Alster Model United Nations

FORUM: First Committee of the General Assembly (DISEC)

QUESTION OF: Debating a legal framework on nuclear ICBM disarmament, aiming at an international treaty

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POSITION: Main Chair

INTRODUCTION

With tensions between countries possessing nuclear weapons running high and Iran enriching its Uranium beyond the 3.67% (90% are needed for nuclear weapons) stated in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or just "Iran nuclear deal")[1] as of the seventh of July 2019, the call for a legal framework on nuclear ICBM disarmament is getting louder every single day passing by.

ICBMs having their origin in the A9/10 - developed by Nazi Germany -, the United States employed leading German scientists in Operation Paperclip in order to develop sophisticated ICBM technology. However, it was not until the test of the Soviet's first thermonuclear weapon in 1953 that the United States research on such missiles gained highest national priority. After different steps in both directions (increase and decrease) during the Cold War, the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) was agreed upon in 1991 and led to a reduction in deployed ICBMs and their subsequent warheads. At the moment all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council have ICBMs with nuclear capability in their arsenals.[2]

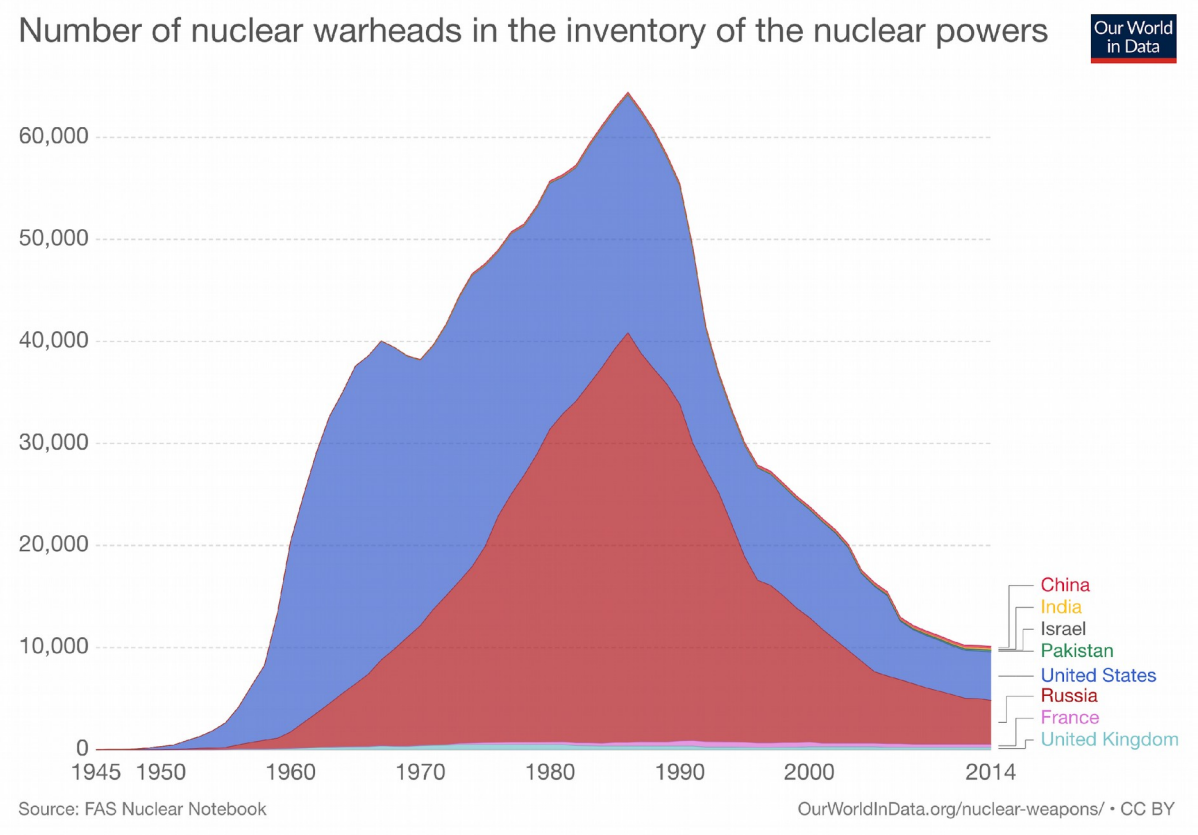
Further, the United Nations General Assembly has acknowledged the use of nuclear weaponry to "bring about indiscriminate suffering and destruction to mankind and civilization to an even greater extent than the use of those weapons declared by the aforementioned international declarations and agreements to be contrary to the laws of humanity and a crime under international

1 https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance
2 https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/united-states-nuclear-disarmament/

law."[3] (those declarations and agreements include e.g. the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and the Declaration of St. Petersburg of 1868).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

First of all, it is important to note that there have in fact been multiple treaties aimed at disarmament. The following graph shows how the number of nuclear warheads (except for the estimated <10 warheads of North Korea) is far from its peak right now. However, this does not mean the remaining warheads do not pose a serious risk to mankind.



Graph 1: Number of nuclear warheads[4]

One of the earliest and most important treaties regarding this topic is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation-Treaty (NPT) of 1968 (entering into force in 1970). This treaty with its three components non-proliferation, the right to peacefully use nuclear technology as well as disarmament currently has 189 member states and the objective to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.[5] However, critics argue it does not stop states wishing to produce nuclear weapons.

