

The Russia-Ukraine war's "Armageddon" threat: A call to action for nuclear disarmament

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Abstract: The first atomic weapon was constructed in 1945 as a result of the discovery of nuclear fission. In the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II, the US first exploded the weapon in 1945. Since then, more than 12,000 different kinds of nuclear weapons and advanced delivery systems have been obtained by nine other countries. Despite efforts to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons, Russia has made it known that it intends to use them in the conflict it is currently engaged in with Ukraine, which began in February 2022. This study looks at the Russian menace that has frightened the world and brought to mind the tragic US nuclear attacks and the ensuing massive destruction of the environment, material resources, and human lives. Fears of a nuclear war and destruction have increased due to the potential for nuclear reprisal from the West. According to this research, there is a serious risk to human survival from the presence of nuclear weapons. It also concludes that there is a genuine risk that nuclear weapons will be used in today's military conflicts. The paper suggests that, by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which went into effect on January 22, 2021, the current stockpile of nuclear weapons be immediately disarmed and destroyed.

Keywords: *Disarmament, International humanitarian law, Nuclear conflict, Nuclear danger, Nuclear weapons, Russia-Ukraine war.*

1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation's government issued an order to launch a massive military assault against Ukraine (Archibong, 2023a). Known as a "Special Military Operation," the Russian military's initial attempt to take control of Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, was unsuccessful (Lopez, 2024). But there has been continued fighting throughout much of Ukraine, particularly in the east, north, and south. Ukrainian forces had successfully mounted counteroffensives to drive Russian troops out of many of the territories they had taken, thanks to Western nations' overwhelming military, financial, and spiritual assistance (Lopez, 2024). Furthermore, Russia is under severe economic, financial, and diplomatic sanctions from the West, spearheaded by the US (Archibong, 2023b). Taking the conflict to Russia, Ukraine has launched missiles and drone strikes into Russian cities, feeling emboldened by this assistance.

On both sides, thousands of fighters and civilians have perished (Amnesty International, 2022). The International Criminal Court (ICC) has classified certain acts as war crimes and crimes against humanity because both parties have disregarded fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, also known as the law of armed conflict (Archibong 2023a). The battle has resulted in numerous instances of indiscriminate missile assaults on civilian targets, including residential flats, schools, markets, hospitals, shopping malls, and civilian infrastructure (Amnesty International, 2022; Garamone, 2022; Victor & Nechepurenko, 2022). Horrifying reports of executions, torture, and sexual assault have surfaced (Marcias, 2022; Archibong, 2023a). Rape is now used as a military tactic (Wamsley, 2022).

The Russian threat to use nuclear weapons to further its military goal, however, is the most concerning. Russia said three days into the war that it will use nuclear weapons in specific situations (Lewis, 2022). When Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the country's nuclear forces to be put in "special combat readiness," the world became enraged (Williams, 2022). On September 21, 2022, he threatened to deploy nuclear weapons once more. Russia's nuclear weapons stockpile and preparedness to use them if specific redlines were broken have been mentioned by President Putin, who has also regularly warned the West and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of this (Lewis, 2024). In the event that Russia uses tactical nuclear weapons in the conflict in Ukraine, US President Joe Biden has threatened to unleash "Armageddon" and warned of dire repercussions (Alberque, 2022).

The main concern of the international world is whether or not Russia will utilize nuclear weapons in the fight with Ukraine. As it threatens, several researchers and specialists think Russia won't employ its tactical weapons in Ukraine. They contend that by bringing tactical nuclear weapons to Ukraine, President Putin is seeking to take advantage of Western concerns about a nuclear exchange. The true goal is to prevent foreign intervention in the conflict and to give the US and NATO the impression that he is prepared to fight the war to the death (Williams, 2022). Although extremely unlikely, it is thought that the use of such weapons is a possibility. Since the detonation of nuclear weapons in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the threat of their use has confused the whole world. This has raised awareness of the existence of nuclear weapons once more (ICRC, 2018). Since the invention, acquisition, and stockpile of such weapons continue to pose the greatest threat to human survival, it has reignited the debate about the necessity of outlawing them. "Nuclear weapons are not yesterday's problem, they remain today's growing threat," states Guterres (2022).

