

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

PROMOTING DIALOGUE ON ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT PROJECT

Nuclear Perils in a New Era Bringing Perspective to the Nuclear Choices Facing Russia and the United States Conclusions and Policy Implications

Spurred by the dangers, the crises, and the risks and near misses in the early years of the Cold War, the superpowers—the United States and Soviet Union—set about the gradual construction of a global nuclear order designed to mitigate nuclear dangers, inhibit arms racing, and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons to additional states. By the end of the Cold War, mutual deterrence *and* strategic arms control had become deeply embedded in their relationship. Three decades on, a significantly different nuclear order has emerged, with China's rise in particular challenging the nuclear calculus in both Moscow and Washington. Difficult questions are becoming unavoidable. Are past concepts and practices appropriate and effective in this new setting? Can arms control work in this multilateral environment? How can this more complex situation be handled safely? *Nuclear Perils in a New Era* sets out to put these questions—and the hard decisions ahead—in context.

Conclusions

- We do not have to hypothesize about what an unregulated global nuclear order—a world without arms control—might be because the first twenty-five years after the end of World War II gave us a vivid taste of that world.
- Arms control treaties, even if concluded in a tense international environment, have usually enhanced mutual security and facilitated détente. Past agreements have stimulated broader progress in nuclear-arms limitation, reduction, and elimination, thereby enhancing international security at large.

- If present trends continue, we may find ourselves living in a future world marked by greater contention among the great powers, more nuclear weapons, more nuclear weapons states, less stability, and less arms control and international regulation of the world's nuclear affairs.
- Despite the five-year extension of the New START Treaty, the United States, Russia, and China are each committed to substantial long-term nuclear modernization programs that are sure to influence one another. In the cases of the United States and Russia, they retain doctrinal inclinations that are legacies of the Cold War.

Policy implications

- As possessors of the two largest nuclear arsenals, Russian and U.S. policy-makers face choices about force modernization, arms control, and technological advancement that will help shape the contours of the evolving nuclear order for many decades, and that will determine the relative safety or danger of the future international nuclear environment.

The next publication in this series will explore the issue of missile defense. Featuring essays from U.S., Russian, and Chinese experts, the publication will be released in Fall 2021.

For further details of our work,
see www.amacad.org/nuclear

About the Project

Unlike the Cold War, the current nuclear age is characterized by a simultaneous collapse of arms control agreements and the absence of any strategic dialogue among the three main nuclear players. One strand of the project's work consists of a series of Track-2 dialogues between experts and former policy-makers from the United States, Russia, and China, designed to identify critical short-term goals in arms control which would serve to minimize and reduce the potential risks of nuclear arms-racing and escalation. The meetings identify areas for cooperation and promote conceptual thinking about measures that might strengthen strategic stability and help to reduce the significant dangers of nuclear weapons being used in the future.

A second strand of work builds on the Academy's prior experience organizing educational sessions for the U.S. Congress on a range of topics. Through a series of engagements with members of Congress and their staffs, the project will help to foster and strengthen knowledge on key issues and challenges facing the United States in arms control and international security, with particular attention to careful management of the strategic competition posed by China

and Russia. A third strand of work weaves the project's expert discussions and policy recommendations together to produce high-impact publications on critical debates within nuclear arms control. These publications will also be translated into Russian and Chinese for dissemination to policy-makers and the arms control communities in Moscow and Beijing.



Participants at a project meeting in Shanghai, December 2019

The Academy's Historic Work on Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control

The Academy has played a crucial role in the nuclear field, particularly when a viable path to cooperation and collective governance was not clear. In 1959, at the height of the Cold War and the nuclear standoff between the United States and the USSR, members of the American Academy, including Donald Brennan, Thomas Schelling, and Henry Kissinger, among others, gathered at the Academy to rethink the framework that had governed the relations between the two superpowers following World War II and to offer a new model of global interaction. The work of this group, in partnership with contemporaneous policy-makers, helped pave the way for the adoption of a new and veritably transformative American nuclear posture based on strategic stability and arms-reduction, rather than on arms-accumulation.

Since 1960, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences has conducted more than a dozen major projects on arms control and nuclear policy topics, ranging from the future of submarine-based deterrents to international arrangements for nuclear fuel reprocessing to weapons in space. *The Global Nuclear Future Initiative* (2008–2019) addressed nuclear issues such as mitigating the problem of insider threats and managing spent nuclear fuel. *Meeting the Challenges of the New Nuclear Age* (2016–present) is a two-phase project that seeks to articulate a new framework for governing relations among the nine existing nuclear weapons states, with a particular attention to strengthening strategic stability within two critical nuclear triangles: China, the United States, and Russia as well as India, Pakistan, and China.

About the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences was founded during the American Revolution by John Adams, James Bowdoin, John Hancock, and other "scholar-patriots" who contributed to the establishment of the new nation. The Academy was created to provide a forum for leading scholars, members of the learned professions, and leaders in government and business to work together on behalf of the democratic interests of the republic. Today, the Academy is an international learned society that brings together leaders from every field and profession to anticipate, examine, and confront critical issues facing our global society.