



The possibility of global nuclear disarmament

The First General Assembly



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global
Literacy and Enlightenment



Forum: The First General Assembly

Issue: The possibility of global nuclear disarmament

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Introduction

On the 16th of July 1945, the first ever nuclear bomb explosion occurred, when a plutonium implosion device was tested at a site located 210 miles south of Los Alamos, New Mexico. From that day on, the world has lived with a global conflict: (how) do we combat nuclear weapons and why are there so many various opinions?

It is a complex issue that comes with the different interests in having power or global security. Princeton's Science and Global Security program has shown in an investigation, that if a nuclear war starts between Russia and the United States of America, that in a few hours there could be 34.1 million casualties and 57.4 injured people. The fact that this possibility is at force from superpowers, creates great uncertainty among civilians and shows that action needs to be taken.

This research report will provide a summary on how nuclear weapons have developed in the last eighty years and what the consequences have been and could be.

How does our knowledge of history help us in forming solutions for disarmament of nuclear weapons in the modern world?



Definition of Key Terms

Non-proliferation

Referring to efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

Arms control

Managing and regulating weapons through treaties and agreements.

Disarmament

Managing The process of reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons

Deterrence

The use of nuclear weapons as a strategy to prevent attacks.

Proliferation

The spread of nuclear weapons to more nations or groups.

Nuclear weapon¹

A nuclear weapon is a device designed to release energy in an explosive manner as a result of nuclear fission, nuclear fusion, or a combination of the two processes.

Nuclear warhead²

Weapons that have different engineering requirements because they must interface with a launch platform or delivery vehicle are called warheads.

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

This treaty has been signed by non-nuclear states to prohibit manufacturing or acquiring nuclear weapons.

General Overview

The start of the nuclear weapon and overtime development

A nuclear weapon is a bomb or missile that utilises nuclear energy that can cause fatal explosions. It all starts in 1939, when the United States of America (U.S.) established the

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/technology/nuclear-weapon>

²

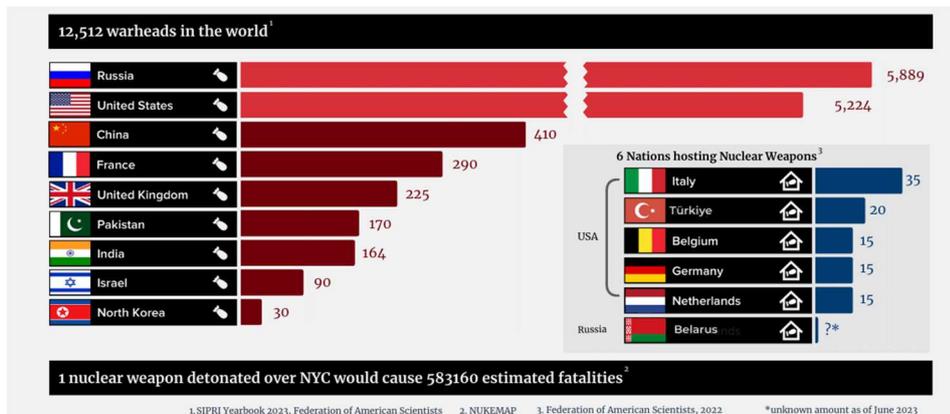
[https://www.acq.osd.mil/ncbdp/nm/NMHB2020rev/chapters/chapter4.html#:~:text=Weapons%20that%20have%20different%20engineering,ADM\)%2C%20are%20called%20bombs.](https://www.acq.osd.mil/ncbdp/nm/NMHB2020rev/chapters/chapter4.html#:~:text=Weapons%20that%20have%20different%20engineering,ADM)%2C%20are%20called%20bombs.)



'Manhattan Project'³. This project was grounded by American scientists, who fled from European fascist regimes. In February 1940, the scientists received 6000 dollars from the state to start a research into nuclear weapons, hoping to exploit the newly recognized fission process for military aims.

Subsequently, the first atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 by the U.S, showing the devastating power of nuclear weapons. The detonation caused 140.000 casualties and later due to radiation even more. Despite the power that leaders become of nuclear weapons, the interest in eliminating them is just as big, maybe even bigger.

Nuclear disarmament is the process of reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons to achieve a nuclear-free world. While the idea is widely supported, making it a reality remains complicated. Efforts toward disarmament began after World War II with the creation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. The UN quickly recognized the threat of nuclear weapons and promoted disarmament. One major step was the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) in 1968. This treaty aimed to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and encourage peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Still, progress has been slow due to global rivalries, mistrust, and the strategic importance of nuclear weapons for superpowers such as the U.S., Russia, France and China.



³ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Manhattan-Project>



Several treaties have already addressed disarmament. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and later the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) between the U.S. and the Soviet Union helped limit and reduce nuclear stockpiles during the Cold War⁴. More recently, the New START Treaty in 2010 continued these efforts.

However, progress has been uneven, and nuclear threats persist. One major hurdle is the idea of deterrence. Many countries believe that having nuclear weapons can prevent attacks by making retaliation certain, but also that having nuclear weapons can defend themselves and destroy the opposition.⁵ This belief, called Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), argues that nuclear weapons can keep peace. While this may have prevented wars, it also makes disarmament harder.

Other obstacles

Furthermore, new technology has also added challenges. Because modern and smaller nuclear weapons could also be used in regional conflicts instead of only big conflicts, and cyber attacks raise concerns about hacking or accidental launches.

Non-nuclear states and global groups do not hold back and keep fighting for the disarmament. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), adopted in 2017, was a big step toward banning nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, none of the nuclear-armed countries signed it. That is why critics argue that disarmament can only work if nuclear powers join in, because they are the ones forming a threat.

