



Search for World Peace Through Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 1899–2024

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Abstract

Since ancient times, wars have been fought by people using arms. The type and number of arms used determined the outcomes of wars and the prestige of nations. Hence, nations continued to develop more sophisticated arms and means of their deployment. Primitive man used stones and clubs as arms. In the Middle Ages, cudgels, cannons, barbed arrows, bolt-action magazine rifles and others were used. The 20th century witnessed the use of more advanced ones, including pump-action rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers, armoured tanks and the atomic bomb. Use of these arms in wars caused many deaths and colossal damage to societies. Due to these impacts, collective efforts have been made by nations and organizations to reduce the cache of arms in state armouries and their use. Notwithstanding, nations have continued to pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction and new methods of their deployment in wars. These trends posed great danger to world peace and security. This study historicises the evolutionary trends of disarmament regulatory frameworks. It utilized an interdisciplinary methodology. Books, journal articles and internet sources on History, Diplomacy and International Relations were utilized. Relevant information in the sources was obtained through library studies and internet browsing; the material was then studied and analysed. The research showed that some states fail to adhere to disarmament regulatory frameworks. This development is responsible for the increase of atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons and terrorist groups in the world. Again, the 21st century has experienced the deployment of arms through computers and drones.

Keywords: Disarmament; Arms Control; Nuclear Non-Proliferation; International Peace and Security; Weapons of Mass Destruction

1. Introduction

Weapons have accompanied human activity since antiquity, serving hunting, policing, defence, crime and warfare alike. Early armies fought with stone-tipped spears, bows, poisoned darts and mallets; these were gradually displaced by rifles, bayonets, machine guns, mortars, tanks and aerial ordnance, and after 1945 by atomic, biological and chemical weapons. Command of a sophisticated arsenal, deployed with skill, has repeatedly decided the outcome of wars and has also fixed a nation's standing in the hierarchy of world power. Britain's naval supremacy between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries rested on the scale and quality of her fleet and crews. Germany's prosecution of the First World War depended

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on the output of Rhineland arms factories. Since 1945, the United States, Russia and China have derived much of their status as leading powers from nuclear stockpiles and domestic weapons industries. This link between arms and prestige explains why states have persisted in developing ever more advanced weapons and methods of deploying them. William argues that the First World War hastened the emergence of modern warfare: although the bolt-action rifle remained the infantryman's basic weapon, machine guns, tanks, poison gas, grenades and flamethrowers altered battlefield tactics and were devised specifically to break the deadlock of trench warfare [1].

Early medieval armies prized speed, mobility and coordination. The Assyrians and Persians built forces that combined infantry, cavalry and missile troops, using spearmen and archers to weaken enemy lines before cavalry exploited the resulting gaps. The Assyrians supplemented this with deliberate terror, inflicting extreme violence on conquered peoples so as to deter future resistance and consolidate imperial control [2]. Greek city-states relied instead on citizen-soldiers, the hoplites, whose phalanx embodied disciplined collective organisation. Slingers, archers and javelin throwers harassed enemy formations before retreating behind the heavy infantry, a tactic that cleared the way for cavalry and chariots to strike at exposed flanks and that marks an early instance of combined-arms warfare [2]. Later medieval forces varied in sophistication. Vikings, Moors and Franks borrowed selectively from Roman practice but rarely matched the strategic discipline of classical Greek or Roman armies. The Byzantine Empire proved the exception, adapting to swifter opponents by fielding mounted archers who could shoot accurately at speed, an innovation that gave Byzantine forces unusual flexibility and demonstrated the empire's capacity to pair technical invention with tactical adjustment [2].

