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Tip Sheet: The New Nuclear Arms Race

What Is the Problem?

The Trump Administration is supporting a vast and expensive “modernization” of our current nuclear stockpile, a plan that began under President Obama.

A recent report in *The New York Times* describes how the plan’s costs have recently ballooned from \$1 trillion over 30 years to more than \$1.2 trillion. The program will not build new nuclear weapons, but instead replace the missiles, submarines and bombers that would deliver them.

Trump recently said, “Let it be an arms race” during a phone conversation with Mika Brzezinski of MSNBC. He then warned nuclear adversaries that the United States “will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.”

President Trump's plans contradict treaties and stated U.S. policy going back decades that instead seek to limit and roll back American and global nuclear stockpiles. In particular, the modernization plan flies in the face of the international Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) - the global system that stops the spread of weapons and demands that those who possess them work to eliminate them. The NPT has been accepted by 191 countries, including the United States, Great Britain and Russia.

The U.S. is at a major turning point for nuclear policy. What happens today—and over the next four years—will affect the safety and security of everyone on the planet for generations to come.

A New Nuclear Weapons Arsenal

A new generation of nuclear weapons being built by the United States, Russia and China is eerily reviving the Cold War-era arms race. Revisiting this risky relationship among nuclear-armed nations in a world where new technologies and sophisticated non-state actors exist could be far more dangerous than the last time around.

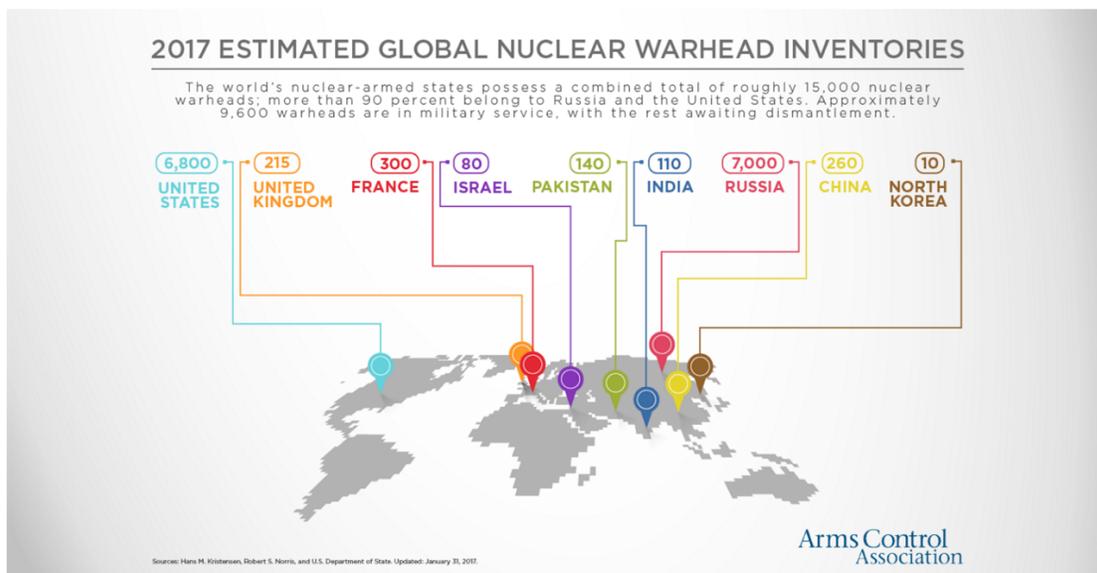
Today, the United States has roughly 4,000 to 5,000 nuclear warheads. Under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), it can deploy 1,550 “strategic” warheads. About 900 of these can be fired within minutes of a presidential decision. If we were to use every weapon in our military stockpile, the United States could drop a hydrogen bomb on every city of the world with population over 100,000. This would almost certainly end essentially all human and animal life on earth.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons among more countries remains a constant danger. The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was a compact between the non-nuclear nations and nuclear-armed nations, with the former agreeing to forgo nuclear weapons development while the latter eliminated their nuclear arsenals. Unfortunately, time is running out on this pact. The last conference to consider the treaty, in 2015, ended with little consensus on progress or goals for the future. The “rules of the bargain” have become less potent and accepted as the nuclear “haves” seem to mock the obligation to disarm, and more nations—if they wish to—could readily produce bombs. This impasse is why there is a new movement in the UN among non-nuclear states to negotiate an entirely new treaty that simply bans all nuclear weapons.

