The risks of catastrophic wars are directly related to the motivations and capabilities of states, including the types of weapons that are available to conduct such wars. Disarmament, however, is rarely the focus of serious scholarly analysis these days. Many academics and journalists are devoting far more attention to "arms control," "nonproliferation," "managed proliferation," and, most recently, "counter-proliferation." These are also the terms that now adorn the doors in the official corridors of the great powers. Though disarmament is a respected topic in policy rhetoric, it is all too often trivialized in policy implementation.

One reason may be that the term "disarmament" is badly misunderstood. It is at times unjustly associated with utopian idealism or naïveté about world affairs, including the role of war and conflict in international relations. At other times it is seen simply as a discriminatory policy, something that one party does to another, such as the act of disarming a vanquished foe after a war. It is even at times blamed for some historical calamities, such as the alleged failure of disarmament initiatives to prevent the two world wars. It is notoriously underfunded compared to its counterpart-armament-yet it is blamed for being weak.

Disarmament is, in short, a subject that merits closer examination, for it potentially offers much more than merely the reduction or elimination of munitions, the customary definition found in a dictionary. The better this potential is understood, the greater will be the prospects for sustaining disarmament as a goal of national policy and as a priority for the work of international organizations. And ultimately, the prospects for achieving world peace, economic and social development, and a healthy environment will increase as well.

**Historical Context**

The international community-including both nation-states and the people their leaders represent—has been turning to the United Nations for help in advancing global disarmament objectives since the UN Charter was signed in 1945. Unlike the Covenant of the League of Nations, which did not mention the term explicitly, the Charter refers twice (in Articles 11 and 47) to
disarmament as among the United Nations's important goals. Yet it is important to recognize that the Charter does not call for the total elimination of all weapons. The term "general and complete disarmament"—first coined in 1927 by Maxime Litvinoff and currently cited in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in the Final Document of the General Assembly's first Special Session on Disarmament in 1978, and in other international agreements—does not appear in the Charter.

On the contrary, the Charter explicitly recognizes a persistent need for some arms for some purposes. The primary goal of the Charter, which was drafted in the closing months of World War II, was "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." The rest of the Charter essentially provided the architecture to accomplish that fundamental aim. This framework rested on the explicit understanding that armed force may at times be needed to enforce the peace. Thus one finds in the Charter not only the "inherent right of individual and collective self-defence" (Article 51) but also the recognition that "armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest" (Preamble). The Charter also authorizes the Security Council to take action with respect to "threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression" (Chapter VII); this authority specifically includes the use of armed force to maintain or restore international peace and security (Article 42). Article 47 created a Military Staff Committee consisting of the Chiefs of Staff of the permanent members of the Security Council to advise the Council and to assist it in making "plans for the application of armed force" (Article 46). These are hardly terms that envisage a world devoid of arms or that fail to recognize the reality of armed force in world affairs.

Furthermore, the Charter's words on the subject of armed force and disarmament were not written on a blank slate in 1945. The treaty language was the product of an evolving process of international law and organization going back hundreds of years, a process driven by an interest shared by the world's leaders in developing methods to keep military conflicts within certain bounds of agreed conduct. Under the laws of war, for example, states are obliged to distinguish between civilians and combatants in the conduct of their hostilities. States learned long ago that it was both a moral imperative and a benefit to their collective self-interests to regulate their behavior within a framework of binding norms and obligations, especially in the conduct of armed conflicts. The fact that such constraints have been violated only suggests that this evolving process is not yet complete.

Crafted in the wake of World War I, the primary goal of the League of Nations with respect to armaments was rather modest: its mission was "the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations" (Article 8). Thus even the League, whose repeated inability to enforce peace in the interwar period is well recognized, did not aspire to create a weapons-free world. It dealt as best as it could with the realities of its time, and its failures were due far more to failures of the statecraft of its members than to its own institutional shortcomings.

Disarmament activities of the United Nations—both of its member states and the organization
itself-today incorporate much of this legal tradition. The Charter is not, of course, the only source of international law governing disarmament activities. Disarmament is different from "arms control" in that it explicitly envisages the physical destruction and elimination of a given weapons system, whereas arms control seeks instead to regulate the conditions of its production and/or use. Disarmament is both a goal and a process. It can be practiced as a unilateral policy (the US decision to eliminate its biological weapons), or it can be registered in bilateral or multilateral treaties, typically focused on specific types of weapons. Under existing treaties, some weapons have been banned outright, for example by the Chemical Weapons Convention and by the Biological Weapons Convention. Some weapons (e.g., many types of conventional arms) remain legitimate for purposes of maintaining domestic order and serving other national-security needs. Other weapons are on the international agenda for total elimination, a goal the international community has repeatedly designated for nuclear weapons.

