

Re-Evaluating Nuclear Programs in Non-P5 Nations

Forum: Disarmament Commission

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Introduction

A nuclear weapon is defined as a bomb that derives its explosive power from a nuclear reaction. According to the United Nations (UN), “nuclear weapons are the most dangerous weapons on earth,” having the capability to take millions of lives. To prevent the expansion of nuclear weapons, countries around the world devised the treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The NPT allows five nations to possess nuclear weapons: the United States (US), China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom (UK). Called nuclear-weapon states, these nations are allowed to possess nuclear weapons because they reached nuclear capabilities before the NPT treaty was implemented.

Nevertheless, non-nuclear-weapon states including India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel have ignored the NPT treaty, and have developed nuclear weapons. Re-evaluating nuclear programs in non-nuclear-weapon states will help determine the best course of action.

Background

On August 6th, 1945, the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Since then, the issue of nuclear weapons has escalated tensions between countries around the world. As weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons have the potential to destroy entire cities and kill millions. The devastating impact of nuclear weapons has increased military tensions between nations, and has also raised discussion on how nuclear disarmament/proliferation should be approached.



Nuclear Weapon

Nuclear disarmament is defined as the act of reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons. On the other hand, nuclear proliferation is defined as the spread of nuclear weapons. Critics of nuclear disarmament point to the theory of mutually assured destruction. This theory states that nuclear attack by one nation would be met with a nuclear counterattack, resulting in the annihilation of both nations. Therefore, those who believe that P5 nations should maintain or continue to develop nuclear weapons argue that the possession of nuclear weapons may actually preserve peace. On the other hand, there are those who support nuclear disarmament. They point out the limitations of mutually assured destruction. In addition, they emphasize the potential negative affects that nuclear proliferation may have on world stability.

Problems Raised

The late Kenneth Waltz, a professor of political science at Columbia, supported nuclear proliferation. He believed that “the measured spread of nuclear weapons is more to be welcomed than feared.” Waltz proposed that all nations first prioritize survival. Since nuclear war leads to mutually assured destruction, nations would do everything to prevent a nuclear war from happening. Take, for instance, the unstable relationship between India and Pakistan. This instability led to the Kashmir conflict, sparking wars such as the 1947 Indo-Pakistani War, 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, and 1971 Indo-Pakistani war. However, after both nations developed nuclear capabilities, the region became relatively more “stable.” Waltz noted, “now with nuclear weapons on both sides, India and Pakistan can no longer fight even a conventional war over Khasmir.” Arthur Waldron, a professor of International Relations at the University of Pennsylvania, also contends that nuclear disarmament is largely ineffective, and instead increases conflict. Waldron believes that “arms control is a myth,” and has been ineffective throughout history.

Proponents for nuclear disarmament who oppose nuclear proliferation point out the limitations of mutually assured destruction. For instance, the development of an ultimate anti-nuclear missile, capable of stopping all nuclear weapons, would render mutually assured destruction ineffective. This is because anti-nuclear missiles can intercept nuclear weapons. Thus, a nation possessing both nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear missiles would defy mutually assured destruction. In theory, they would be able to attack another nation with nuclear weapons while effectively prevent a nuclear counterattack with their anti-nuclear missiles. While current anti-nuclear missile technologies are not yet fully developed, nuclear proliferation would pit nations against each other to develop the most effective anti-nuclear missiles.

In addition, the theory of mutually assured destruction makes an important assumption: that the leaders who can press the nuclear trigger will always make sound, logical decisions. Under exceptional circumstances, as is often the case when tensions escalate between nations, leaders may make irrational, unreasonable decisions.

Even if mutually assured destruction is viable, nuclear proliferation still has negative consequences. Perhaps most significantly, the possession of nuclear weapons makes it difficult to keep nations in check under international law. Consider, for instance, North Korea. North Korea’s possession of nuclear warheads makes it ever more difficult for other nations to keep North Korea in check. Sanctions can be imposed, but the ultimate solution: threats of military violence, cannot be legitimately and effectively directed towards North Korea.