This essay explores the history of nuclear weapons, their introduction during World War II, how they revealed a state's vulnerability, and how they set off a nuclear arms race. It looks at the dangers of retaliatory strikes by other nuclear-armed powers as well as Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons in the conflict with Ukraine. Since all it takes is one mistake, misperception, or calculation to cause nuclear destruction, it argues in favor of banning nuclear weapons.

1.1. Creation and Application of Nuclear Weapons

What exactly is a nuclear weapon, and why is everyone so afraid of using one in combat? According to Norris and Cochran (2024), a nuclear weapon is a technology or tool of war made from nuclear fission, nuclear fusion, or a combination of the two that is intended to unleash immense energy and consequently massive destruction. The development of the atomic bomb, commonly known as a nuclear weapon, was made possible by the 1938 discoveries on nuclear fission made by prominent chemists Otto Hahn, Fritz Strassman, Lise Meiter, and Otto Frisch (Metcalf, 2023). On July 16, 1945, the first nuclear weapon was tested in the US state of New Mexico (Munro, 2024). The test was the result of the US-led Manhattan Project, a scientific initiative to create atomic bombs during World War II (Metcalf, 2023).

In 1942, the project got underway with backing from Canada and the United Kingdom. The first of these weapons was deployed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, during World War II, and caused enormous destruction, fatalities, injuries, and illness ((Norris & Cochran 2024)). Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber, carried a 9,000-pound uranium-235 bomb known as "Little Boy," which was dropped by parachute. Over Hiroshima, it exploded 2,000 feet over the city, causing a firestorm that destroyed 13 square kilometers, or five square miles. 140,000 people were murdered in the bombing of Hiroshima (ICRC, 07 August 2018).

Three days later, on August 9, another B-29 bomber dropped the "Fat Man," a plutonium bomb that weighed roughly 10,000 pounds, on Nagasaki (Volle, 2024). It generated an explosion of 22 kilotons, making it more potent than the one used at Hiroshima. A 6.7 square kilometer portion of the city was leveled. Of the 74,000 fatalities, civilians made up the majority. Many deaths continued as a result of the fallout from the nuclear attacks in the months and years that followed. The effects of radiation caused

hundreds of survivors to suffer from various lethal ailments in the years that followed. In addition to the deaths, roughly 70% of the buildings were destroyed or caught fire (ICRC, 2020b).

1.2. Start of the Nuclear Arms Race

With the US's successful creation and use of the bombs, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union), a rival superpower, found itself exposed (Munro, 2024). By 1949, they had completed their nuclear program and produced the bomb (Spacey, 2020). The Cold War rivalry drove the creation and accumulation of thousands of nuclear weapons (Swift, 2009). The United States possessed more than 32,000 warheads in various categories between 1945 and 1991. By 1988, the Soviet Union (followed by Russia) possessed around 33,000 operable warheads in stock. Thanks to accords made possible by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), Russia and the US dismantled thousands of warheads following the end of the Cold War. However, a sizable portion of them is still able to cause enormous harm.

Many nations have made investments in nuclear weapons research and development in the years following the US's initial use of them in conflict; many of these bombs are thought to be more lethal than the ones that were dropped on Japan (Waltz, 2008). Nine nations are estimated to have 12,700 warheads as of 2022 (Aljazeera, 2022). Russia (5,977), the United States (5,428), China (350), France (290), and the United Kingdom (225) are the nations that have been formally recognized as nuclear powers. Unofficially, Israel (90), North Korea (20), India (164), and Pakistan (170) are the other nations with nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons and their delivery mechanisms have changed significantly since they were first used in 1945 (Ruff, 2022). There are two types of nuclear weapons: tactical, which is smaller and less lethal, and strategic, which is carried by ballistic missiles and can destroy entire cities. According to Norris and Cochran (2024), tactical nuclear weapons have been developed for use with artillery rounds, landmines, short-range ballistic and cruise missiles, and torpedoes.