In the 21st century, warfare is prosecuted mainly by the deployment of arms through electronic means. The USA, Russia, China, Britain, Japan, Israel, Iran and other world powers use drones to launch attacks on enemy territories. The use of drones launched through electronic manipulation has enhanced considerably accurate and precise attacks on sites; however, the use of such means and methods has also made warfare more complex. Nations have always prioritized possession of numerous and high-calibre arms. The trend has resulted in increased production of arms by world powers and the purchase of more weapons by non-world powers. Despite arms control agreements, nations have continued to increase their armouries through the manufacture of new weapons or purchase, and have continued to increase the budgetary provisions for arms development and procurement. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [3], in 2025 the USA spent \$950bn on missile defence, shipbuilding and nuclear deterrence, and China spent \$336bn on arms in 2024, a 38% increase over previous years. Economic Confidential, citing National Bureau of Statistics figures, stated that Nigeria's spending on arms procurement increased continuously between 2020 and 2022: in 2020 Nigeria spent N29.24bn, in 2021 it spent N72.50bn, and in 2024 the country spent N520.2bn [4].

The destruction caused by arms used in wars instigated the pursuit of regulation of these weapons by states and non-state actors. Disarmament refers to the reduction of arms possessed by states; it involves arms control and the prevention of arms proliferation by states. Arms control is the management of access to and use of weapons for legitimate purposes, while non-proliferation pertains to the prevention of the production, importation and spread of nuclear weapons by states. States and non-state actors pursue disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation mainly to maintain international peace and ensure world security.

Formal efforts to regulate the arms used during wars are traced to the medieval period. In 1139, the Second Lateran Council of the Roman Catholic Church prohibited the use of the crossbow against Christians but permitted its use against non-Christians. In 811 CE, Emperor Charlemagne restricted arms exports from his empire to other lands. But modern arms control started in the 19th century. In 1817, Britain, representing Canada, signed the Rush-Bagot Treaty with the United States; the signing made Britain and the United States reduce, equalize and eliminate their naval forces on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain after the War of 1812. The “St. Petersburg Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Times of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grammes Weight” was signed in 1868 by 17 states, banning the use of explosive projectiles by belligerents during wars. Principles to guide the activities of states in space, the moon and other celestial bodies were declared in 1963 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA); the declaration also provided for a limited nuclear test ban in the world [5].

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the concepts of the security dilemma and deterrence. The security dilemma explains that efforts by one state to strengthen its military security may be viewed as threats by other states, encouraging them to increase their own weapons and military capabilities. This process can produce arms races, mistrust, and greater international insecurity. Deterrence theory further explains why states continue to maintain powerful weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, because the threat of retaliation is believed to discourage potential attacks. However, dependence on military deterrence creates a contradiction with disarmament because states are expected to reduce weapons while still relying on them for national security and international influence.

The study also applies liberal institutionalism and collective-security theory to explain the role of international organizations and treaties in regulating state behaviour. International institutions promote cooperation by establishing common rules, facilitating negotiations, monitoring compliance, and coordinating sanctions or inspections. Disarmament, arms-control, and non-proliferation agreements therefore function as legal and institutional mechanisms for limiting the development, spread, and use of weapons. Nevertheless, their effectiveness depends on the willingness of states to comply, support enforcement, and prioritize collective peace over national interests. This framework helps explain why disarmament initiatives have contributed to international restraint but have not yet achieved lasting world peace.

3. Research Method

This study adopts an interdisciplinary, historical and documentary methodology drawn from History, Diplomacy and International Relations. It historicises the evolutionary trends of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regulatory frameworks over the period 1899–2024. Data were obtained from secondary sources — books, journal articles, treaty texts, encyclopaedias and reputable internet sources — gathered through library studies and internet browsing. The information so obtained was studied and analysed descriptively and qualitatively, tracing the chronological development of the treaties, protocols and enforcement mechanisms and evaluating the extent of state compliance with them.

4. Result

4.1. Regulatory Frameworks of Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Countries and international organizations made several collaborative efforts on arms regulation in the 19th and 20th centuries. The efforts took the forms of conferences, proclamations, conventions, agreements and treaties. The first conferences held were the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conferences on disarmament.

4.1.1. The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907

The 1899 Hague Convention was held from 18 May to 29 July at The Hague, Netherlands. It was inspired by the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Times of War, of Explosive Projectiles Under 400 Grams Weight. The conference was initiated by Tsar Nicholas II and attended by 26 nations. The main themes of discussion in the conference — disarmament, international law, and arbitration — were handled by three sections. The convention resulted in the 1899 Hague Declaration 2 Concerning Expanding Bullets. Paragraph two of the document states thus: “the Contracting Parties agree to abstain from the use of bullets which expand or flatten easily in the human body, such as bullets with a hard envelope which does not entirely cover the core or is pierced with incisions.”

