GEOPOLITICS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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Abstract: It has been more than seven decades since the world's first nuclear bomb was dropped on two Japanese cities. Since then, nine different countries have acquired nuclear weapons technology. Nuclear weapons, undoubtedly, are a hazardous power for a country. They do not only have explosive power; the power of deterrence may be more prominent than nuclear disintegration. During the Cold War era, nuclear weapons were used for deterrence effects. Two superpowers were in an endless arms race, significantly so, over these tremendous weapons. Fortunately, they were never used but deterrence was always a hot topic. However, nuclear weapons have always shown the evolution of classical geopolitics alongside the importance of today's geopolitics which has been very much at the top of world politics since the first World War and even though countries are separated by great distances, nuclear weapons' ranges mean that a country's territory can be reached easily. Currently, these weapons are shaping countries' defence policies, geopolitics strategies and their interests.

Keywords: GEOPOLITICS, NUCLEAR WEAPONS, INF.

1. Introduction

The international system came face to face with the phenomenon of ‘nuclear power’ for the first time with the use of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ during the Second World War, in 1945, with attacks on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus, for the first time, ‘nuclear weapons’ entered the international political arena in the context of deterrence theory. A new era, considered as covering the period between 1947-1991, within the international system, along with the phenomenon of nuclear deterrence, was dubbed the ‘Cold War’.

‘Nuclear Weapons’ were the significant and fundamental element of deterrence at the strategic level in the context of international relations during the Cold War period. Nuclear deterrence has given the possibility of irreparable damage or even destruction to the other parties’ army without defeating the army of rival/enemy states. The etymological origin of the word ‘deterrence’ is, “military strategy under which one power uses the threat of reprisal effectively to preclude an attack from an adversary power”.[1] Deterrence is an integral part of the phenomenon of power. It is a gaseous state where power is not practically applied but its existence is known and its threat is felt. Deterrence: in international relations, it can be defined as the power to persuade the enemy to abandon an act s/he intends to carry out. According to George Quester and Patrick Morgan, even before the Second World War, interest in a strategy was evident; well before nuclear weapons appeared and after them escalated sharply. [2] However, according to Sagan, “Deterrence theory was born at the beginning of the Cold War and therefore developed in an atmosphere of great urgency and uncertainty”. [3] Therefore, the theory has gained an excellent reputation in the face of the horrific impact of the use of nuclear weapons during the Cold War period. During the Cold War, the United States achieved a short-term unilateral strategic superiority and a nuclear monopoly in the international system thanks to its nuclear power. On 29 August, 1949, the Soviet Union concluded its first nuclear bomb program and had its first atomic bomb. In historical order, the United States had its first atomic bomb in 1945 and its first hydrogen bomb in 1952, while the Soviet Union had its first atomic bomb in 1949 and its first hydrogen bomb in 1953. Three years later, in 1952, Britain began nuclear tests, France in 1960 and China in 1964 acquired nuclear weapons.[4]

Within the Cold War, two superpowers were aware of the nuclear impasse based on their competitor's nuclear retaliation capacity, with the result of this arms battle reaching a significant level: almost nuclear war, especially during the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union entered an arms race. The 1960s and 1980s were the most intense period of this endless loop. This race between the Great Powers was about to bring a danger that would have affected the whole world, for instance, Cuban missile crises. Therefore, in 1965, efforts began to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons by the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China. These five countries came up with meaningful ways of establishing new security investigations. The endless arms competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, in particular, led to a way of understanding between the two states in order to put an end to this race. The talks about reducing the armament of nuclear weapons between the United States and the Soviet Union began in 1969 with an agreement. The first, Salt-1, lasted two and a half years.[5] The second phase of this agreement, Salt-2, began in Geneva in 1972 and was signed in 1979. This agreement, which is the continuation of the Salt-1 talks, resulted in its termination before it came into force.[6]

The treaty with the highest participation and success was the ‘NPT’. It was signed on 1 July, 1968, by fifty countries, mainly with the participation of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union. On 5 March, 1970, it was approved by forty countries. The main principles of this treaty were the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the promotion of the use of nuclear energy for peace.[7] With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Cold War era ended, with the need of nuclear war between the two nuclear superpowers much reduced. However, the agreements to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons signed did not specify exactly what was expected. The agreements were partially successful.

