

NUCLEAR NON-THREAT IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

In the contemporary nuclear era, power relations between the Nuclear Weapon States and others become more troubled due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The use of strategic nuclear weapons is highly concerning, but the case's reality would not allow this possibility. The power struggle dominant powers had experienced over the economic and military aspects combined with the Strategic Nuclear Weapons' ability to mass murder: Even though international norms do not allow such usage, we can easily argue that any NWS willingly goes down that road in the face of interest. The war in Ukraine taught us that higher structures that possess nuclear weapons with better economies dominate other states that lack such a power. The way international relations work, there is not enough institute that guarantees the functioning of a liberal order.

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Russia is widely recognized as one of the major nuclear powers in the world. It possesses one of the largest nuclear arsenals, with an estimated 4,300 nuclear warheads in active inventory as of 2021.¹ This nuclear arsenal includes various delivery systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and strategic bombers. Russia's nuclear arsenal is not only a tool of deterrence and defense but also serves as a symbol of its status as a global power. It has a long history of prioritizing the development and modernization of its nuclear capabilities, which has been reflected in its defense spending.

Russia's status as a regional nuclear power is primarily due to its geographic location, as it shares borders with several other countries and has historically been involved in regional conflicts. In addition, Russia has invested heavily in its nuclear arsenal to project power and deter potential adversaries. As a regional power, Russia's nuclear arsenal is also significant in its relations with neighboring countries. Its possession of nuclear weapons has been a source of concern for some of its neighbors, particularly those in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, who view Russia as a potential threat. This has led to tensions in the region, which have been exacerbated by Russia's actions in recent years, including the annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in Ukraine. While Russia's nuclear arsenal is a significant source of its military power and strategic influence, it also presents a major challenge to international security. The risk of accidental or intentional use of nuclear weapons remains a significant concern. The ongoing arms race between nuclear-armed states, including Russia, seriously threatens global stability. Overall, while Russia's nuclear arsenal is seen as a critical component of its status as a major world power, it is also a source of concern for neighboring countries and has contributed to regional tensions.

Strategic Nuclear Weapons

In the 21st century, international relations are dominated by Strategic Nuclear Weapon deterrence capacity and economic warfare. Since the cold war, SNW's become the primary deterrence and trump in NWS's hands. In the international structure, a lower and upper structure relation exists that almost entirely runs the area. The P5+1 states with legal access to Strategic Nuclear Weapons dominate the global economy and political hegemony. Non-Nuclear Weapon States have restricted access to UN Security Council. According to this assumption, NWSs are the hegemon in the world system, and as the upper structure, both economically and politically dominant determines the lower structure states, which are economically

¹ Arms Control Association, "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," Arms Control Association, January 2022. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat#:~:text=The%20Federation%20of%20American%20Scientists,dismantlement%2C%20as%20of%20January%202021>

and militarily (NW) incapable of how and when to act and create an artificial political area in international relations. NNWS can only hope their military forces will be able to limit the damage an attack can do.² Under the constant threat of NWS, there can be said that there is no democratic structure in international organizations and international relations.

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When we look at it from a realist approach, the relations between states are based on economic concerns. The conflict Ukraine heavily suffers from today emerges from two dominant capitalist powers U.S. and Russia’s conflict of interest with a particular state. The difference between the cold war and the contemporary disagreement between the U.S. and Russia is, the main conflict between the U.S. and the USSR was ideological. USSR’s socialist structure against the U.S.’s capitalist open market economy. After the collapse of the USSR, this ideologic draft disappeared, but instead, imperialist conflict rose. The U.S.-led NATO tries to expand its influence zone to the old Warsaw Pact and USSR countries. As the Washington Treaty’s founding principles suggest, “secure individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”³ The U.S. desires an open market economy for East European States and integrates them into the global capitalist market.

On the other hand, Russia wishes to keep its old influence zone among neighboring states and tries to create a “feeding system” for Russia. At the bottom of the disagreement, we can argue that there is economic exploitation lying. P5 countries are above the law and determine the security of the world. It is no coincidence that the Nuclear Weapon States are the most economically dominant countries in the

² Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate* (New York / London: W.W. Norton Company, 2002).

³ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Founding Treaty”, *NATO*, retrieved https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_67656.htm#:~:text=Moreover%2C%20it%20stated%20that%20NATO,and%20the%20rule%20of%20law

world. As mentioned above, the states' upper and lower structure relation is based on this economic relation. Strategic Nuclear Weapons are the oppression instruments for those who control the international economic structure.

