**Is the abolition of nuclear weapons achievable? Is it good or bad? – Arjun Banerjee, Pol. Science.**

(**Self-composed essay, no references used**).

This fundamental question reminds of what so far has been a Sisyphean struggle a la Albert Camus for nations to try and achieve. The answer, I would say is yes – abolition is achievable – but a significant amount of political will internationally is required for the same to happen. The political will to rid the earth of nuclear weapons and fissile material must work orchestratedly and in consonance cutting across nations, because of the very basic human nature of mistrust and suspicion. What makes things complicated is that no single NWS would typically be ready to completely give up their weapons first, as the weapons are often a deterrent against enemy country attack, a first- or second-strike capability.

In international affairs, national power projection is a major concern for many rising states. One of the primary ways to do this is to brandish nuclear weapons. The global nuclear scenario is intricately linked. When the US developed their first weapons by 1945, the Soviet Union followed suit in 1949. China followed their lead in the 1960s, India followed China in 1974 with Smiling Buddha/ Pokhran 1 and later in 1998, and Pakistan was not far behind, conducting its own tests in the Chagai Hills. Israel and North Korea for their own purposes are reputed to harbor these weapons too. To balance power, which is a well-known international relations dynamic, no one country would like to be the first one to give up or destroy their nukes. This would potentially leave them vulnerable to enemy nuclear attack. Thus, when I surmise that nuclear weapons abolition is actually achievable, that statement comes with its own fine print. It is achievable, but it does not seem realistic at the current time.

The USA has taken the lead in reaching out to other countries to pursue nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. That is indeed a good way to try and prevent new states from developing nuclear weapons. However, nonproliferation does not do anything to eliminate the nuclear weapons already in existence, and the great majority of them with Russia (inheriting the greatest number almost like a law of primogeniture were in place there) and the USA itself. Not even does arms control, which is the placement of certain restrictions upon the development, production, stockpiling, proliferation and usage of small arms, conventional weapons, and weapons of mass destruction, address the problem of abolition of nuclear weapons.

Thus, arises the question of disarmament. Even with agencies such as the UNODA and UNIDIR functioning full-time, well-known NGOs in the field such as ICAN or Ploughshares Fund, among various others, reputed nonproliferation schools such as CNS Monterey, as well as a plethora of thinktanks such as Stimson, CSIS, Brookings, RAND, NTI, VCDNP, Chatham House, SIPRI to name a few, working in the field and regularly coming up with new research on the destructive potential of nuclear weapons, NWS do not seem ready or willing to give up the nuclear weapons in their possession just yet.

Moving on from whether abolition is indeed achievable to whether it is a good or a bad thing, that would again depend on certain factors – most critically, for which country and when in time. What might be blessing for one country may be malignant for another. If total abolition of all nuclear weapons and fissile material across countries is meant sans any qualifiers, yes, it is a good thing. Possession of nuclear weapons can perhaps be compared to the freedom of possessing guns in society. The very fact that guns exist freely among civilians leads to the higher probability of their usage, including against human targets. Now, when used in self-defense, we can overlook the harm that guns cause. However, seldom is the need of a nation for self-defense so great that nuclear weapons need to be used. Low-yield tactical weapons against military installations is still understandable, but in an age of precision bombing, the use of high-yield explosives such as the Tsar Bomba or the one used for Castle Bravo or even those far less powerful than these behemoths especially against civilian populations, is inappropriate.

Clear differentiation is crucial to keep nuclear energy distinct from nuclear weapons. Nuclear power for energy purposes in developing as well as developed countries is useful if the nations in question have sufficient knowhow to maintain the nuclear 3S – safety, security, safeguards – requirement. The IAEA has a key role to play in this context by conducting their regular technical cooperation programs across developing nations and bringing the nuclear energy wannabes up to par with international best practices. It is important to lookout for countries turning their energy/ LEU programs to HEU/ weapons programs. Terrorist or non-state actor threats today make the abolition of nuclear weapons even more crucial – one slip can have severe negative repercussions – only by virtue of the tremendous destructive potential nukes have. Combined international political will is key to nuclear weapons abolition, even if it means gradually reducing stockpiles to a Global Zero. External and internal pressure on nuclear-armed states from a population aware of nuclear hazards can perhaps serve to hasten this process. After all, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’ Doomsday Clock has been adjusted from five to two minutes to midnight.