In this research paper, I would like to examine how nuclear weapons are playing a new essential role in changing geopolitics? The author used theoretical content and analytical methods of research. The article presents research findings concerning the author's questions as mentioned before and based on his results, the analysis of available literature and scientific articles. In the research, the author focused on the change of geopolitics over the withdrawal of the INF agreement.

2. Geopolitics and Withdrawal of INF

Although the agreements were partially successful, there are now eight sovereign states in the world that have successfully acquired nuclear weapons. Five of them are recognised as a ‘nuclear-armed state’ under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The states which have acquired nuclear weapons are as follows: The United States, Russia (successor to the Soviet Union), the United Kingdom, France and China. Israel, believed to possess nuclear weapons, on the other hand, built its first nuclear reactor in the 1950s with the help of France and produced nuclear warheads.[8] India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 and Pakistan, unable to stand being disadvantaged in the Kashmir conflict, responded to this test in 1998.[9] Uncontrolled armament in this part of Asia emerged in the 20th century as one of the most dangerous problems in the world at the end of the century.[10] North Korea, which ratified the treaty on the proliferation of atomic weapons in 1985, declared to the world that it had developed an atomic bomb in 2003.[11] The one agreement reached between Moscow and Washington had a significant effect in order to decline the number of nuclear weapons at the global level. This was the INF agreement (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty), signed between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States in 1987.[12] However, one can see that nuclear weapons are gaining importance again in national security and defence strategies due to, in particular, the US and Russia announcing their withdrawal from the INF raised concerns that countries would enter a nuclear arms
race again in the near future. The Stockholm Institute for International Peace Studies (SIPRI) says more and more nuclear powers around the world are investing in nuclear weapons. Last year, the number of nuclear weapons globally dropped by 4 per cent but there was an increase in attempts by states to modernise their nuclear weapons.[13]

Herein, best to explain Geography and its correlation to politics, so called Geopolitics which is concerned with geographical factors; where the region, population, strategic location and natural resources [14] are altered by economics and technology and the effects of inter-state relations shaping the struggle for world domination. Classical geopolitical understanding is actually under the influence of realism with their state-centred thinking system and hosting the reality of having absolute power in the international system.[15]

Moreover, in the post-Cold War period, the perception of geopolitics went beyond geographical definitions and gained a meaning over prioritised economy, political, military, cultural and technological values. A new geopolitical environment is emerging in the world due to changes in political geography and political power hierarchy. One may argue that the ideological struggle between the countries is now over. In this case, geopolitical concerns have come to the fore in the competition and struggle between countries. This situation, which began to change after 2001, has completely changed with the withdrawal of America and Russia from the INF agreement in 2019 [16] and a new era has begun. The most important features of this new era are obscurity, the chaotic environment that allowed asymmetric power struggles to begin, as well as polarity.

The INF agreement was important to reducing escalating tensions and growing uncertainty at a time when the arms race of the Cold War was at its peak. It has been a cornerstone of armament control efforts with a significant reduction of the most destructive weapons systems history has ever seen. [17] The suspension of the agreement by the United States and Russia risks reversing gains, as well as the potential to damage arms control efforts. Based on the perception of regional and global threats by the United States and Russia, it can be stated that both countries have rational reasons to withdraw from the agreement. The fact that North Korea, India, Pakistan and especially China have nuclear and missile technology unique to the two countries in the Cold War has made INF a geopolitical burden for the United States and Russia.