1.3. The Missile Crisis in Cuba

The Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union, which put both nations on the verge of a devastating nuclear war, resulted in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (Britannica, 2024). A reaction to what looked like an impending US invasion of Cuba, the Soviet Union, an ally, started building a ballistic missile launch pad on the island. Situated in Cuba, barely ninety kilometers away from the United States, were Soviet medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Missiles fired from the locations would take a few minutes to get at US targets. American U-2 spy planes conducted reconnaissance and found evidence of the manufacturing and stationing of a ballistic missile (Hankins, 2023).

In an attempt to break the impasse, the US prepared to use force and demanded that the Soviet Union remove its missiles from Cuba. In order to stop Soviet ships from arriving on the island with their military supplies, the US established a naval blockade. After protracted diplomatic discussions, the incident was resolved amicably. The Soviets gave up, halted construction on the missile sites, and removed the missiles that had been placed in Cuba. In return, the US pledged to never attack Cuba. Furthermore, it pledged to withdraw its nuclear-tipped missiles, which were already stationed in Turkey. According to some, the situation is the closest the world has ever been to a catastrophic nuclear accident (Borger, 2022).

1.4. The Russia-Ukraine Conflict and the Growing Nuclear Danger

Russia said that after the redlines it had set had been passed, its armed forces were prepared and ready to use nuclear weapons to maintain and defend the country when the conflict began in February 2022 (Lewis, 2022). However, the public has not been made aware of these redlines. Russia claims that the conflict is about its own survival and currently regards the entire West as its adversary in a proxy conflict. Presently, Russia portrays itself as the victim of a crisis that the West is causing. In the event

that Russia faces an existential threat, the president of Russia has repeatedly threatened to deploy nuclear weapons. However, the definition of "existential threat" is unclear and lacks precision.

On September 21, 2022, the Russian President reiterated his threat to use nuclear weapons should NATO attack Russia with its arsenal (Williams, 2022). As per his statement:

Our country has different types of nuclear weapons as well, some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and its people, we would certainly make use of all weapons systems available to us. This is not a bluff...Those who are using nuclear blackmail against us should know that the wind rose can turn around (Williams, 2022).

With over two years of fighting, there is no sign of a conclusion. According to Dmitri Medvedev, the deputy chairman of the Russian Federation's Security Council and a former Russian president, both sides are busily gathering additional weaponry and getting ready for a drawn-out conflict that might last decades (Aljazeera, 2023a). Additionally, Medvedev has stated that if Russia were to lose, nuclear weapons would be used, possibly crossing one of the red lines (Aljazeera, 2023a). The rhetoric and danger of using nuclear weapons has not diminished as the fight drags on, as he stated on March 23, 2023, that a "nuclear apocalypse" was getting "closer." President Putin's close ally Sergey Medvedev threatened nuclear retaliation in January 2024 if Ukraine used Western long-range weapons to strike Russian missile launch facilities. (Reuters, 2024). Maybe this is just another redline.

1.5. The Reasons Behind Russia's Desire to Use Nuclear Weapons in the Fight

27 months have passed since what was supposed to be a swift and decisive military action. There have been significant setbacks to Russian offensives (Shinkman, 2023). Straining resources, chaos in the armed forces, and unease in the political leadership are said to be impeding the effort. It is said that the Russian military is disorganized and ill-prepared (Sonne & Troianovski, 2023). The main causes are a severe manpower deficit, a lack of coordination between several units, inadequate information, unclear supply lines, low morale, and overall discontent.