A Hardy Perennial

Former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold once called disarmament a "hardy perennial" at the United Nations, a term that appropriately captures the theme of persistence in a hostile environment. This persistence is easy to document with respect to the three types of weapons of mass destruction-nuclear, chemical, and biological.

In the field of nuclear weapons alone, the disarmament goal has figured prominently in a half-century of debates in the UN General Assembly and in the resolutions it has approved. The goal has been enshrined in important treaties, including agreements creating nuclear-weapon-free zones in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. Disarmament is a goal of the Seabed Treaty, the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (not yet in force), and the NPT, which obligates its parties "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament."

The International Court of Justice strongly reaffirmed this goal in 1996 by issuing its historic, unanimous advisory opinion that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control."

In May 2000, this obligation was further reinforced at the NPT Review Conference, as a result of an "unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament." As reported in the Final Document of that conference, this statement was accompanied by an agreement on 13 "practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts" to implement that commitment. And in an extraordinary rejoinder to those who would pursue security in nuclear deterrence or in missile defense, the conference reaffirmed that "the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons" (emphasis added).
Yet while disarmament has indeed been a perennial in the landscape of international peace and security, it has also had to survive in an extraordinarily difficult environment. Its critics argue that disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, can never be perfectly verified and hence is a folly. Some say nuclear weapons in one state will deter their use by another. Some go even further, saying that nuclear weapons will also deter major conventional wars between nuclear-armed states, given their shared interest in avoiding actions that may escalate to nuclear war. Others argue that increased reliance on nuclear weapons will allow for cuts elsewhere in the defense budget.

In addition to these conceptual rationales for the acquisition or retention of nuclear weapons, there is also a political and economic engine at work: each of the states that possess nuclear weapons has a powerful institutional support system. The bureaucracies that manage such weapons, the forces that field them, the national labs that design them, the companies that supply their components, the legislators in districts where these components are made, the academics who receive government grants, and even elements of the news media and entertainment industries have helped, each in their own way, to perpetuate the existence of such weapons. And perhaps most tragically, some states continue to attach great national pride to the acquisition or possession of such weapons. Long after the Cold War has ended, one still finds official statements heralding nuclear weapons as "vital" or "essential"-statements from officials who are also hard at work to ensure that no other states adopt the same reasoning.

The Sustainability Factor

Disarmament is much like any other goal of public policy: it is not self-sustaining. It is created and advanced by human beings who are subject to competing priorities, limited resources, technological complexity, uncertainty, stress, risk, and ambitions. The weapons themselves are perpetuated by many of the same types of forces. For the "hardy perennial" of disarmament not only to persist but also to bear fruit, it must proceed from this most fundamental human premise.

Disarmament is a human activity not just because humans engage in it, but also because the costs of its failure are borne by humans, just as its successes are shared throughout the human world. If disarmament yields to unrestrained arms competition and war, the advocates of disarmament will not be the only ones to suffer. If disarmament succeeds, then the advocates of disarmament will not be the only ones to gain new security benefits and new opportunities for human betterment. Disarmament is a vitally important means of advancing human security and the long-term development of societies. It is a definitive example of a collective good.

To weather difficult political environments, advocates of disarmament must operate at several critical levels of policy-making, all of which require considerable leadership-undoubtedly a vital factor in sustaining disarmament both inside and outside of government. Leaders must recognize the need not just to win the war of ideas but also to appeal to hard, practical interests. They must understand the need to ensure that the process of disarmament has the ability to adapt and to renew itself through the ebb and flow of the various seasons of administrations, UN
General Assemblies, legislatures-in short, the ever-changing dynamics of human political institutions. Leadership has its greatest potential when strong political will is combined with institutional tools to implement that will.