In 1907, “Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land” was the second Hague convention. It was held in The Hague from June to October 1907 and was attended by 44 nations, including Britain, France, Germany, the USA and others. Article 23(a) of the convention prohibits parties involved in war from using poisoned weapons, and Article 23(e) forbids the use of arms, projectiles or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering to persons [6].

4.1.2. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919

The Paris Peace Conference of 1 January 1919 was held at the end of the First World War. It was spearheaded by the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy, and attended by about thirty nations. The conference was instigated by the many deaths and the destruction caused by the war. It ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, which provided for the establishment of a supranational organization and the disarmament of Germany [7].

4.1.3. The Washington Naval Conference (1921–1922)

This conference is also called the “Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament.” It was held from 12 November 1921 to 6 February 1922 in Washington, USA, and resulted in the signing of the Four-Power Treaty, the Five-Power Treaty and the Nine-Power Treaty. The Four-Power Treaty was signed by the USA, UK, France and Japan in Washington; it stipulated that parties to it should respect the rights of the other signatory nations. The Five-Power Treaty, also known as the Washington Naval Treaty, was signed by the USA, UK, France, Japan and Italy; it was a treaty for the limitation of naval armament aimed at maintaining peace in the Pacific Ocean. The treaty provided that the US, UK and Japan should build ships in a 5:5:3 ratio; it also provided that it was to remain in effect until 1936 and that signatory nations should not build any capital ships between 1922 and 1932. The Nine-Power Treaty was signed by the USA, UK, France, Japan, Italy, Belgium, China, the Netherlands and Portugal; this treaty mainly emphasised the maintenance of the open-door policy in China [8].

4.1.4. The London Naval Conference (1930)

The London Naval Conference was a convocation of the major powers of the world, namely the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France and Italy. It was convoked mainly to reappraise the ratios and time frame for the resumption of building naval ships agreed at the

earlier Washington Conference. The powers concluded that the states could resume construction of capital ships in 1936. They also granted 10:10:7 ratio limits on the building of auxiliary craft for the United States, Great Britain and Japan respectively. The disparity in the ratio for shipbuilding was rejected by Japan, which argued that the disparity be removed and that it should be given the same ratio as the United States and Great Britain. Due to the disagreements, a second London Conference was convoked in 1935 for further deliberations; it also ended in disagreement, which made Japan withdraw from the conference [9].

4.1.5. The League of Nations Disarmament Conference (1932–1934)

The most ambitious interwar attempt to check military growth came with the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1932 to 1934, convened by the League of Nations and attended by some sixty states, including the United States and the Soviet Union, with the stated aim of limiting armaments, regulating warfare and averting another global conflict [10]. The delegates aimed not merely at reducing weapon stocks but at building an international framework for collective security through agreed limits on military capability.

That ambition soon foundered on national self-interest. France insisted that German military strength be kept strictly curtailed to forestall renewed aggression, while Germany dismissed the Versailles restrictions as discriminatory and demanded either their abolition or their uniform application to all states [10]. Britain and the United States declined the political and military commitments a settlement would have required, leaving the conference without a common strategy.

Matters worsened once Hitler took power as Chancellor in January 1933. He rejected further limits, claiming Germany had already met its disarmament obligations, and demanded comparable reductions from the other powers; when this was refused, Germany quit both the conference and the League in October 1933. By March 1935, Hitler had repudiated the military clauses of Versailles outright and launched a full rearmament programme, prompting other European states to build up their own forces in turn [10]. These moves broke the conference and marked the end of the interwar disarmament movement.

Its failure showed that disarmament could not hold in a climate of mutual suspicion, rival national interests and weak enforcement. The interwar period produced numerous treaties in which states pledged to regulate or cut their arms, yet these rested on voluntary compliance rather than binding collective action, and so achieved little. The conference's collapse hastened the arms race of the 1930s and helped create the conditions from which the Second World War emerged [10].

