NMD AND ARMS CONTROL DEBATES AT THE 2000 NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE

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Abstract

The question of the NMD (Non-Nuclear Missile Defense)/ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty was one of the most controversial one at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Not only Russia, China and France, but also many non-nuclear-weapons states as well as Conference President Abdallah Baali and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan strongly criticized the U.S. plan on the NMD. Because of this sharp confrontation between the U.S. and others, the prospect of the conference had been very pessimistic; and it was afraid that the issue might destroy the conference.

However, the five-nuclear-weapons states found an irredescent phrase on the issue, which permitted the conference to adopt a final document by consensus. In fact, the five nuclear-weapons states shelved the issue because they knew they could not resolve it at the conference and continuing the debates on it would destroy the conference. Although the issue was shelved at the first second week of the second week, it has appeared anywhere during the discussion until the end of the conference. And the issue had a very negative impact on the proceedings and results of the conference.

In this paper, I would like to examine the debates on the issue at the conference, showing how strong the opposition to the U.S. program was and how negative the issue was for the conference.

The Forecast of the Conference

According to the report of arms proliferation, the forecast of the conference was generally pessimistic, because international relations in general, and relation between the U.S. and Russia particularly, have been getting worse and worse in the past few years. (1) Confrontation between the nuclear-weapons states and non-nuclear-weapons states has been a typical pattern at the review conferences based on the very nature of the treaty regime. In addition, at this conference, the confrontation among the nuclear-weapons states was characteristic. This thought would be difficult to adopt a final document because of these double confrontations. Among some reasons behind the confrontations, the most serious one was the issue of the NMD/ABM Treaty.

The Issue of NMD Treaty

Ambassador Abdallah Baali of Algeria made a statement as the president of the conference at its beginning. When he referred to the negative and positive developments in the past five years, he pointed out the “challenge of the ABM Treaty and the intention of the United States to deploy an anti-missile defense system” as one of the negative developments. (2)

Address by Mr. Ko Azan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was more warning as follows. Let me turn to the most recent challenge facing us in the area of nuclear disarmament: the growing pressure to deploy national missile defenses. This pressure is jeopardizing the ABM Treaty - which has been called the cornerstone of strategy stability - and could well lead to a new arms race, setbacks for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and create new incentives for missile proliferation. (3)

Just from the beginning of the conference, the NMD/ABM Treaty has been one of the most controversial issues.

The Nuclear-Weapons States

The United States, the only state which defended the NMD program at the conference, tried to mitigate concerns and defend itself by emphasizing their consultation with Russia and China, justified its program by stating: “The world has changed dramatically in the almost three decades since the ABM Treaty was signed. That Treaty has been amended before, and there is no reason it cannot be amended again to reflect new threats from three continents outside the strategic deterrence regime.” Secretary of State Ms. Madeleine Albright also made it clear that it was not intended to degrade Russia’s deterrent and nor would it have that result. (4)

Military observer of the Russian Federation, Mr. Igor Ivanov, criticized the U.S. program from two aspects. The first is that further reduction in strategic offensive weapons can only be considered in the context of the preservation of the ABM Treaty which is the cornerstone of strategic stability and the compliance with the ABM Treaty in its present form without any modification as a prerequisite for further negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The second is that the collapse of the ABM Treaty would undermine the entirety of disarmament agreements concluded over the last 30 years. (5)

Ambassador Mr. Sha Zukang of China, citing the speech of President Jiang Zemin that so-called missile defense program will inevitably exert an extensive negative impact on international security and peace, as a new round of a new round of arms race among the major powers, destabilizing international efforts of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation,” harshly criticized the intention of the U.S. as follows: “Relying on its overwhelmingly superior strength in economy, science and technology, a certain military power, disregarding the large nuclear arsenals with overkill capability, is vigorously pursuing the development of national missile defense (NMD) system in an attempt to seek absolute security for itself.” (6)

Mr. Hubert de La Fortelle, the representative of France, told: “France attaches the utmost importance to maintaining strategic stability, of which the ABM Treaty is an essential element. It is apparent that the ABM Treaty, concerning the non-proliferation threat, the second of which is agreed for the last thirty years.”

Under this circumstance, during the first week of the conference, it was highly afraid that if the conference would fail because of this sharp confrontation on the issue of the NMD/ABM Treaty between the U.S. and other countries in general and between the U.S. and other four nuclear-weapons states in particular.

Common Statement by Five Nuclear-Weapons States

On the first day of the second week, May 1, the five nuclear-weapons states submitted a common statement, which was a compromise among the five. It dealt with many issues from universality to nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances, safeguards and others. The NMD/ABM Treaty was dealt with in the context of START II, stating: “We look forward to the conclusion of START III as soon as possible while preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability as and a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons, in accordance with its provisions.” (12) This phrase was adopted as it was in the final document. (13)

The phrase “preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty” is irredescent. The U.S. could justify its position by emphasizing the word “strengthening”, because the U.S. could understand that amending the Treaty meant strengthening the ABM Treaty. The other four nuclear-weapons states naturally accentuate the importance of the word “preserving” in order to justify their position. On balance, the U.S. can be said to be able to preserve its position. On this issue, the U.S. could extract a concession from the other four states. As for the price, the U.S. had to make concessions in other issues. Furthermore, the phrase “preserving and strengthening” was turned down because the U.S. had to yield to Russia's demand.

Demand for Strategic Stability

In the statement, the phrase “preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty” was added. In the context of the NMD/ABM Treaty issue had been settled among the five on the first day of the second week, the issue continued to be very hot during the last three weeks. One argument is that strategic stability, whose main element is the ABM Treaty, should be maintained when discussing future measures for nuclear disarmament. In the case of further efforts to reduce nuclear arsenals unilaterally, the phrase “for the maintenance of strategic stability” was added. In the case of further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons, the phrase “in the context of further reductions in nuclear arsenals” was added. In the case of far-reaching arms control measures for disarmament, the phrase “for the maintenance of strategic stability” was added. Finally, in the case of a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies, the phrase “to enhance strategic stability” was added. (14)

On the other hand, the five nuclear-weapons states held the opposite view. They believe that any future nuclear disarmament measures were bound to be one in the same paragraph, which has a common phrase for these measures. (15) The phrase contains the word “based on the principle of diminished security of all”. The phrase “strategic stability” was replaced by “diminished security” at the last stage, but the meaning is almost the same. That is, any future nuclear disarmament measure is conditioned by diminished security for all, and many nations, in particular Russia and China, interpret that modification and abandonment of the ABM Treaty is tantamount to the diminished security.

The other argument is that the prevention of arms race in outer space (PAROS) is more urgent and important than a cut-off treaty. This is the argument by China. There has been a general consensus that the first priority after the CTBT would be the negotiations on a cut-off treaty. The Shannon mandate was once adopted at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, it was widely expected that a clear direction to the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a cut-off treaty would be agreed in a final document. However, the U.S. sacrificed the clear commitment to a cut-off treaty for its demand for the NMD. As a result, China’s argument prevailed and the early commencement of the negotiations on a cut-off treaty became impossible.

Conclusion

The 2000 NPT Review Conference succeeded in adopting almost 30-page final document by consensus. It means a great success of the conference from the viewpoint of many observers whose forecast was very pessimistic. However, we have to judge the success of the conference by examining the contents of the final document. The U.S. attitude to save by any means the NMD program made the U.S. passive in the discussion on nuclear disarmament. As a result, the five nuclear-weapons states agreed the lowest common denominator.

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