

**eDiscussion Summary on Non-Proliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament  
Policy Research Division, Foreign Affairs Canada  
December 2006**

From September 25th to December 1st, 2006, Canadians were invited to share their views on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament (NACD). Participants were provided with numerous on-line resources to foster clear and informed discussion. There were a total of one hundred and sixty postings to the eDiscussion.

Several questions were posed to participants on different themes related to non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament by policy makers at Foreign Affairs to guide and frame the eDiscussion. The main points raised in relation to these themes are summarized below:

### **Nuclear Non-Proliferation**

#### **I. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) generated a great deal of discussion among participants. Many participants recognized the importance of the NPT, even though the Treaty has not achieved all its goals. Overall, participants thought it necessary to see all signatory countries commit to their obligations and suggested that those outside the Treaty join it.

Participants proposed more control and enforcement over access to technology and expertise to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. However, others thought it better to address the root causes of nuclear weapon acquisition. Many noted the problem of the NPT entrenching the nuclear warhead “haves” from the “have nots” but some did not believe that the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons was desirable or likely. The balance of power generated by the presence of nuclear weapons was cited as a reason to keep these weapons and argued that the disarmament of the five nuclear powers inside the NPT would never occur.

#### **II. The North Korean Nuclear Crisis**

Many participants thought the neglect of those inside the NPT to commit to their obligations has been a contributing factor to the recent North Korean nuclear crisis. It was noted that this situation has created cyclical effects where those who do not possess nuclear weapons feel threatened and thus seek a nuclear capability for leverage with nuclear weapons states.

Participants disagreed on how Canada should react to this crisis. Sanctions against North Korea were supported by some, but others thought it would worsen the situation by adversely affecting the population and further isolating the regime. It was stated that US foreign policy has been counter-productive by sending mixed messages to Pyongyang and that the blatant refusal of bilateral negotiations between the US and the DPRK were responsible for escalating the crisis. Participants agreed that diplomacy was the only way forward and some suggested that a “carrot for carrot” framework be drawn up and economic ties re-established.

#### **III. Canada's role in nuclear disarmament**

In terms of Canada's role in nuclear disarmament, participants agreed that Canada should work towards non-proliferation. Some proposed that Canada position itself as a world leader in this domain. Some thought Canada should promote the use of diplomacy as the only means to settle inter-state conflicts and work with the international community in the creation of policies and treaties that further the goal of non-proliferation. Others highlighted the importance of Canada's work against the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear technological expertise to reduce the risk of proliferation, especially in the Former Soviet Union. Some suggested that Canada needs to work on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and calls were made to bring A.Q. Khan to justice.

## **Small Arms and Light Weapons**

### **I. The need for disarmament**

Participants did not agree on the need for disarmament, especially among civilians and non-state actors. Some argued that SALW were a tool for self-protection and considered disarmament a mistaken policy whereas others saw SALW as a serious security threat and advocated disarmament.

On the issue of landmines, all agreed that their use should be omitted from warfare. Participants acknowledged the leadership role Canada plays on the international abolition of landmines.

### **II. Measures for disarmament**

Those who proposed to disarm non-state groups suggested means to reduce the accessibility to SALW: tighter border controls, measures to combat illegal trade and international laws restricting the production and the sale of these weapons. Participants brought up the necessity to address the root causes related to the need for small arms and light weapons, given that the destruction of small arms and light weapons will not put an end to conflict and violence.

### **III. Challenges to disarmament**

According to some participants, demand was the main challenge to disarmament. They argued that if the demand for SALW was low, the supply would not be as considerable as it is today. Other participants to the eDiscussion mentioned the growing access to small arms has resulted from free trade and the profitability of institutions such as international banks. It was noted that it was contradictory of western countries to be preoccupied with the ails of SALW when they are the chief manufacturers of these weapons.

Further, there was some debate about the challenges of disarming non-state groups and actors. It was noted that disarming a non-state actor meant choosing a side and participants considered it risky to support a group that might become an enemy in other circumstances.

## **Chemical and Biological Weapons**

Opinions recognized the dangers of biological and chemical weapons in the hands of non-state actors. Some participants considered these weapons a serious threat considering the accessibility to some of their components and the relatively modest resources and technical knowledge needed to create these weapons.

Participants outlined the need for support and verification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Biological weapons were noted to be the most dangerous weapon packing a maximum of destructiveness and availability and it was suggested that Canada needs to be prepared for a biological or chemical weapon attack. One participant wrote that it was not just the DPRK's nuclear program that was problematic but its plausible weaponized small pox program against which its army has been inoculated.

## **Threats to Canada**

Participants were asked what they thought were the main NACD threats to Canada. Non-state and terrorist actors' efforts to obtain nuclear, chemical and biological weapons were a source of serious concern for some participants, as well as Canada's geographic position juxtaposed with hard-line US foreign policy towards Iran and North Korea. Others thought SALW were a threat towards Canadian Forces operating abroad. One participant voiced his concern over the level of comfort with the original nuclear weapon states keeping their weapons despite the dangers of

accidental launch. Another participant thought Canadian involvement in Afghanistan would make Canada a target. Finally, some participants did not feel Canada was facing a direct threat.

**Official response by Foreign Affairs Canada**

This summary of the views received during the eDiscussion on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament is currently being reviewed by policy planners within Foreign Affairs Canada. Their response will be posted on the Canadian International Policy site in January 2007.