Russia's armed forces have been repeatedly defeated therefore they have the choice to use nuclear weapons (Williams, 2022). Russia's army's stunning defeat in Kharkiv Province told us a lot about its capacity to carry out the conflict to a reasonable end. Three vital Ukrainian cities were humiliatingly lost to Russian forces (Aljazeera, 2022). They were defeated one after another in the northeast and south. Strong domestic criticism of the way the conflict was being fought followed this humiliation (Lu, 2022). The Russian ranks appeared somewhat disorganized and confused, as evidenced by their fighting failures (Lu, 2022).

The Russian government has mobilized its reservists in response to a series of setbacks and disappointments. Thousands of males, however, have fled to neighboring countries because they do not want to be recruited (Associated Press, 2022; Lu, 2022). Top Russian officials are even more irritated by this, as evidenced by the protests that have occurred in various sections of the nation (Sonne & Troianovski, 2023). The military debacles in Russia have damaged the country's well-regarded reputation, leaving political elites puzzled and distressed (Sonne & Troianovski, 2023). This has caused divisions at the top, leading to some rearranging in the command and control structure (Associated Press, 2022).

However, the West has given Ukraine military assistance totaling several billions of dollars, and as a result, the country is well-armed (Associated Press, 2022). It is estimated that the value of Western assistance to date is \$122 billion (Briancon, 2023). The majority of the weapons and equipment have come from the US (Masters & Merrow, 2023). Western military tactics and systems have been taught to thousands of Ukrainian soldiers. Additionally, Ukraine receives reliable intelligence from the US and NATO, allowing them to locate and strike enemy sites (The Associated Press, 2022).

Ukraine has received a variety of weaponry from Western nations (Horton & Ahmedzade, 2023). These include, among other things, mine-clearing and night-vision equipment, combat drones, thousands of artillery rounds, anti-aircraft weaponry, HIMARS multiple launch rocket systems, and

tactical secure communications systems (Shinkman, 2023). Additionally, light tanks and promises of MiG-29 fighter aircraft have been given to Ukraine. The United Kingdom has provided Ukraine with Challenger 2 battle tanks and depleted uranium tank shells. Russia seems frightened by the depleted uranium tank shells. Along with Storm Shadow missiles from the UK, France has also supplied SCALP missiles to Ukraine (Horton & Ahmedzade, 2023). The United States has declared that it will not obstruct its partners' delivery of F-16 fighter fighters to Ukraine. "Game changer" status for US-made F-16 jet supply is possible (Bertrand *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, the US stated in October 2022 that it will provide Patriot missiles to Ukraine in order to strengthen that country's air defense system (Cancian & Karako, 2022). This is anticipated to significantly increase Ukraine's firepower.

A turning point in the battle was the delivery of US-made Patriot missiles to Ukraine in April 2023 (Pemble, 2023). Several Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missiles have already been downed by the weapon, which is one of the most sophisticated surface-to-air missiles. Modern hypersonic missiles have been shown off by the Russians as unstoppable and unbeatable. It seems that Ukraine's access to cutting-edge weaponry, technology, and intelligence has skewed the balance of power in their favor. Sophisticated Ukrainian air defense systems have intercepted and destroyed the majority of military drones manufactured in Iran that Russia has launched (Shinkman, 2023).

With strong military backing from the West, Ukraine has severely damaged Russian forces. In addition to their defensive actions, Ukrainian forces have occasionally conducted counteroffensives, killing thousands of Russian soldiers and regaining control of sizable areas that were previously occupied by the Russians. During one of these counteroffensives in the east, Ukrainian forces are said to have used Western-supplied HIMARS rockets to kill many Russian soldiers. While Ukraine estimated that 400 Russians had died and 300 had been injured in the attack, Russia acknowledged that 60 of its men had died (Shinkman, 2023).

