Is Nuclear Deterrence Even Possible Today?

Throughout the Cold War the incredibly intimidating destructive capability of nuclear weapons created a red line that neither the US nor the USSR were willing to cross, which compelled them to negotiating their differences even when the parties were equally reluctant to do so. Regrettably, those days seem to be back, as tensions between Russia and China on one side and the US on the other continue flaring even today. That is why one can safely describe nuclear weapons as a core component of prevention of the next major war.

As it's been pointed out by the director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Renata Dwan the risk of nuclear weapons actually being used these days is at its highest since WWII, which explains why the Doomsday Clock has been set to 11:58 p.m. by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists last January.

While American political figures would try to hush up their reliance on nuclear weapons as a key component of ensuring national security, it nevertheless remains instrumental to Washington's ability to defend itself and its allies. Therefore, it's highly abnormal that under these circumstances the rapid development of nuclear missile technology remains unregulated by the international community.

However, this fact is but one of the many problems associated with nuclear weapons, as it turned out that Washington may be willing to launch a nuclear strike on some other occasion than in an event of the US coming
under attack, especially under the Trump administration. The notion that weapons lack consciousness is pretty self-explanatory, the only question is what ideas and concepts govern their usage.

For instance, for the longest time Russia has had only two conditions for launching a nuclear strike – in retaliation for being attacked with nuclear weapons or in an event of an armed aggression that could endanger the very existence of the state. That's pretty much it. However, under Barack Obama, the White House had a total of six conditions for launching a nuclear strike, while under Donald Trump this number grew to a total of fourteen different pretexts. It's highly disturbing that Trump can send the whole planet back to the Stone Age in an event of some “non-nuclear strategic attack.”

Back in 2018, the United States Department of Defense published a revision of the Nuclear Posture Review that outlined the prospect of development of the US nuclear arsenal for the next couple decades, with Trump pledging his full support to this strategy, that postulated the “much-needed” modernization of American nuclear weapons, infrastructure, and delivery systems.

One of the last surviving treaties that prevents the world from slipping into the depths of nuclear madness is START III, which is due to expire in February 2021. There's rumours that its signatories are planning to sign a similar deal for another five years, but no official confirmation of such intentions has emerged so far. It seems that Washington is willing to take a lot of risks in a bid to create a new generation of even more destructive nuclear weapons, with experts arguing that it will not be able to attain this goal earlier that in 2026. It's been announced that those intermediate range ballistic missiles that are being carried by Ohio-class submarines will no longer be produced, as they are to be substituted by the tried and tested Minuteman III ICBMs carrying new nuclear payloads. The generation of B-1, B-2 and B-52H strategic bombers are going to be completely replaced by B-21 Raider. However, from 2026 onwards the US is planning to start producing a new generation of delivery systems, spending some 1.7 trillion dollars on R'n'D. It goes without saying that no other country in the world can afford a comparable modernization program.

With nuclear deterrence being the cornerstone of defense strategies of a great many of international players, it's only logical that geopolitical analysts would typically describe it as the sole reason as to why we haven't witnessed WWIII yet.

Against this backdrop, the number of international players that wants to get its hands on nuclear devices grows by the day, as it's hard to argue that one's possession of WMDs negates the danger of armed aggression against a state wielding it big time. This concept is based on the notion that fear is the ultimate motivator and no political force would ever dare to risk facing the consequences of a nuclear conflict. However, this will only work when mutually assured destruction is guaranteed. With countries developing defensive measures against nuclear devices, there's no guarantee that a state will be totally obliterated by a nuclear salvo of another state, which means that the unimaginable civilian casualties and the damage inflicted upon the environment of both states will no longer be justified by any logical cause. To make the matters worse, with new players getting dragged into such a confrontation, politicians are running the risk of transforming our planet into a lifeless rock drifting in space.

This means that there's much more efficient ways of ensuring one's “primacy” over other states than nuclear warfare, through economic development and the pursuit of technical and social progress.

The concept of nuclear deterrence has become an insurmountable obstacle on the road to global nuclear disarmament. It's hardly a secret that Russia and the US are not the only states that rely on it, which means that no bilateral agreement between these states can change the situation, as other parties must pledge their support to the goal of nuclear disarmament. Unlike the US, Russia is vulnerable to nuclear strikes launched from most any state of the world due to its sheer size and unique geographic location, which makes it much more sensible to the topic of nuclear disarmament than the US.

It must be understood that a world without nuclear weapons is nothing like the world we live in today. An effective international system of conflict resolution must be implemented to prevent conventional conflicts and attempts to deploy non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction. The world must have a solution to large armed conflicts, local conflicts and nuclear terrorism to make global nuclear disarmament possible.

Thus, the goal of preventing the untimely demise of mankind requires deep reorganization of all of the existing international institutions. This process will help the international community to address other pressing challenges of today, like the state of global economy, energy security, environmental protection, global epidemics, transnational crime syndicates and the rise of radicalism.
Under these circumstances, it's clear that nuclear disarmament is not the end goal, it's a driving force behind the attempts to make our world more just and more civil, basically, a better place for everyone.

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