Other treaties of great significance include the STARTs (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties). START I, which was signed in 1991 and ratified in 1994 limited long-range nuclear forces of the

3https://www.refworld.org/docid/528c8d1b4.html (A/RES/1653(XVI))
4http://thebulletin.org/nuclear-notebook-multimedia

5https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/

United States and states of the former Soviet Union. Start 2 - signed in 1993 - never entered force but would have committed the United States and the Russian Federation not to exceed 3,500 deployed warheads at any given moment. Further, the New START Treaty - signed in 2010, in effect since 2011 - commits the United States and Russia to reduce their nuclear stockpile by half and is currently in force. However, these treaties do not constitute legally binding international agreements.

So far, there has only been one legally binding international agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons, namely the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) of 2017. This treaty is binding for its signatories, but as of July 2019 only 23 nations have ratified the treaty even though it was passed by the United Nations General Assembly with 122 votes in favour, one against and 1 abstention.[6]

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

ICBM: An Intercontinental Ballistic Missile is - as the name suggests - a missile that can carry a payload over large distances. First of all, it is launched from a ground-based launcher. Secondly, it reaches the orbit and then re-enters the atmosphere. The general flight path can be described as a parabola. Due to this technique ICBMs require a lot of technical expertise, which some countries do not posses. Countries that do in fact have ICBMs in their arsenal are for instance the United States, China, Russia, India and the Democratic People‘s Republic of North Korea (the Hwasong-15).[7]

Nuclear Weapon (Fission): In order to be able to comprehend nuclear weapons, one has to understand *critical mass* first. This is defined as “the minimum amount of nuclear material needed to maintain fission”. An increase of the density of any given material would result in a decrease of *critical mass*. Modern nuclear weapons use explosives chemical in nature in order to create an inward-directed blast, which then compresses the isotopes in its centre (uranium-235 or plutonium-239) in order to increase density and therefore decrease *critical mass.* After reaching *critical mass,* neutrons are injected in order to initiate fission and create an atomic explosion.[8]

6https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/
7https://interestingengineering.com/what-is-an-intercontinental-ballistic-missile-and-how-does-it-work
8https://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-weapons/how-do-nuclear-weapons-work (section 2)

Nuclear Weapon (Fusion): For the notorious hydrogen bombs, the energy released by the fission explosion is used in order to fuse the hydrogen isotopes deuterium and tritium. Due to this additional step, these weapons are capable of releasing enormous amounts of energy.[9]

Nations Yielding Nuclear Weapons: Several countries have nuclear weapons in their arsenals. These are (estimated numbers): the United States (6,500 warheads), the Russian Federation (7,000 warheads), France (300), China (260), the United Kingdom (215), Pakistan (130), India (120), North Korea (<10). Even though not officially acknowledging it, Israel is estimated to have somewhere around 75 warheads in its arsenal.[10]

POSSIBLE ISSUES

Non-signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty

As we can observe with the TPNW, nuclear nations will not easily agree on giving up their power. This is also the case for three of the four non-signatories of the NPT: India, Israel and Pakistan. Especially in case of India and Pakistan as regional rivals it would have to take both nations mutually deciding to reduce their stockpile in a simultaneous way. It is highly unlikely that one of the two states would agree on reducing its stockpile under an international agreement without being convinced that the other one would do so as well.

Deterrence

Especially the United States and Russia state that nuclear weapons are necessary in order to protect its citizen by preventing an attack due to fear of nuclear retaliation. As states before regarding India and Pakistan, in order to agree on an international framework, there would have to be mutual trust in disarmament. However, a reduced ICBM stockpile as well as the removal of nuclear warheads - according to concerns of officials - would make an attack on a (in that case) former nuclear power more likely than it would be now with nuclear capability since retaliation would not be as destructive.

9https://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-weapons/how-do-nuclear-weapons-work (section 2)
10https://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-weapons/how-do-nuclear-weapons-work (section 5)

MAIN COUNTRIES INVOLVED

United States

Due to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the United States has its smallest nuclear stockpile since 1956 at the moment. Furthermore, it has removed eight deployed ICBMs in the process (the United States has the capability to launch ICBMs with a range of up to 13,000 kilometres from any of its launch sites). However, the United States government has made it clear that - even though aspiring a world free of nuclear weapons - they are currently needed for deterrence as well as defence while other countries still possess them.[11]

Russian Federation

Russia's approach to nuclear disarmament is quite similar to that of the United States. This is due to the fact, that the United States and Russia are co-signatories of the STARTs. However, the Russian Federation is working on the modernization of ist nuclear force as of 2019. This includes the development of a new ICBM called RS-28 Sarmat.[12]

QUESTIONS FOR DELEGATES

Does the country represented by the delegate have nuclear weapons?

Does the country represented by the delegate have ambitions of gaining nuclear weapons or increasing its stockpile?

Has the country represented by the delegate signed the NPT?

In case of not possessing nuclear weapons: Does the country the delegate is representing have military ties to countries having nuclear weapons in its stockpile?

Is the country the delegate is representing a country experiencing tensions with another country that has nuclear weapons (e.g. Pakistan/India)?

USEFUL SOURCES

1. Data regarding nuclear weapons <https://ourworldindata.org/nuclear-weapons> [8/07/2019]

11 https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/united-states-nuclear-disarmament/
12 https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/russia/nuclear/

2. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/> [8/07/2019]

3. A/RES/1653(XVI) <https://www.refworld.org/docid/528c8d1b4.html> [8/07/2019]

4. United States policy <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/united-states-nuclear-disarmament/> [8/07/2019]

5. Explanation of Nuclear Weapons <https://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear-weapons/how-do-nuclear-weapons-work> [8/07/2019]

6. Secretary General on Missiles <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/missiles/> [8/07/2019]