Nations should prioritize survival

Overall, the issue of nuclear proliferation, especially in regards to nuclear programs in non-P5 nations, is of extreme importance. A careful analysis of arguments for and against nuclear proliferation will lead to better policies on nuclear weapons. Ultimately, these improved policies will help to minimize the potential negative impact of nuclear weapons.

Key Nations' Stances

United States of America (US): The US government is staunch supporter of nuclear disarmament. From 1994 to 2020, the US military has dismantled 11,683 nuclear weapons. In a recent press release, The White House reaffirmed its stance on nuclear weapons, stating that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” and that “the further spread of such weapons must be prevented.”

Russian Federation: Russia has the largest nuclear stockpile in the world, with approximately 6,200 nuclear warheads. Russia is a strong supporter of the NPT, and opposes nuclear proliferation. Like the US, Russia has reduced its nuclear stockpile. However, further efforts to reduce Russia's nuclear stockpile has been met with resistance.

Republic of India: India has never signed the NPT; thus, it is not recognized as a nuclear-weapon state. Despite being a non-nuclear-weapon state, India has developed nuclear weapons. Its nuclear stockpile consists of approximately 156 nuclear warheads. India maintains a nuclear no-first-use policy, which means that India will not use nuclear weapons in warfare unless another nation first attacks India using nuclear weapons.

Possible Solutions

1. Raise discussion on the effectiveness of current international policy on nuclear weapons between both P5 and non-P5 nations. Policy experts such as those affiliated with governments or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with views against the current status quo may ignite discussion necessary to improve upon current international policies.
2. More clearly define the actions that should be imposed upon countries that withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and develop nuclear weapons. This means establishing a set of escalating consequences (e.g. sanctions) based on the severity of the withdrawing country's actions.
3. Some nations exchange nuclear equipment or nuclear material for purposes of generating nuclear energy. Nations may apply these nuclear resources to develop nuclear weapons. Currently, agreements exist between individual nations to prevent such situations. These existing agreements need to be strengthened.



Nations may apply nuclear resources to develop their weapons

Glossary

Nuclear Weapon: A weapon of mass destruction that is powered by nuclear energy.

Nuclear Proliferation: The spread of nuclear weapons or technology enabling nuclear development

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to nations that do not currently possess nuclear weapons.

United Nations Disarmament Commission: the Disarmament Commission is a commission under the UN General Assembly. The Disarmament Commission considers and makes policies recommendations on issues relating to disarmament.

Mutually Assured Destruction: this is a principle of nuclear warfare that, in theory, should deter nuclear warfare. It states that a nuclear attack by one nation would be challenged with a nuclear counterattack by the other nation, resulting in the annihilation of both nations.

P5 Nations: P5 nations are permanent members of the UN Security Council. The 5 permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These P5 nations are also the only nations “legally” recognized under international law to possess nuclear weapons. Thus, they are called nuclear-weapon states.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is an international treaty that aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology. Signed on July 1st, 1968, the NPT has been ratified by over 191 countries. According to the NPT, only nuclear-weapon states, the P5 nations, are allowed to possess nuclear weapons. This is because these nations possessed nuclear weapons prior to the signing of the treaty on January 1st, 1967. Still, the NPT stresses the importance for nuclear-weapon states to stop further development of nuclear weapons and reduce their nuclear arsenal.

Timeline

1942 – The United States begins The Manhattan Project, collaborating with the United Kingdom and Canada to develop the first nuclear weapon.

1945 – The United States detonates the world’s first nuclear weapon in a nuclear test at New Mexico.

1945 – On August 6th, 1945, the United States detonates a nuclear bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. This marks the first time a nuclear weapon is used in warfare.

1949 – The Soviet Union detonates its first nuclear bomb in a weapon test on August 29th, 1949.

1968 – The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is signed.

1996 – The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty is signed. It prevents nations from



Member states must come up with solutions

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conducting a nuclear weapon test explosion. This treaty has been ratified by 170 countries.



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