Russia reorganized its command structure and called up some 300,000 reservists in response to the successful counterattacks by the Ukrainians (*The Associated Press*, 2022). Russia is becoming more and more inclined to use nuclear weapons as a result of its military defeats and failures. Will Russia make use of it, though? That's the key query. Since 1945, when they were first used, nuclear weapons have never been used in battle. That was supposed to be their final use in combat due to the immense damage. The world might not be correct! They are exclusively made and stocked by a few states as a deterrent. However, this is set to change in the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, as Russia appears to regard these weapons as the only way out of the deadlock it has created.

1.6. Russia is Getting Ready to Use Nuclear Weapons, from Words to Deeds

Russia has moved forward with its plans to employ tactical nuclear weapons in spite of the critiques, placing some warheads and their delivery systems in Belarus, a crucial ally whose territory it used to conduct the first operation. Russia claimed the move was motivated by escalating hostilities with the West (Giovannini, 2022). Additionally, Russia has established red lines that, if violated, would result in the use of nuclear weapons. Only Russia's military and political elites are aware of those red limits. How can Ukraine and the West avoid going over them?

President Putin should be taken seriously since he has issued repeated warnings that he is prepared to use nuclear weapons. His danger seems legitimate, substantial, and widely known. When Russia said that Ukraine was considering the use of an improvised nuclear device, popularly known as a "dirty bomb," on October 23, 2022, it caused some unease in the West (Gannon, 2022). The claim was rejected as untrue and viewed as a ruse by Russia to support its plan to station nuclear weapons in Ukraine (Gannon, 2022). President Putin signed a bill in February 2023 postponing Russia's entry into the Strategic Arms Treaty (START). The Russian president announced on March 25, 2023, that Belarus would get tactical nuclear weapons. President Putin stated that they will begin crew training on April 3 and finish a special tactical nuclear weapons storage facility on Belarusian territory on July 1. Subsequently, Belarus now has nuclear-capable Iskander missile systems installed by Russia.

President Putin signed a bill in November 2023 that forbade Russia from ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which forbids the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the globe (CBS News, 2023). Since the beginning of the conflict with Ukraine, Russian weaponry has also been upgraded by President Putin. Emperor Alexander III and Krasnoyarsk, two submarines, are the newest additions to its fleet. Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles are mounted on both nuclear submarines (Aljazeera, 2023b).

Arising from the deepening Western military support for Ukraine, including the possibility of sending troops into Ukraine, Russia which considered such moves as provocative, announced plans in May to commence military exercises incorporating tactical nuclear weapons (Aljazeera, 2024). Not long after the announcement, Russia started tactical nuclear weapons drills involving Iskander and Kinzhal hypersonic missiles near Ukraine's border. This has been seen as a warning to Western leaders supporting Ukraine. The Western alliance NATO also caused a row when, on June 17, its head said talks had begun to take more nuclear weapons out of storage and put them on standby (Sabbagh, 2024). This is in response to the growing nuclear threat from Russia and China.

1.7. Is the Russian Threat Just a Bluff or Is It Real?

Such a threat has been discounted by some analysts, who think that it is really a ruse to terrify the West and NATO and keep them from getting involved in the conflict (Alberque, 2022). Some believe that Russia is bluffing or that it is an overly dramatic joke since launching a nuclear bomb on Ukraine may intensify hostilities and lead to retaliation from NATO. If Russia were to launch a nuclear attack, the US would undoubtedly reply (Alberque, 2022). The US takes Russia's threats seriously. In an address to a special UN General Assembly session on nuclear disarmament, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres referred to the Russian government's remarks and actions regarding the potential use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine as the "rattling of nuclear sabres" and nuclear blackmail (Guterres, 2022). "The idea that any country could fight and win a nuclear war is deranged," he declared. A humanitarian Armageddon would result from the use of nuclear weapons.

