

Committee: DISEC 1

Topic: The question of the return to an arms race in nuclear weapons

Chair: Ella Jones

School: Royal Russell School

Summary

The question of the return to a nuclear weapons arms race has come to the forefront in recent years, particularly with the ascension of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States. On the 20th of October, 2018, he announced that the USA would withdraw from the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-Range Missiles, known as the INF Treaty, which some believe marks the beginning of the end of stable, international nuclear arms control. The ending of the Cold War was characterised by the signing of many international nuclear arms control treaties, the measures of which have been steadily reducing in effect since the 1980's. Though major players in a possible new nuclear arms race would include Russia and the USA, nations such as North Korea and Iran are also alleged to be in possession of nuclear warheads, complicating the international community's drive to reduce the global stockpile.

Essentially, it is in the interest of most nations to avoid entering into another nuclear arms race, as it is generally accepted that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is dangerous and economically unviable. However, advocates of Mutually Assured Destruction would argue that it is in all nation's best interests to possess nuclear weapons in order to prevent conflict, a standpoint that is fairly controversial. It appears as if nuclear arms control is loosening and has been over the past few decades, and many political figures argue that this control should be tightened and reconfigured to secure the safety of the global community.

Definition of Key Terms

Abrogation: The repeal or abolition of an agreement, in this context referencing the USA's abrogation of the ABM Treaty

Mutually Assured Destruction: A US doctrine of reciprocal deterrence with what was previously the USSR, based on the fact that both would inflict catastrophic damage on one another if nuclear weapons were to be used in a conflict.

Nuclear Warhead: The tip of a missile or torpedo that uses nuclear energy in order to explode.

Détente: Easing of tensions, the period towards the end of the Cold War characterised by the signing of arms control treaties.

Nuclear Weapons State: A nation recognised as being in possession of nuclear weapons by the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT.

Background Information

With the ending of the Second World War, hostilities emerged between the USA and the Soviet Union as they were no longer united by a common enemy. Developments in armaments steadily increased, with the two superpowers struggling to match one another with new, more powerful weapons. The eventual end of the Cold War, the period leading up to which was known as détente, brought with it many new measures to secure international arms control. It is the rise and subsequent breakdown of these measures that gives rise to the question of whether the world is about to enter into a new nuclear arms race.

As the Cold War ended, East-West arms control built up into a formidable policy bolstered by international co-operation on treaties (all are referenced in the later timeline and treaties sections), and it seemed as if the arms race was well and truly over. However, whilst the global stockpile of nuclear weapons has dropped significantly¹, the global total being 14,700 in 2018 as compared to some 70,000 in the mid-1980's, problems have come to light over the last few decades.

As mentioned before, Trump's announcement of withdrawal from the INF Treaty does appear to have accelerated the deterioration of nuclear arms control. However, his announcement only really highlights a process that has been ongoing for several years. In July 2014, the USA accused Russia of having violated the INF Treaty, and in 2018 this was affirmed by the USA's NATO allies in the July Summit Declaration. Though the details of the charge are somewhat unclear, the gist is that Russia has developed a cruise missile with a range of over 500 kilometres, a claim that Russia rejects. Russia itself asserts that the USA has violated the INF Treaty in three ways: using banned missiles for target practice, deploying drones that could be considered cruise missiles, and basing a maritime missile defence

¹ Kristensen, H.M and Norris, R.D., 'Status of world nuclear forces', Federation of American Scientists, 2018

system on land. The USA rejects all these charges, and Trump's withdrawal from the agreement has effectively ended the argument.

The tightened arms control enjoyed by most nations since the Cold War is also threatened by nations such as North Korea, which has been declared a Nuclear Weapons State. North Korea's tests of long-range missiles and development of nuclear devices have long been an obstacle in its relations with the international community, particularly the USA, and the nation has resisted dismantling its nuclear weapons programme despite sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council.

From the development of the first atomic bomb to the conclusion of the Cold War, followed by the more recent build up of tensions, the context for the question of a return to a nuclear arms race makes it quite clear that a destructive outcome is not an impossibility.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Russia, formerly involved as the USSR- Russia's long history of nuclear tensions with the USA is pivotal to this question, as the relationship between the superpowers is characterised by their competition in the arms race. The trading of accusations and withdrawal from treaties such as the CFE Treaty in 2015 appears to show a deterioration of relations with the USA, particularly combined with alleged meddling in the 2016 presidential elections. Relations are strained between Russia and many major players on the world stage, including the UK, after the alleged poisoning of Sergei and Julia Skripal in Salisbury, followed by the expulsion of diplomats on both sides.

United States of America- As mentioned previously, competition between the USA and Russia is what fuelled the highly charged nuclear arms race of the Cold War. President Trump's withdrawal from various international agreements, including the Paris Climate Accord, has led to some isolation from other global superpowers. The USA continues to hold one of the largest stocks of nuclear weapons globally.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO- NATO is a political and military alliance who states their objectives to be "collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security through partnerships." The organisation currently has 28 member states, but originally included 10 European states, the USA, and Canada. During Donald Trump's election campaign, he suggested that NATO may now be obsolete, but has made no further comments nor any attempt to leave the alliance.

