

II. Culture and the Construction of Western Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament Practice

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Introduction¹

The attempt by Western states to construct a global non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament (NACD) regime since the end of the Cold War is typically understood to be a more or less rational response to changes in the nature of the international security order since 1989. On this view, the main threat to the West is no longer posed by an inherently "expansionist" Soviet Union, but arises instead from a more diffuse and generalized risk of "proliferation," understood as the "destabilizing" spread of various types of military technology (especially weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems and certain categories of conventional weapons).² In much of the Western (and particularly American) policy and policy-relevant academic discourse, threats to the individual and collective interests of Western states are assumed to be self-evident. Moreover, it is assumed that Western NACD policies are "rational" and "benign," and Western policy-makers and diplomats often present their security policies as providing the global "public good" of international peace and security. Of course, a corollary is that policies of states that do not support Western NACD initiatives are understood to be irrational and dangerous.

Such analyses pay little attention to the role of ideas, culture or practices in either defining interests or constructing and coping with threats, nor are they sensitive to the ethnocentricity of their underlying assumptions. "Western" or "Northern" approaches to NACD and security-building issues have been informed by a specific constellation of enduring and widely-shared beliefs, traditions, attitudes and symbols that form part of what can be called the "Western security culture." Elements of this cultural "backdrop" or horizon of meaning would include a progressive delegitimization of the use of force to resolve disputes (between certain states or peoples), a commitment to rule of law and governmental (and individual) accountability; a contractual and negotiated conception of relationships (interpersonal and inter-state); an ambiguous (and non-hierarchical) relationship to authority; a scientific and rationalist orientation towards problem-solving; and a religious/ethical heritage emphasizing an individualistic conception of human rights and an often polarized world view. Separately and together, elements of this cultural baggage were invoked or drawn upon to construct the contemporary Western approach to NACD issues, which was mostly concerned with the American-Soviet (and later NATO-Warsaw Pact) arms

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² See, for example, Brad Roberts, "From Nonproliferation to Antiproliferation," *International Security*, 18:1 (Summer 1993), 139-179, and for a discussion of this policy shift, see David Mutimer, "Reimagining Security: The Metaphors of Proliferation," in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 187-222; Michael Klare, *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws: America's Search for a New Foreign Policy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); and Andrew Latham, "Re-Imagining Warfare: The Pentagon's 'Revolution in Military Affairs'," in Craig Snyder, ed., *Contemporary Security Studies* (London: Macmillan, forthcoming 1998).