Public opinions and activism also matter. Groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) raise awareness and pressure governments. ICAN even won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for its efforts. Despite challenges, there are thus reasons to hope. Because diplomacy and multilateral talks can lower the risks. Measures like de-alerting nuclear weapons and creating nuclear-free zones can reduce tensions, such as Africa is the continent an example of a nuclear-free zone.

So, while treaties and campaigns have made progress, countries still rely on nuclear weapons for security. The risks are too great to ignore, as accidents, proliferation, or deliberate use could cause massive destruction. Disarmament remains as *the* key to stronger peace and safety. And from previous moments, it is a fact that nuclear weapons can be deadly for human beings, which is a crucial factor for solution making.

⁴ <https://www.armscontrol.org/treaties/strategic-arms-limitation-talks>

⁵ <https://www.livescience.com/mutual-assured-destruction>



Major Parties Involved

Russia

According to the Arms Control Association, as of 2024 Russia would possess approximately 5580 nuclear weapons. That would make the country the most powerful when it comes to such possession. An important factor is that they also inherited many weapons from the USSR. However, the tensions of Russia holding such a big ownership of nuclear weapons, was even more intensified in 2019. In 2019 Russia had their signature withdrawn from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The INF had to make sure that a category of nuclear weapons was eliminated that were threatening to Europe in the 1980's.

United States of America

The United States of America was the first country ever to develop nuclear weapons. They are currently the second most powerful nation with 5044 nuclear weapons. They have great tensions with countries like Russia, China, North-Korea and Iran. Additionally, the U.S. stores their warheads also in non-nuclear countries like: Italy, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands and Türkiye.

China

China has approximately 500 nuclear weapons. However, the US Department of Defence made a forecast which concluded that China will probably have a stockpile of about 1500 warheads by 2035 if it grows at the speed, it does now.

Nuclear states

The other six countries that have the disposal of nuclear weapons are France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea.

International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)

ICAN is a non-profit organization that is fighting for the abolishment of nuclear weapons, because they stand for a vision that sees nuclear weapons as the most inhumane and indiscriminate weapons of all. They act through demonstrations and giving online events. And their site also provides very useful information about nuclear weapons⁶.

⁶ <https://www.icanw.org/>



Timeline of Events

August 1942	Manhattan Project established in the U.S.
16th July 1945	U.S. conducts first ever nuclear test
6th August 1945	U.S. drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima
9th August 1945	Second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki
24th January 1946	United Nations calls for elimination of atomic weapons
29th August 1949	Soviet Union tests its first nuclear bomb
October 1962	Cuban Missile Crisis: creating tension to nuclear war
1972 & 1979	SALT agreements
1985-1991	Cold War: enormous nuclear arms race between U.S. and USSR
1991	Fall of Soviet Union: raising concerns about nuclear weapons proliferation
October 2006	North Korea conducts their first nuclear test
2022	Russia veiled threats of use nuclear weapons against Ukraine



Previous attempts to solve the issue

It is hard to solve such an issue, because it requires cooperation and flexibility from each country. That is why the most attempted solutions are treaties, because it establishes obligations between member states and international organizations.

1968: Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

A treaty aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, promoting peaceful nuclear energy, and pursuing nuclear disarmament. While it has been widely adopted, enforcement and disarmament progress have been slow, mainly because of security concerns. Countries want to use their nuclear weapons out of defence, but also because of political rivalry. This makes the issue harder, because it balances the certainty of the treaty out.

1996: Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

This treaty bans all nuclear explosions for testing purposes. Although signed by 185 countries, it has not entered into force because key nations, including the U.S. and China, have yet to ratify it. It needs 44 to be able to formally go into force, but it still needs 9 signatories.

2017: Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

This treaty is the first to legally bind an international agreement to ban nuclear weapons entirely. It prohibits the development, the testing, the possession, and the use of nuclear weapons. However, major nuclear powers, including the U.S., Russia, and China, have again not signed it. And these signatories of major powers are just so crucial to combat the issue, because they are mostly the ones creating the threat in the first place.



Possible solutions

Specialists for nuclear and non-nuclear states

When coming to a solution for the disarmament of nuclear weapons, it is important to keep in mind that all countries have different optics, norms and values. By giving multiple specialists time to elaborate on the consequences of nuclear weapons, the risks of even having them would look much worse. And therefore, promote the idea of getting rid of them, since they would only bring innocent lives in danger. It would also provide a moment for the leaders themselves to question each other.

UN possession

The motto of the United Nations is “*Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet*”, thus the world should be safe for everyone. The unequal division of nuclear weapons among great powers, the tension among citizens and leaders is great. If the UN would be the main possessor of the weapons, no one can misuse their weapons. And they will make sure that in an emergency they can be used to maintain the peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet for all, if danger comes that close.

Establishment committee supervision on nuclear weapons

A full abolishment on nuclear weapons would be the most practical for disarmament, however for such action to be implemented, supervision over all nuclear weapons should be preserved. Because if the abolishment comes through, what is going to happen with the 12,100 nuclear weapons in the world?⁷ If the UN possession is off the table and states have reasonable arguments why they should stay on their soil, UN supervision should be established. They will verify that they are stalled in the right place and not further shaped.

Useful documents

- I. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Manhattan-Project>
- II. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nuclear-weapons-who-has-what-glance>
- III. https://www.icanw.org/new_study_on_us_russia_nuclear_war

⁷ <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/nuclear-weapons-who-has-what-glance#:~:text=The%20world's%20nuclear%20armed%20states,nuclear%20weapons%20by%20the%20NPT.>



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