**Challenges to Nuclear Arms Control**

**The resump-tion of nuclear testing is a worrying signal to global peace and security.**

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For many years, the pillars of international arms con­trol have been crumbling due to a lack of coopera­tion and consensus on crucial issues among major powers. Agreements signed between the United States and Russia during the Cold War aimed at reducing nucle­ar risks, preventing the costly arms race, and ex­ercising strategic restraint are losing their effec­tiveness and durability. As the trust gap between Washington and Moscow widens, major treaties signed between them have become threadbare or entirely defunct. Notably, the US unilaterally with­drew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002, raising concerns for Russia. In 2021, Russia with­drew from the Treaty on Open Skies. The extension of the New START Treaty in early 2021 was the only hope of lim­iting military activities and strengthening the arms control regime. However, the agreement expires in 2026, with no further extension in sight given the increased tensions be­tween the US and Russia after the Russia-Ukraine war. This, in turn, intensifies misunderstandings and leads to an esca­lated arms race between the military rivals.

[PM Shehbaz to chair federal cabinet meeting today](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/pm-shehbaz-to-chair-federal-cabinet-meeting-today)

Another blow to arms control would be the resumption of nuclear tests, as it weakens a major arms control agreement—the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Signed in 1996, the CTBT was a major step to prohibit “any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion.” However, as geopolitical competition rises between major powers, they may resort to nuclear testing and reconsider their commit­ments to refrain from it. Nuclear testing raises the significance of nuclear capability and serves as a way of power projection and nuclear supremacy. While more than 175 countries have currently signed and ratified it, the CTBT has yet to enter into force. More importantly, countries considered more likely to be capable of testing have not ratified it. A resumption of nu­clear testing would diminish the possibility of the treaty’s en­try into force. It also diminishes the hope that the CTBT’s com­mitment of all members not to carry out any nuclear weapons test explosions or other nuclear explosions will ever come into effect. A test by one state would likely be responded to by the other, thus increasing the risk of nuclear escalation. In particu­lar, the end of the moratorium on nuclear testing or non-com­pliance with the objective and purpose of the treaty would in­crease the potential of nuclear proliferation and encourage other states to consider nuclear capability.

[COAS Asim Munir, Saudi Crown Prince vow to strengthen defence cooperation](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Mar-2024/coas-asim-munir-saudi-crown-prince-vow-to-strengthen-defence-cooperation)

Since its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), North Korea has carried out six underground nuclear tests, from 2006 to 2017, and is reportedly prepar­ing to conduct another nuclear test in the near future. In addition, on October 18, 2023, Russia withdrew from the CTBT, a major move that has escalated its nuclear risk pos­ture amid increased tensions with the US in the aftermath of its war with Ukraine. Very recently, Russia accused the US of nuclear testing site activity, which the US rejects. Like­wise, there are indications about potential Indian nucle­ar tests, which if conducted would further complicate the South Asian regional security environment, instigating an arms race and increasing the risks of conflict.

Even though Pakistan is not a signatory to the CTBT, it continues to support the objectives and purpose of the trea­ty and observes a unilateral/voluntary moratorium on nu­clear testing. Pakistan’s continued support for the CTBT is a testament to its commitment to the treaty’s objective. Paki­stan was not the first country to test and is committed to re­fraining from resuming nuclear weapons testing. However, despite Pakistan’s continued efforts, India has been reluc­tant to cooperate with Pakistan on the proposed strategic restraint regime (SSR) due to its quest for nuclear primacy and becoming a superpower country.

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The resumption of nuclear testing is a worrying signal to global peace and security as it would undermine the al­ready fragile global nuclear governance and lead to an in­tensified arms race, thus creating risks of nuclear escala­tion. Especially in sensitive regions, such as South Asia, maintaining a balanced security environment is key to peace and stability. There is a dire need for ensuring com­pliance with arms control arrangements.

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