Another aspect of INF’s cancellation probably has to do with China, which has been at the beginning and end of almost all major geopolitical developments in recent years. The missile capability that this country has developed appears to have played a large role in the treaty parties’ decision to withdraw. Not to develop land-based ballistic and cruise missiles equivalent to those of China is considered by some in the United States to be a significant weakness against this country in the Asia-Pacific. Once the INF restrictions are removed, the United States and its allies can be expected to engage in an armament move against China with medium-range missiles. [18]

The extent to which the US and Russia will change their military positions against China in the coming period will be carefully monitored, especially considering that the INF has created significant weaknesses against China. The threat posed by Russia’s growing Chinese missile capacity on its border and the discomfort the United States and its Asian allies have over China’s increasingly sophisticated missile stockpile could have significant international security implications. [19] On the other hand, it can be predicted that Europe, which is making the most critical effort to protect the agreement, will raise concerns about Russia and the US-Europe security relationship could produce various crises in a possible nuclear arms race between the USA and Russia. Finally, the suspension of the INF could lead to the question of the future of the New START, signed in 2011, which will be on the agenda for another two years. In such a case, it can be considered that the risks and threats that may arise in the coming process will become increasingly severe and eventually weaken arms control efforts.

Another important aspect is the introduction of hypersonic missiles with advances in missile technologies. These missiles, with their enormous kinetic energy, have great destructive power and are very difficult to prevent. [20] In a new missile arms race in Europe, and the Asia-Pacific, Russia and China are certain to play the lead role with the hypersonic missiles they are developing; this means very different play-making from the ‘classic’ nuclear war strategy of the Cold War.

3. Conclusion

Under the INF agreement, missiles with a range of between 500 and 5,500 kilometres and launched from land were banned. After the deal, both countries destroyed a total of more than 2000 missiles. In addition, both the United States and the Soviet Union first, then Russia, opened their nuclear weapons facilities up to international control. The number of missiles covered by the treaty was, in fact, a small fraction of the nuclear weapons held by both countries. Therefore, this agreement was an example of nuclear disarmament agreements.

Today, there are about 15 thousand nuclear weapons in nine countries around the world. The United States and Russia keep more than 1,500 of the nuclear weapons on high alert, ready to launch in minutes. Most of these weapons are more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945. If these bombs go off in a major city, a single nuclear warhead could kill millions of people and their impact would last for decades.

Despite everything, the total number of nuclear weapons in the world has decreased considerably in the last three decades years as a result of the agreements made. In the intervening last thirty years, this number has dropped by over 15 thousand. Many countries have removed the nuclear warheads on their soil and ended their work in producing nuclear weapons, however: with the cancellation of the INF Treaty, the trend towards reducing nuclear weapons could be reversed.

Many countries in the world have nuclear power or research reactors and can use them for weapons production. The spread of nuclear technical knowledge increases the risk that more countries will develop nuclear bombs. With the disappearance of the INF Treaty, an extraordinary increase in the number of nuclear warheads could occur because building a nuclear weapons system on land is far less costly than building it at sea or in the air. The cancellation of the INF Treaty paved the way for the deployment of nuclear weapons in many countries, likely, their allies by superpowers. The world is becoming more dangerous in terms of nuclear weapons.

Moreover, the emergence of newly developed missiles, hypersonic missiles, today can hit states territories, of course, revolutionary developments in radar and launching control systems technologies are expected to improve states’ defence capabilities against these missiles, however: with the impact of these missiles, especially in the ocean and sea areas, leaving valuable platforms vulnerable, both in times of tension and conflict. These armed states in the face of their rivals should therefore be cornered; the geopolitical implications of this situation are inevitable. Therefore, due to the ideological and geopolitical rivalries of countries, this is not a situation that will happen overnight. The world’s marines will soon launch a massive armament era to have modernised ballistic missiles. The one might say that the states will concentrate on the geopolitics and nuclear forces again and want to extend their influence spaceless geopolitics under the supremacy of nuclear weapons.

4. References