Despite U.S.-Russian agreements that have eliminated some nuclear weapons, the nuclear powers' failure to divest themselves of their full nuclear arsenals and their plans for nuclear "modernization" have led to a revolt by the non-nuclear powers. Fed up with the hypocrisy of the nuclear-armed nations, some have developed nuclear weapons or nuclear capability while others are considering it.

The United States and Russia

Nine countries in the world possess a total of about 14,900 nuclear weapons. The United States and Russia account for 93 percent of them. Since their peak in the mid-1980s, global arsenals have shrunk by over two-thirds. More countries have given up weapons and programs in the past 30 years than have tried to acquire them. However, after more than 20 years of teamwork between the U.S. and Russia on nuclear arms control, many experts are worried that the deteriorating relationship between the two countries poses a great risk to the world.



In just the past few years, North America and Russia have been at odds over the pro-EU demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, the Syrian Civil War, NATO missile defense systems in Romania and Poland, Russian missiles in Kaliningrad, and

numerous other disputes. Both countries are set to modernize and modify their nuclear arsenals in ways that could make nuclear war more likely.

Every nuclear missile system Russia deploys, or will deploy, is potentially capable of defeating America's missile defense systems, including what is currently deployed and what is envisioned for the future. Despite the lack of a successful track record with missile defense systems, Russia is also on the verge of completing the deployment of its own anti-missile shield designed to diminish the effectiveness of U.S. nuclear weapons. Even though these systems are unproven at best, the race to build them adds to the strategic risks.

There is a potential deal to be made with Russia on nuclear weapons, and it doesn't involve trading the lifting of sanctions to succeed. President Trump would do well to accept Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's proposed disarmament agenda, and expand it to include a new ABM treaty and a new disarmament treaty that not only reduces the numbers of weapons on both sides but also would include the elimination of multiple warheads on all missiles, both land-based and launched from submarines.

Other Countries With Nuclear Weapons

At the dawn of the nuclear age, the United States hoped to maintain a monopoly on its new weapon, but the secrets and the technology for making nuclear weapons soon spread. The United States conducted its first nuclear test explosion in July 1945 and dropped two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Just four years later, the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear test explosion. Great Britain, France and China followed. In 1968, seeking to prevent the nuclear weapon ranks from expanding further, the United States and other like-minded nations negotiated the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which went into effect in 1970. Later, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was negotiated in 1996. The CTBT has yet to enter into force, in part because the United States has not yet voted to ratify it.

India, Israel and Pakistan never signed the NPT and possess nuclear arsenals. Iraq initiated a secret nuclear program under Saddam Hussein before the 1991 Persian Gulf War. North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT in January 2003 and has tested nuclear devices since then. Iran and Libya have pursued secret nuclear activities in violation of the treaty's terms, and Syria is suspected of having done the same.

China, India and Pakistan are all pursuing new ballistic missile, cruise missile and sea-based nuclear delivery systems. In addition, Pakistan has lowered the threshold for nuclear weapons use by developing tactical nuclear weapons capabilities to counter perceived Indian conventional military threats. North Korea continues its nuclear pursuits in violation of its earlier denuclearization pledges.

What Are Possible Solutions?

Effective arms control negotiations must include an appreciation of history, a realistic assessment of the present and the ability to project into the future. The solutions are not politically easy but are somewhat straightforward: do not expand any nuclear arsenals. Instead, continue to reduce weapons stockpiles, ideally until they are all gone.

The U.S. can't ignore ongoing threats from Russian President Vladimir Putin to modernize and expand his country's nuclear arsenal. Nor should we idly sit by while North Korea works toward its first fully functional nuclear weapons system, including an ICBM capable of reaching the

U.S., or as Pakistan develops tactical weapons—and endeavors to give commanders the authority to use them on the battlefield.

The tools available to limit nuclear risks—diplomacy, sanctions, embargoes, international agreements and treaties—may not always be completely effective, but they have managed to prevent countries like Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. They've also helped reduce weapons stockpiles by more than a factor of 10. Still, there is much work to do in order to truly eliminate nuclear threats. Most of that work is political in nature, not technical.

As citizens, we all need to have frank and honest discussions—in our homes, at work and with elected officials—about the reality of nuclear weapons, including their numbers, risks, cost and imminent threat to the future of humanity. Every weapon we dismantle takes us a step further away from the worst kind of catastrophe imaginable.

President Trump is known to change his mind. His peculiar fondness for Putin and rapport with Russia places him in a strong position to lead potentially powerful, bilateral diplomacy and arms reductions efforts. Unfortunately, until dangerous new development programs are put to rest, and we dismantle antiquated nuclear weapons and get down to truly low numbers of nuclear weapons, we won't be safe.

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