However, other people think Russia is not playing games and that if things do not seem to be going their way, they will use nuclear weapons to destroy any consequences during the conflict. As a result, it is important to treat the threats seriously. According to Talmazan (2023), President Joe Biden of the United States has joined the group of people who think President Putin's threat to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine is genuine. The UN has also stated that the likelihood of using nuclear weapons is greater than previously believed. As per the United Nations, on October 3, 2023, "the Doomsday clock stands at 90 seconds to midnight, closer than ever to global ruin."

In the event that Russia launches a nuclear strike, how will the West react? President Biden has threatened to take tough action if Russia uses nuclear weapons in Ukraine for tactical purposes. However, other analysts think that since Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the US and NATO will not use their nuclear weapons in retaliation out of fear of a full-scale nuclear war. They'll respond with harsh criticism and more penalties. China, Russia's powerful ally, will only express worries. China and Russia will veto any resolution that is proposed at the UN. When the redlines set by Russian officials are crossed, President Putin may decide to use a tactical nuclear bomb; nevertheless, Western leaders should not take this as a bluff but rather seriously consider the Russian threat. What Western leaders find most difficult is figuring out what exactly Russia's redlines are, and how to support Ukraine without stepping over them is probably their worst nightmare. Given the current losses Russia is facing, a long-term, protracted conflict is not sustainable. Western sanctions are causing a downturn in the country's economy. Because of the sanctions, its defense industry is currently suffering from a shortage of crucial parts. How long will it continue to rely on armaments from nations like North Korea and Iran? This is the point at which nuclear weapons could be made to talk.

1.8. *The Current Nuclear Threats Across the Globe*

Potential nuclear conflicts occur outside of the war between Russia and Ukraine (Giovannini, 2022; Waltz, 2008). India and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed powers, are classic examples. Following their separation from Great Britain in 1947, both nations have engaged in a string of conflicts about control of the Kashmir region. Pakistan became a nuclear power in 1998, while India became a member of the club in 1974 (Munro, 2024). Both nations possess a sizable arsenal of warheads that may be fired from air, sea, or land-based platforms. There is a concern that their long-running border dispute could lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons. China, another nuclear-armed state, and India are at odds over disputed borders; both countries having experienced border-related crises in the past (Markey, 2023). Troops are gathering on both sides of their borders from clashes out of concern that the already high border tensions could go worse. With disputed borders, China, India, and Pakistan all have highly developed nuclear arsenals and highly effective delivery systems (Markey, 2023).

In 2006, North Korea attained nuclear power status. Its leader, Kim Jong Un, has repeatedly declared that, should a battle arise with its adversaries, the United States and South Korea, he will employ nuclear weapons (Kim, 2022; Giovannini, 2022). The North Korean leader stated, via the official Korean Central News Agency, that his country's nuclear war deterrent is ready to mobilize its absolute power dutifully, exactly, and swiftly in accordance with its mission, and that his armed forces are fully prepared to respond to any crises during his speech to veterans of the Korean War (1950–1953) (Kim, 2022).

North Korea's nuclear weapons and delivery system have advanced significantly, and the country's leader has issued a warning that the weapons could be deployed in a pre-emptive manner (Kim, 2023). Two nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles that are capable of hitting the US mainland were tested by North Korea in December 2023 (Palmer, 2023). The North Korean leader once more gave orders to his armed forces to "thoroughly annihilate" the US and South Korea in the case of any provocation in January 2024, while testing an underwater nuclear strike drone (CBS News, 2024).

Another state that possesses nuclear weapons capabilities is Israel, which has been secretly building these weapons for a long time. Israel is thought to have roughly ninety nuclear bombs, although it has never admitted to possessing such weapons. The Arab neighbors of the state of Israel are antagonistic, and since 1948, they have fought multiple battles over who owns and controls the area of Palestine. According to a comment from an Israeli cabinet member, using nuclear weapons in the conflict with Hamas in Gaza was a possibility (Lederer, 2023). The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty does not include Israel as a party.

