

Focus: On the Relationship Between Arms Control and Disarmament and Peace

Focus is our column for secondary school students. We welcome your comments and suggestions for future topics.

Here at External Affairs and International Trade Canada we frequently receive letters from students asking what we are doing for peace.

When writing back, we describe Canada's involvement in conflict resolution and peacekeeping through the United Nations. We are also sure to mention our research in arms control verification and our extensive participation in arms control and disarmament discussions and negotiations. We assume, like most people, that there is a relationship between arms control and disarmament on the one hand and peace on the other hand. But what, precisely, is that relationship? Do arms control and disarmament prevent wars? If so, how?

Definitions

First, some definitions.

The terms "arms control" and "disarmament" are often used interchangeably but, strictly speaking, they are not the same thing.

Arms control refers to measures that limit the growth of or otherwise regulate weapons, military forces and/or their supporting activities. Such measures can include restrictions on numbers, types, testing or training, stationing, acquisition and use. The Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) of 1963, which bans nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water, is an example of an arms control agreement. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to countries that don't already have them, is another example. The terms "arms limitation" and "arms regulation"

are sometimes used instead of arms control.

Disarmament refers to the actual reduction or elimination of weapons and/or military forces. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, under which the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to get rid of all their nuclear weapons with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km, is an example of a disarmament agreement.

If weapons or equipment have to be dismantled or destroyed, or troops returned to civilian life, it is disarmament. If not, it is arms control.

Relationship

One might think that the relationship between arms control and disarmament — abbreviated as ACD — and peace is straightforward. If countries have no weapons, they cannot make war. But, as we have seen from the definitions, ACD agreements do not always get rid of weapons; they may just limit them. Besides, short of banning all sticks and

arms race between Great Britain and Germany in the years before World War I probably helped to cause that war. If Country A sees Country B building up its military forces, Country A may fear that it will be attacked, and may decide to attack Country B first to prevent this.

What ACD Can Do

ACD can help make war less likely in a number of ways:

1. By increasing certainty about military capabilities and intentions.

Country A may not know for sure that Country B is building up its military forces or by how much. The fears on which it bases its attack may be unfounded. ACD agreements that provide countries with more information about other countries' force levels and military intentions can reduce unnecessary suspicions. Also, by putting limits on both sides' force levels, ACD can make countries more confident about the course of future military developments.

2. By ensuring a stable military balance.

ACD can create situations where countries have roughly equal numbers and kinds of military forces. Countries are less likely to go to war if there's a good chance the war will end in a costly stalemate.

ACD can also limit or reduce weapons that are "destabilizing," that is, weapons that contribute to the danger of surprise attack or of early attack in a crisis situation. It has been suggested, for example, that intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) based in silos on land are more destabilizing than ballistic missiles based on ships or submarines (known as SLBMs), because they are easy targets. In a crisis, a

Do arms control and disarmament prevent wars?

stones, it seems reasonable to assume that countries determined to go to war can find some means to do so regardless of restrictions on weapons. Even the United Nations' concept of "general and complete disarmament" allows countries to keep enough military forces and weapons to maintain internal order. Does this mean that ACD has no relationship to peace?

Not exactly. Weapons are not the sole cause of war, but they can contribute to its likelihood. Increases in military strength can create suspicions and tensions that may lead to war. The naval