of policies based on cooperation. We must do this for ourselves today and for future generations as well, for their well-being depends on our conduct today.

Every successful domestic legal system is based on principles of equity. The Golden Rule, in some iteration, is universal to all ethical systems, yet the international security community entirely neglects this lesson, and most glaringly in nuclear weapons policies. Imagine if the treaty banning biological weapons universally stated that while no country is allowed to use polio or smallpox as a weapon, in the interest of strategic global stability, “we” will permit nine countries to stockpile and threaten the use of the plague as a weapon. The world community would declare this an incoherent, unrealistic, and dangerous policy, and this indictment would be correct. That is why we must correct the analogous example in the realm of nuclear weapons. No country should have them, and the failure to establish global norms against them makes stopping their spread very difficult and increases the likelihood of their use, by accident, madness, or design.

Despite legal commitments contained in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the pleas of numerous world leaders—which include nearly all Nobel Peace Laureates, including President Obama; the overwhelming majority of nations; the unanimous ruling of the International Court of Justice; coalitions of powerful voices of U.S. statesmen including Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, Sam Nunn, and William Perry; and diplomats, military leaders, and legions

of experts around the world—progress commensurate with the threat is lacking. Arguments posed by those who extol the perceived virtues of nuclear weapons—that we need them to respond to unforeseen dangers and must maintain enough current nuclear capability to counter a first strike by another country—have not amplified our security at all, but rather have delivered to the world enormous arsenals and no substantive operational plan to get rid of them.

We must place nuclear weapons elimination in the context of achieving the entire menu of existential, global public goods.

Advocacy for the elimination of nuclear weapons has not succeeded. One reason is that the debate is framed within a traditional “national risk vs. benefit” analysis. The debate poses the question incorrectly. It presumes that nuclear weapons provide a unique benefit to the security of privileged states, while also having controllable risks. On the other hand, most arms control advocates argue that the risk is too great and that some having the weapons is a stimulant for proliferation. Even though this analysis is true, this approach to the debate has not succeeded. Counterarguments in the capitals of states with nuclear weapons consistently prevail, and those who extol the value of nuclear weapons box the debate in an antiquated structure.

Thus, in the risk/benefit framework, it is difficult to overcome the argument that these weapons provide a beneficial deterrent against a potential, as yet unrealized, unforeseen, unknown, and unknowable threat. According to nuclear weapon advocates, we have a known, yet manageable risk, and an unknown risk could be far worse. They thereby successfully advance “the solution” of improving the management system by making concerted efforts to stop proliferation.

The reality is that nuclear weapons are a present, existential threat and do not provide national security. In fact, they constitute a pillar in a systemically dysfunctional international security order that is not adequately addressing a set of pressing global threats. Nuclear weapons are a critical logjam for progress behind a large, complex systemic problem: the lack of a sufficiently broad, common security framework that integrates nuclear weapons elimination into the process



of addressing all shared threats to human survival. So long as nuclear arms control practitioners insist on pursuing arms control and disarmament goals outside of a broader framework defined by cooperation, law, and collective security, we will have a very hard time achieving success. We must place the elimination of nuclear weapons in the context of achieving the entire menu of existential, global public goods. This holistic approach to global sustainable security is accurate and realistic and will certainly help build coalitions with others also interested in a sustainable future.

Ensuring a sustainable safe future is a moral imperative. We at GSI propose redefining security to meet critical and existentially imperative challenges. Success will be the obtaining of global, common, public goods of the highest value. These would be achievements worth celebrating. So-called “realists” who persist in asserting that international law, ethical principles in policy, and finding common interests are adverse to the natural order and manner in which

nations must behave are unable to come up with realistic solutions. They advocate the pursuit of a dominance model of security that we believe is unable to generate a sufficiently cooperative international order to respond to real security threats that have no military solution. A new approach should focus on common goals and collective efforts in a manner that is consistent with empirical, honest, and accurate appraisals of our current existential situation and worthy of our highest ideals and most passionate efforts.

What is needed fast is a sober discussion by the world’s leaders in government and civil society to define where nations’ interests are harmonious and coherent and can thus be coordinated, where interests are adverse, and where they are simply different. In such a discussion, it would be discerned that we are in a unique moment in history where our common interests and goals far outweigh perceived adversarial postures. We could then begin acting as grown-ups who deal with reality rather than ideas about it. ♦

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