North Korea- With its status as a Nuclear Weapons State, it is known to the international community that North Korea develops and tests nuclear weapons. It is likely² that North Korea has created materials for approximately six nuclear weapons since 2000, and continues to produce enough plutonium for roughly one bomb per year. However, in recent years it has appeared as if a move towards partial

² 2006 United States National Intelligence Estimate

disarmament is more welcome than before, and the maintenance of a good relationship with the USA appears pivotal to this outcome.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description
1990's	Global nuclear stockpile reduction hits its fastest pace
1996, 8 th July	International Court of Justice advises that the use of nuclear weapons would generally be considered contrary to international law.
2002, June 13 th	The USA unilaterally withdraws from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972.
2002, May 24 th	Russia and the USA sign the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT).
2006, October 9 th	North Korea conducts a nuclear test, provoking international condemnation.
2014	The USA declares Russia to be violating the INF Treaty.
2015	Russia effectively withdraws from the CFE Treaty, citing inequality.
2017, 27 th March	Nuclear ban treaty negotiations begin at the United Nations.
2018, October 20 th	Donald Trump announces US withdrawal from the INF Treaty.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

1972- Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM).

1987- The INF Treaty eliminates all ground-launched missiles with a range between 500 and 5500 kilometres, including both cruise and ballistic missiles.

1990- Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) capped at equal levels the number of heavy weapons deployed between the Atlantic and the Urals by members of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO).

1991- Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START I) reduced the number of strategic nuclear weapons; further cuts were agreed in 2002 and again in 2010 in the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START).

1991- Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) were parallel, unilateral but agreed actions by both the Soviet Union and the USA to eliminate short-range tactical nuclear weapons, of which thousands existed.

1995, 15th December- Southeast Asia declares a nuclear weapon free zone stretching from Burma, to the Philippines, to Laos and Vietnam, covering Indonesia.

1996, 11th April- Officials from 43 African nations sign the Treaty of Pelindaba establishing an African nuclear-weapon free zone, and pledging against stockpiling or testing them.

1996, 24th September- The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty is signed by many nations, including China, France, the UK, Russia, and the US. India refuses to sign.

2017, 7th July- Two-thirds of the world's nations vote to adopt the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As one of the most hotly debated issues possibly of all time, there have been countless previous attempts to solve the issue. The creation of international organisations such as the ATOM Project, which seeks entry into force of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and the limitation of nuclear arsenals, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, an international partnership including 83 nations, demonstrates a great drive towards limiting proliferation as a method of calming a possible arms race.

Attempts to solve the issue take different approaches in their manner of doing so, but international cooperation and transparent dialogue is the common thread to all anti-nuclear organisations. However, as the arms race has been especially heated between two nations in particular, Russia and the USA, their cooperation with each other is often at the forefront of the nuclear debate.

Generally speaking, international non-profits including representatives from as many nations as possible, such as organisations like Global Zero, an international non-partisan group of 300 world leaders looking to eliminate nuclear weapons, seem to be the norm in attempts to solve this issue.

Possible Solutions

In order to avoid a nuclear arms race, experts recommend that the emphasis is first placed on improving arms control between the USA and Russia. The heart of any possible solution to a new nuclear arms race lies in taking effective steps to reduce nuclear risks and tensions, primarily by strengthening existing arms control measures.

In March 2018, President Putin noted that the New START agreement would soon expire, the given date being February 2021. One solution to the collapse of a useful instrument of arms control would be to extend the treaty by a further five years, the threshold length of time that can be agreed between the two countries without any action by the Duma or Congress. If this agreement is not extended, 2021 will bring the first time since 1972 where there have been no limits on the world's largest strategic nuclear arsenals.

A further method of negating a possible arms race would be to address the INF Treaty compliance dispute, mentioned earlier in this report. As both Russia and the USA have exchanged accusations of treaty violations, with the US stating that they would not allow Russia to gain military advantage through the violation of the treaty, it is paramount that further steps should be taken to resolve these compliance disputes.

Focus must also be given to involving all nations in a transparent, inclusive dialogue that works towards a global reduction of nuclear arms stockpiles.

Bibliography

- Smith, Dan. "Are We Heading For A New Nuclear Arms Race." *World Economic Forum*, 2018, www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/are-we-heading-for-a-new-nuclear-arms-race-06bf1940-5034-47c0-833f-99227a964656/.
- Goodby, James, et al. *Obstacles in U.S.-North Korea Relations*. Atlantic Council, 2007, pp. 3–10, A *Framework for Peace and Security in Korea and Northeast Asia*, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03534.8.
- US Legal, Inc. "Nuclear Proliferation Law and Legal Definition." *Nuclear Proliferation Law and Legal Definition* | USLegal, Inc., 2017, www.definitions.uslegal.com/n/nuclear-proliferation/
- Organization, North Atlantic Treaty. "What Is NATO? Free Summary by North Atlantic Treaty Organization." *GetAbstract*, NATO, 28 Apr. 2017, www.getabstract.com/en/summary/what-is-nato/29339.
- Boese, Wade. "Arms Control Today." *U.S. Withdraws From ABM Treaty; Global Response Muted* | Arms Control Association, 2002, www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-07/news/us-withdraws-abm-treaty-global-response-muted.
- ICAN. "Nuclear Weapons Timeline." *ICAN*, 2017, www.icanw.org/the-facts/the-nuclear-age/.
- Countryman, Thomas M., and Andrei Zagorski. "Arms Control Today." *Urgent Steps to Avoid a New Nuclear Arms Race* | Arms Control Association, June 2018, www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-06/features/urgent-steps-avoid-new-nuclear-arms-race.