A strong institutional infrastructure is therefore another key factor in achieving sustainable disarmament. Advocates of disarmament have much to learn from the past successes attained by advocates of armament. Just as the military-industrial complex has developed the means to perpetuate itself over generations, to adapt its goals and methods to changing circumstances, and to expand its coalition base, so too must the "disarmament complex" match these specific organizational capacities. Moral self-righteousness may well help in motivating human effort; yet morality alone will not suffice to guarantee successful disarmament efforts. Ultimately, disarmament must rest upon a combination of ideas and self-interest pursued and defended by organized institutions. Institutions are a triple-use weapon: they can promote disarmament, aggravate arms races, or perpetuate ignorance and inaction. As human creations, institutions do what humans tell them to do.

Institutions, therefore, count as a means to an end. They are force multipliers for the activities of individuals. They can marshal unique resources, such as talent, funds, and information. They can aid in the education of the public. They can exert a powerful influence not just upon the form and content of domestic legislation but also upon both the process and the likelihood of enforcement. They can serve as arenas for building coalitions among divergent interests and for holding them together over time.

What applies to national institutions applies equally to international institutions, which serve the interests of their member states and, ultimately, the human race. Over the last few years, the world has been witnessing the gradual strengthening of a global institutional infrastructure of disarmament. This can be seen in the actions of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who re-established the UN Department of Disarmament Affairs, while reinvigorating its three Regional Centres in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It is evident in the priority accorded to disarmament in almost all of the gatherings held last year to commemorate the new millennium, including global forums involving nongovernmental organizations, the presiding officers of the world's legislatures, and religious leaders, and culminating in the largest-ever gathering of heads of state and government, the UN Millennium Summit.

There could scarcely be a clearer statement of the international priority of disarmament than that found in the Millennium Declaration issued after that summit. In this historic document, the world's leaders resolved "to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and to keep all options open for achieving this aim, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers."

Such statements are crucial in building a global consensus on basic concepts and on clear goals for disarmament. The aim of global nuclear disarmament is, in fact, no longer contested by any nation-state. The debate now centers on difficult questions concerning the means to achieve
disarmament. Some people view missile defense as a path away from nuclear deterrence, while others see missile defense as the catalyst for a new arms race involving both nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. The global nuclear disarmament effort also does not benefit from the absence of multilateral, binding norms governing the production, stockpiling, sale, or use of missiles, and the absence of such norms in the field of missile defense.

The process of building national and international infrastructures for disarmament is by no means complete. Networks of nongovernmental organizations are just beginning to grow, and many are facing steep learning curves. Disarmament, while an oft-stated goal in diplomatic arenas, has yet to be seriously reflected in domestic legislation, national regulations and policies, and political party platforms. Among all the players identified earlier in this article—the bureaucracy, national labs, companies, legislators, academics, and the news media and entertainment industries—each must carry a heavier load for disarmament to prevail as a method of advancing human security.

Given the extraordinary dividends—security, economic, and environmental—that disarmament offers humanity, it follows logically that public education may well be the key to its ultimate success. This is the third and surely one of the most important factors that will determine the fate of disarmament. The 20 members of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters surely think so, for it was a theme stressed heavily in their deliberations last year. Building on this theme, the UN General Assembly approved Resolution 55/33E on November 20, 2000, requesting that over the next two years the secretary-general prepare a study on education in the fields of disarmament and nonproliferation.

An educated citizenry is the best ally for meeting the challenge of sustainable disarmament—the people vote, pay taxes, and have numerous ways of making their views known to political leaders. They can fight to enhance oversight and accountability and motivate their leaders to lead and to support leadership initiatives.

Charting Future Policy

In 1998, the Brookings Institution reported that the historical cost of the US nuclear-weapons program—including development, manufacturing, maintenance, retirement, and cleanup expenses—was around US$5.5 trillion. Environmental remediation costs alone are staggering, and if remediation efforts fail or if there is a new environmental catastrophe, these costs may well prove to be grossly underestimated. Though we may not know the exact cost, we can easily appreciate that as high as these costs have been, they would pale in comparison to the costs that would be incurred should competitive national nuclear armaments culminate in a regional or a nuclear war.

Unfortunately, there have been no similarly detailed "audits" of the rest of the world's nuclear-weapons programs, few of which are noted for their transparency. No one can state the exact opportunity cost of all this investment. No one knows precisely how many other social and
economic goals might have been achieved with this largesse, with additional benefits for international peace and security. Nor can one confirm the alleged benefits of such expenditures, given the notorious difficulty of attributing the prevention of nuclear war to nuclear deterrence.

Yet with good leadership, strong institutions, and quality education, disarmament will grow both in importance and in popularity over the years ahead. The fate of disarmament is where it has always been: in the hands of the people.