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Philosophical Issues in Verification of Weapons Limitation, Reduction, and Nonproliferation Treaties

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Abstract. This article describes some of the philosophical Issues that permeate the belief systems of individuals attempting to craft and/or evaluate the verification components of various weapons-related treaties.

Verification often proves to be a significant stumbling block in developing, evaluating, signing, and seeking to ratify weapons limitation, reduction, and nonproliferation treaties. One part of the stumbling block comprises the varied philosophical assumptions--conscious and unconscious--permeating the belief systems of policymakers, negotiators, and legislators involved in these processes.

Many verifiers speak and act as if they are logical positivists--even if they've never heard the term before. They believe that verification must be built on observation.

The radical logical positivists seem to believe that there must be data "out there" in the real, material world that serve as "smoking guns" and can lead to total confirmation or disconfirmation of a party's compliance with a treaty. They also seem to believe that there procedures that must be rigorously followed that will lead to discovering the "smoking gun" data.

The more moderate logical positivists--while adhering to belief in reality as the material world, the import of observation, and the necessity of rigorous procedures--allow that confirmation or disconfirmation may not be total. Instead, the latter may be partial but approaching totality through accumulation of data.

Unfortunately, significant problems occur with the logical positivist approach to verification. (1) Much of what we observe is dependent on our sensory modalities. Yet through technological advances, we have discovered that there is more to the world than what we can sense. And even with ever-newer technological advances, realms of the world more obviously seem to exist beyond the observable. And, of course, as we depend on technology to broaden our knowledge of the world, we lose our direct experience of this world. By demanding observable criteria, the weapons-treaty developer or evaluator is not being hard-nosed, but soft-headed. Realms of the world are being discounted as irrelevant and meaningless to the detriment of security. The limitations of observation are further illustrated by well-documented illusions--the products of normative human perception--and by the vagaries of observation depending on need state--hunger, need to believe in an enemy, and so on. (2) Building on this last point, we might note that the logical positivists discount most if not all of mental phenomena, because the latter cannot be satisfactorily observed but only inferred. But histories seem to suggest--from the Chankuo Ts'e through The Peloponnesian War to modern journalistic accounts of ethnocentric conflicts--that intentions, fears, beliefs and other mental constructs are heavily involved in security matters. In fact, what about the logical positivists' beliefs concerning observation, the material world, and rigorous procedures? What do we make of these beliefs in light of the positivists' critique of beliefs? What do the positivists make of their beliefs in light of the belief critique? (3) We also must note that logical positivists and other humans do not live their lives as if logical positivism was the case. Our behaviors

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are partially based on hopes, desires, inferences, intuitions, feelings, morals and ethics (that one would be very uncomfortably stretched to confirm through observation and procedure), and nomological networks of constructs having less and less association with direct experience. And even if each of these could correspond with observable data--e.g., anger with the clenching of teeth--then what of the dissimulator? Because we cannot directly observe most of history, does that mean most of history does not exist? Or if history is defined by procedures of discovery, does a historical statement that the Hittites conquered the Egyptians denote the past? Or does it denote only a future of what will happen if we follow certain procedures of history and consult books and artifacts and the like?

In the world of treaty development and evaluation, the verifiers act and always have acted--regardless of their claims--as what we now call postmodernists. They develop, share, conflict over, and deconstruct narratives of reality. Their notions of deterrence, correlation of forces, offensive and defensive capabilities, and destabilization are no different than notions of love and hate. (See Algarabel, S., & Dasi, C. (1996.) Heuristics and memory strategies used by mathematicians. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 83, 41-42; Liu Hsiang. (c. 20/1996). In J. I. Crump (Trans.), Chan-kuo Ts'e. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies; Sargent, R-M. (1997). The social construction of scientific evidence. Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 10, 75-96; Shareef, R. (1997). A Popperian view of change in innovative organizations. Human Relations, 50, 655-670; Thucydides. (c. 405 B.C./1967) In R. Warner (Trans.), The Peloponnesian War. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books.) (Keywords: Information Warfare, Intelligence, Nuclear Weapons, Perception Management, Verification.)