

Russia reminds us that Nuclear Disarmament is an idealistic fantasy

By Melisandre St Hilaire



When Putin reminded us that Russia would defend its [“territorial integrity with all the means”](#) at its disposal in late 2022, the world did not hear diplomatic rhetoric but rather the revival of cold-war strategy. Seemingly dormant to most, threats of nuclear devastation have not only resurfaced but have uprooted the fantastical hopes of disarmament. We treat the existential threat of nuclear weaponry the same as our own inevitable mortality; deny, delay, deny, delay. The poetic hamartia of human kind - a weapon with enough power to propel the Earth off its axis ten times over - seems more fitting for the pages of a novel. In fact, it was, as H.G Wells predicted over a century ago in *The World Set Free*, foreseeing atomic chain reactions and a world ravaged by nuclear warfare.

Since the cold-war humanity has grappled with the existence of nuclear weaponry through the initiation of several international disarmament movements. Becoming a taboo at least for a little while. The supposed global moral objection to its use manifested in the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (1990) facilitating the removal of all strategic nuclear weapons between the US and Russia, which was [approximately 80%](#) then in existence. Today, recent behaviour on the political playing field suggests the longevity and practicality of abolition mechanisms are

deficient. The New START treaty, set to expire in 2026, has succeeded in [further limiting](#) both powers' nuclear capabilities, while establishing rigorous verification and monitoring measures to enhance mutual trust and strengthen strategic stability. With its expiration looming, Russia [announced](#) in 2023 a unilateral suspension of U.S inspections of its nuclear facilities - an action not provided for under the treaty. Arguing that previous U.S military support to Ukraine constitutes an alteration of the strategic landscape and undermines the original basis of the agreement. It seems the law can only go so far. Not to mention the fact that the treaty only reflects a bipolar Cold War-era framework that fails to address today's multipolar nuclear reality. [SIPRI](#) hints at a new arms race, nuclear enlargements are spreading in North Korea, Pakistan, and India paving the way for an unprecedented risk of a global nuclear war. Concerningly, the countries that are not signatories to such initiatives, thus are not bound by their obligations. Leaving other powers to confront both modern security threats and legal ineffectiveness. Either they adhere to disarmament obligations, limited in scope, or fall back on deterrence logic.

Putin's brief glimpse into the trajectory of his nuclear arsenal possessing "[various means of destruction that are more modern than those of NATO countries](#)", suggested the latter. Whilst the number of global nuclear arsenals has undeniably decreased at the hands of [reduction movements](#), state modernisation efforts namely the [development](#) of Hypersonic Glide Vehicles, directly contradict the regime. Unlike traditional Cold War-era ballistic missiles with predictable trajectories, HGV's travel [over five times](#) the speed of sound and can maneuver mid-flight, making them difficult to detect and intercept. This technological leap is also [driving investment](#) in next-generation defense technologies, including kinetic interceptors, electromagnetic railguns, and high-power lasers; systems that could themselves be weaponized. This new arms race has largely been in response to Russia's [Avangard](#), which has prompted the U.S. army to begin testing its Advanced Hypersonic Weapon, as well as France's V-Max and Japan's Hyper Velocity Gliding Projectile.

Contrary to commitments to nuclear restraint, states such as France, India, Pakistan, North Korea, the U.S and the UK continue to [pursue](#) advanced weaponry. Back home, the UK previously committed to reduce its arsenal to no more than 180 warheads by the mid 2020s, however, the Johnson government [reversed](#) course, increasing the cap by 40% to 260 and halting

transparency measures. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab [justified](#) this move by citing a shift in growing threats from Russia and China.

Posing an uncomfortable truth; disarmament simply does not work. Countries are persistently choosing to rely on deterrence to secure the safety of their borders over chasing disarmament aspirations. In the face of ineffective legal regimes, with minimal reach and clear lack of enforcement who can blame them.