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IAEA

The state's nuclear capacity is not limited to only Strategic Nuclear Weapons. As for nuclear energy, there is another concern that comes to mind: nuclear facility security. International Atomic Energy Agency is the core global governance structure for monitoring, aiding, and assisting the peaceful use of nuclear technology. IAEA is founded on three main pillars that are covered within the IAEA statute. Nuclear safeguards, nuclear safety and security, and the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

In safeguards, IAEA monitors nuclear states to use their technology peacefully and not to use nuclear technology for military intentions. Under article III of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was signed in 1968, IAEA inspects nuclear facilities and material balancing arenas and scientist inspectors report their findings to the IAEA board of governors and send the necessary information to the United Nations.⁴ Those inspections under the model protocol of the IAEA were not detailed and compelling. After the IAEA found a violation in North Korean nuclear facilities, the protocol needed to renew. So, in 1997 Model Additional Protocol (INFCIRC/540) was approved by the IAEA board of governors. This new protocol gave IAEA more authority and space for inspections.⁵ The IAEA is authorized to expand access to information and places in the States under the Additional Protocol. The Additional Protocol intends to remedy gaps in the information submitted under a CSA (Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement). The Additional Protocol strengthens the IAEA's capacity to give considerably greater confidence in the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in such states by allowing the IAEA to gain a far more comprehensive picture of such states' nuclear programs, plans, nuclear material holdings, and commerce.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) actively watches developments

⁴ Elisabeth Roehrich, "The IAEA's Work", *University of Vienna*, University of Vienna Department of History, Vienna/Austria

⁵ IAEA, "Additional Protocol", retrieved <https://www.iaea.org/topics/additional-protocol>

in the country's nuclear plants and provides frequent reports on the situation.⁶ The importance of the Russian- Ukrainian war to the IEAE, is the first war that includes the safety of nuclear facilities inside the war. It can be predicted that in the future, with any chance, of another conventional war, IAEA will be more responsible for ensuring the security and safety of nuclear facilities. The number of nuclear facilities is increasing over time. That means more responsibility for the International Atomic Energy Agency. In fifty years, this international organization would become one of the most important and popular international organizations.

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On 24 February 2022, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was notified by the State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine (SNRIU), in its capacity as a national competent authority under the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident, of the imposition of martial law on Ukrainian territory and an alert at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant via its Incident and Emergency Centre (IEC) (NPP). Since receiving this information, the IAEA has activated the IEC, established regular contact with Ukrainian authorities, and has been closely monitoring the situation at nuclear facilities and activities involving radioactive sources on Ukrainian territory, focusing on the implications for nuclear safety, security, and safeguards.⁷

Concerning safeguards, the IAEA has continued to implement safeguards in Ukraine, including in-field verification operations in compliance with Ukraine's CSA and AP, as well as on the basis of the AIP for Ukraine for 2022. Based on a review of all safeguards-relevant information accessible to the IAEA to date, the IAEA has found

⁶ IAEA, “Nuclear Safety and Security in Ukraine” retrieved <https://www.iaea.org/nuclear-safety-and-security-in-ukraine>

⁷ Summary Report by the Director General, “Nuclear Safety, Security And Safeguards In Ukraine”, 24 February – 28 April 2022, IAEA retrieved <https://www.iaea.org/nuclear-safety-and-security-in-ukraine>

no evidence of the diversion of declared nuclear material or any indication that would cause a proliferation risk.

Russia's Possibility of "Going Nuclear"

Russia's attack to Ukraine might serve Russia's long-term economic and political interests. The catastrophic slowness Russia suffered though, caused the idea of Russia going nuclear. Firstly, we should consider Russia as a great power and President Putin took a calculated risk that was abstracted and sanctioned by the western market. The rapidly growing Asian market has become a lifesaver for U.S.-sanctioned countries like Iran and Russia. To avoid from those sanctions, Russia and Iran negotiated and concluded on an economic level. It can be argued that Putin sees Iran as a future NWS and closes their ties on a regional policy aspect.

Those sanctions are not only affected Russia but the European Union countries too. The escalating energy crisis between the EU and Russia is questioning the EU's dependency on eastern energy sources. The U.S. has not suffered from the EU energy crisis, and the sanctions implemented by the EU are starting to fade away day by day. Without pressuring the effects of full implementations against Russia, it can be said that the international community is not whole and cannot put pressure on a dominant country.

