

The Nuclear Spring

Terrorism is on the rise and spreading. We can't be sure that it won't be able to acquire nuclear weapons in one way or another.

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A feeling of insecurity pervades the international scene. The idea that the end of the Cold War would have been the end of history, opening a world beaming with peace, has proven to be naïve. I will not spend much time on the conflicts that since the 90's have made the front pages and headlines. These conflicts have multiplied and intensified. Terrorism is not a new thing. However, it is today much stronger and more organized.

Nuclear weapons which were in the territories of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, were eliminated. Russia, however, maintained its arsenal, comparable to its long-time adversary.

This picture has been a sufficient basis to maintain the primary strategic instrument of the Cold War on the Western side: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (OTAN).

With highs and lows, largely due to Russia's adaptation to its new reality and also due to the mentioned conflicts, the two then called superpowers could come closer together. In 2010, an important agreement was signed, which extended the scope of a previous version, which is the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START III). However, in recent years, the deterioration of mutual understanding and communication between those two countries is evident.

Each of them possesses about 7000 nuclear weapons, out of which approximately 1,700 are deployed for launching within a matter of minutes.

Seven other countries also possess nuclear weapons. Three of these - Great Britain, France and China - have arsenals of 200 – 300 weapons. It is worth noting that the first two countries (Great Britain and France) are members of NATO. In addition, Israel, India and Pakistan have smaller arsenals. Lastly, North Korea has recently started its nuclear career.

All these seven countries have their nuclear weapons for defending themselves, especially in their respective regional contexts. France and Great Britain, however, are part of NATO's strategy, while China has increasingly broad interests and influence, which go beyond its regional context.

We should bear in mind that the main possessors are engaged in massive modernization programmes of their nuclear weapons in an effort to make them more efficient, light, penetrating, but by no means less destructive and terrifying.

Nuclear powers generally make public specific policies in which they seek to define the conditions for the possible use of their weapons. These policies are not all alike and vary in time. We can't be reassured solely by these texts or statements. For a long time, countries that do not possess nuclear weapons have been requesting from countries that do possess nuclear weapons to sign a treaty that would guarantee they will not use their weapons against those that do not have them. The nuclear powers accept to declare such guarantee, but they do not agree to sign a contract.

There is a growing concern regarding nuclear security. Books and articles tell us more and more about events, errors and accidents that on several occasions brought the world to the brink of the dreaded nuclear Armageddon. Moreover, terrorism is on the rise and we cannot be sure that it won't be able to acquire nuclear weapons in one way or another.

We have long known about the strategic theories relating to the concept of deterrence, which is the core of the argument presented by nuclear powers and their allies. Books, working documents, articles, a whole library produced by sophisticated intellectuals and experts should convince us but didn't.

We should not forget that nuclear armed States aim their warheads primarily against each other. We should not forget as well that the results of a nuclear war are not limited to the direct contenders.

On December 23, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution convening a conference in 2017 to negotiate a nuclear weapon ban treaty. If banned, as is the case with biological and chemical weapons, also classified as weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons will then become illegal. At present, they are not.

It is interesting to note that 4 nuclear weapon armed States did not vote against that resolution of the General Assembly. But we would not be so naïve to the point of thinking that all nuclear weapon States are immediately going to accept the prohibition. These States will not be pleased with the entry into force of the new norm in International Law and with the fact that their peoples will then become aware of the problem.

Prohibition is not the end of the way. It will nevertheless pave the way for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Caribbean and Latin America are celebrating 50 years since - against all winds and tides - they took the decision, by means of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, to prohibit in our region and adjacent seas, any nuclear weapon. The 5 countries which at that time

possessed nuclear weapons, signed protocols in which they agreed to respect the Treaty. We have been pioneers in the prohibition of nuclear weapons. Tlatelolco has operated flawlessly in those five decades and must continue to do so.

The American scientist **Carl Sagan** described what would be the result of a nuclear war as “the nuclear winter”.

Today, we are living a “nuclear spring”, thanks to the vast majority of the international community.

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