Iran, a different prospective nuclear power, is increasing the amount of weapons-grade uranium it produces (Aljazeera, 2023c). The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) study, which was released on December 27, 2023, expressed concern over Iran's rapid production of high-grade uranium. Iran is said to be working on developing nuclear weapons, which would strengthen its military position in any conflict with the US or Israel (Gartzke, 2009).

1.9. *Moral, Ethical, and Legal Concerns*

The class of weapons of mass destruction includes nuclear weapons. Chemical, biological, and radioactive weapons are among the others. A weapon of mass destruction is intended to kill many people—possibly millions—and wreak irreparable, wanton property damage (Purpura, 2008). The ecosystem may potentially be severely and permanently destroyed by it. A multinational disarmament convention known as the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972 forbids the use of biological weapons (ICRC, 2021). International law forbids the use of chemical weapons (Chemical Weapons Convention 1997). The legality of biological and chemical weapons was established, but the situation with nuclear weapons has proven more ambiguous (Corwin, 1987).

The UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion on the following question: "Is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance permitted under international law?"—amid global tensions, nuclear threats, and the arms race (*Legality of the Threat or*

Use of Nuclear Weapons of 8 July 1996). It was widely anticipated that the ICJ would rule that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is illegal, but this did not turn out to be the case (Greenwood, 1997). The Court determined that there is no clear international law that forbids or permits the use of nuclear weapons. It went on to say that the UN Charter and international humanitarian law (IHL) must be followed whenever nuclear weapons are used.

So, the question is: Is it ever possible to deploy nuclear weapons in a way that complies with the UN Charter and international humanitarian law (IHL)? The UN Charter forbids the use of force in the settlement of disputes (Article 2[4]), making the topic difficult to address. While there is an exception to the use of force in collective self-defense under Article 51, the use of nuclear weapons is most definitely not covered by this clause (Corwin, 1987). Since 1945, when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed with nuclear weapons, the UN General Assembly has been pushing for disarmament and non-proliferation.

The main reason why nuclear weapons cannot comply with IHL's standards is that they cannot comply with the rule of distinction in attacks which requires parties to a conflict to direct attacks only against military objectives (Corwin, 1987). According to this principle, participants to a war have an ongoing need to differentiate between civilian objects and military objectives, as well as between combatants and civilians. Attacks on civilians or civilian-related objects must never occur (Corwin, 1987). The IHL concept of prudence, which mandates that parties to a conflict take all reasonable steps to minimize injury to civilians and civilian objects, cannot be reconciled with the use of nuclear weapons. It goes without saying that nuclear weapons cannot be employed under IHL's restrictions (Corwin, 1987). Although it did not forbid the weapon or its use in battle, the ICJ acknowledged this when it said in the Advisory Opinion that "it follows from the above-mentioned requirements that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflicts and in particular the principles and rules of international humanitarian law."

The use of nuclear weapons is repugnant, disgusting, and abhorrent from an ethical, moral, and legal standpoint in any situation (ICRC, 2020a). Detonating a nuclear bomb would have disastrous short- and long-term implications, making it unethical and immoral. As demonstrated in 1945 by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where the devastating effects on people and the environment persisted for many years after the explosion, endangering future generations as well as the unborn, it is capable of causing massive human and environmental havoc (Blunt, 2023; ICRC, 2020b).

1.10. In the Direction of Disarmament and Nuclear Weapon Prohibition

The UN claims that nuclear weapons are the most lethal and devastating weapons in the planet, capable of destroying entire cities and wiping out entire populations with a single blast (Kaur, 2023). It is believed that having nuclear weapons prevents other states from launching nuclear attacks. States possessing nuclear weapons regard them as a source of power and are so unwilling to give them up (Norris & Cochran, 2024; Bernstein, 2016). The elimination of nuclear weapons is the strongest defense against the risks posed by their very presence.