Secondly, this major conflict was caused by Russia's security concerns. Within the official intervention of the west in Russia's influence zone, conflict becomes inevitable. In 1993 Russia changed its non-first use of SNW doctrine. The new military doctrine stated that if there was an intervention in old USSR countries, the military would consider the first-use policy. Without provocation, no rational or cognitive actor would view the usage of SNW. It is better to remember that Nuclear Weapons are not conventional weapons, they are mass murder weapons and there is no turnback after setting off. We can calculate Russia's intentions on Ukraine and what possible outcome they expect. The economic and political long-term expectations would not allow Russia's NW usage. The aftereffect of SNWs is geographically and politically not in favor of Russia. The only purpose SNWs serve in the conflict would be no other than destruction and massively damaging Russia's legitimacy-seeking behavior.

Thirdly, Russia tries to claim legitimacy for its actions on Ukraine. President Putin's discourse "Russia's border 'doesn't end anywhere'". This statement shows how important the influence zone was for Russia and the mentality behind this attack. Russia's 1990-2000 era was turbulent and political loneliness that they thought changed the state policy to aggression. An article written by Putin clearly states

that Russia sees Ukraine as its own part and argue that the west turning Ukraine against Russia, and they will not accept it.⁸ The legitimacy-gaining effort will affect the future of how Russia gains from Ukraine and the relations between the parties. When we add the U.S. and western states' support for Ukraine to the equation, we can see that there is an imperialist economic interest conflict from both sides. If Russia decides to use SNW, that would be against their interest in the region and bring more loss than gain. As a rational actor, in Ukraine's case, Russia would not waste its dominance over an easy win. It also must be said, those assumptions are only binding for the Ukraine case. In the future, it is not certain that Russia or other NWSs will not use SNW. There is a fair possibility that going nuclear would benefit a state's interest. We cannot expect any power to act completely rational. If per se there is no guarantee for military dominant mechanisms to seize power in the moment of weakness. In this scenario, deterrence would fail, and rational deterrence would not work. We can give Nazi Germany as an example. The Third Reich was able to seize the power by democratic elections and controlled today's one of the most systematic and politically rich cultures. This proves that it cannot be expected that a state always acts purely rational. Even they can rationalize the usage of SNW, and that can cause a disaster.

Lessons From the Conflict and Non-Proliferation Regime

It is difficult to predict with certainty whether Ukraine having nuclear weapons would prevent a Russian invasion. On the one hand, possessing nuclear weapons could potentially act as a deterrent and make Russia think twice before invading Ukraine. The prospect of a nuclear conflict would be hazardous and could have catastrophic consequences, so it may give Russia pause before taking such aggressive action. On the other hand, Ukraine's possession of nuclear weapons could also escalate the situation and lead to an even more dangerous and destabilizing situation. It could trigger an arms race between the two countries and increase the likelihood of a catastrophic miscalculation or accidental use.

Additionally, if Ukraine were to pursue nuclear weapons, it could have severe implications for international security and the global non-proliferation regime. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by a new state, especially one in a region with existing security tensions, could have serious implications for regional and global stability. Overall, while possessing nuclear weapons could potentially act as a deterrent, it is not a guaranteed solution and could have serious negative consequences. The most effective way to prevent a Russian invasion of Ukraine is through diplomatic efforts, including dialogue, negotiation, and international pressure.

⁸ V.V. Putin, "On the Historical Unity Of Russians And Ukrainians", *Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library*, 12 July 2021, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/article-vladimir-putin-historical-unity-russians-and-ukrainians>

As one outcome of this conflict, international actors faced a 21st-century nuclear threat. Differing from the cold war, MAD (Mutually Assorted Destruction) was not part of the conflict, and the nuclear threat that came from Russia was a wake-up call for professionals. After the occupation of Crimea, at given time, western powers failed to prevent the invasion coming from Russia. Using SNW as deterrence was a card at the hands of Russia against western powers and a further pressure tool against Ukraine. NNWS desires nuclear weapons for their resistance against NWS, but existing of SNW could cause escalate a nuclear war at any level. Some undesired countries like North Korea or Iran as an NWS could break western pressure on them. On the other hand, a non-rational actor can cause misuse. The war proved one more time how non-proliferation and disarmament important for international-level peace and how the system needs certain adjustments to eliminate the Strategic Nuclear Weapon paradox.