Following the terrible consequences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the UN became concerned about the presence and application of nuclear weapons in warfare when it was founded in 1945. Thus, one of its main goals was to achieve nuclear disarmament. Therefore, nuclear disarmament was identified as a primary UN goal in the very first resolution (Resolution 1(1) of January 1946) of the General Assembly in 1946, which was headed "Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy." Disbanded in 1952, the UN Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC) was established on January 24, 1946, "to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy."

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was established as an international organization in July 1957 with the goal of encouraging nuclear energy's peaceful uses and discouraging its military applications (Munro, 2024). It aims to support the safe, secure, and peaceful use of nuclear technologies and serve as a platform for global collaboration. In 1959, the General Assembly established the goal of universal and comprehensive nuclear disarmament. States were compelled to sign arms control treaties

because of their fear of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons. Among these are the Treaties on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968) and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963).

Although it was signed in 1996, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which prohibits the development of nuclear weapons, has not yet come into effect. The UN General Assembly established the International Day against Nuclear Tests (resolution 64/35) in 2009 in an effort to raise awareness of the necessity of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. On the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, in 2013, the General Assembly passed a resolution (resolution A/RES/68/32) demanding the signing of a convention on nuclear disarmament and the cessation of nuclear testing, manufacture, possession, and stockpiling.

There have been appeals and campaigns for a global prohibition of nuclear weapons and the elimination of current stockpiles, in addition to test bans and non-proliferation treaties. In order to spearhead the movement to forbid and eradicate nuclear weapons, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was established in 2007. ICAN, a non-governmental organization with partners in over 100 nations, was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts in facilitating the passage of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). It keeps pushing for the treaty's full implementation. The TPNW, which aims to prohibit the creation, testing, manufacture, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use, and threat of use of such weapons for governments who ratify it, had been endorsed by 122 states by July 2017. January 2021 marked the TPNW's entry into force.

The likelihood and perils of employing nuclear weapons have increased after the conclusion of the Cold War (ICRC, July 31, 2020). With Russia threatening to use these weapons in the crisis in Ukraine, and the likelihood of NATO response, there is a growing chorus of people calling for the elimination of these weapons. "The idea that any country could fight and win a nuclear war is deranged," stated UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Aljazeera, 2022). The most assured way of preventing a nuclear war is by total elimination of such weapons. Global nuclear disarmament is therefore the best course of action. States that currently possess nuclear weapons should guarantee their total and verifiable destruction for the benefit of humanity. It is evident that the world will never be a safer place as long as they exist, the UN claims (United Nations, 2023).

2. Conclusion

One of humanity's greatest accomplishments is the development of nuclear weapons, and using them in warfare poses the biggest threat to global security. States have committed themselves to efforts for nuclear disarmament by adopting a number of multilateral instruments since they were first used in 1945. As a result, by the conclusion of the Cold War, the world's nuclear stockpile decreased from roughly 65,000 to approximately 12,000. The result of this endeavor was the 2017 adoption of the TPNW, which binds states to the prohibition and disarmament of nuclear weapons.

States possessing nuclear weapons are reluctant to completely disarm because they see the weapons as essential components of their security framework. Thus, political will and intense pressure will be needed to get these regimes to disarm. Disarmament should be pursued globally, collaboratively, and without regard to national sentiments, ideologies, narrow interests, or prejudice of any kind. The campaign ought to be taken up more aggressively in all forums and put on the national, international, and local agendas of nations, religious organizations, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations. In this sense, ICAN's activities ought to be applauded and continued.

Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or against any other nation is counterproductive to the disarmament effort and has to be discouraged. This will only serve to frighten non-nuclear powers and prompt them to begin developing nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence. Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine rose to become the world's third-largest nuclear power. Under the 1994 Memorandum on Security Assurances, it surrendered its armament in exchange for security guarantees. Russia, a signatory to the pact, has, nevertheless, declined to abide by it. Ukraine now facing the threat of nuclear attack must be kicking itself for giving up those nuclear weapons.

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