4.2. Disarmament Treaties and Protocols

A disarmament treaty is a contractual agreement signed by states' representatives or sovereigns. Once signed, a disarmament treaty is binding on the parties that ratified it; consequently, it becomes a source of international law, enforceable by the parties. A disarmament protocol, on the other hand, is a set of rules and procedures that regulate the diplomatic engagements of the states that ratified it. A disarmament protocol clarifies, amends or adds details to an existing treaty or convention, and enables the making of updates or the adding of specific arrangements to the treaties. Disarmament treaties and protocols negotiated in a conference addressed specific issues. Below are some of the treaties and protocols of the disarmament conventions.

4.2.1. The 1925 Geneva Protocol

The 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare was signed in Geneva on 17 June 1925 by representatives of thirty-eight states and entered into force on 8 February

1928, marking one of the earliest international efforts to regulate the conduct of warfare. It was signed at the Conference for the Supervision of the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition, held in Geneva from 4 May to 17 June 1925. The agreement prohibited the use of chemical and poisonous weapons — including asphyxiating and toxic gases, as well as similar harmful substances — on the battlefield, and it further sought to establish the universal acceptance of these prohibitions as principles of international law binding on all states [11]. This Protocol and earlier ones that banned poisonous weapons were further strengthened by UN Resolution 2162 B (XXI) of 16 December 1966 [12].

Despite its significance, several signatory states — including France, Britain, Belgium, Canada, Australia, India, the Soviet Union, South Africa, the United States and Israel — ratified the Protocol with reservations. France, for example, maintained that its obligations under the Protocol would apply only to states that had signed, ratified or acceded to the agreement; it also reserved the right to suspend its obligations if an opposing state or its allies violated the Protocol's prohibitions [13]. The Islamic nations of Jordan, Kuwait, Libya and Syria also signed the document with reservations, stating that signing the protocol did not mean their recognition of Israel's statehood. In that regard, Jordan stated that its accession to the protocol shall not in any way imply recognition of Israel, and shall not entail for it the obligation to conclude with Israel any of the arrangements indicated in the protocol.

4.2.2. The Treaty of Versailles (1919)

The Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919 at the Palace of Versailles following the Paris Peace Conference, marked the formal conclusion of hostilities between Germany and the Allied Powers after the First World War. The principal Allied participants included the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy, while Germany was excluded from the negotiations and was compelled to accept the treaty's terms without meaningful participation. Although the United States participated in drafting the treaty, the U.S. Senate refused to ratify it, leading the country to conclude a separate Treaty of Berlin with Germany on 2 July 1921. The treaty fundamentally reshaped the post-war international order by imposing severe political, economic and military obligations on Germany while establishing mechanisms intended to preserve international peace and prevent another global conflict.

One of the treaty's most enduring achievements was its provision for the creation of an international organization dedicated to collective security, culminating in the establishment of the League of Nations on 10 January 1920. The treaty also imposed substantial reparations on Germany, holding it primarily responsible for the devastation of the war. In addition, Germany was required to surrender approximately ten percent of its European territory, relinquish all overseas colonies, and accept extensive territorial adjustments designed to weaken its strategic and economic capacity. These punitive measures reflected the determination of the victorious Allied Powers to prevent Germany from regaining the military strength that had contributed to the outbreak of the conflict.

Beyond territorial and financial sanctions, the Treaty of Versailles represented one of the earliest comprehensive international efforts to regulate armaments and institutionalize disarmament as a means of maintaining peace. The treaty ordered the permanent demilitarization of the Rhineland and restricted the German army to 100,000 personnel, thereby eliminating Germany's capacity to wage large-scale offensive warfare. It further prohibited Germany from possessing several categories of offensive weapons and military infrastructure, illustrating the growing international recognition that unchecked military expansion constituted a major threat to global security.

The treaty also incorporated significant disarmament principles through the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 8(1) emphasized that national armaments should be reduced to the minimum level necessary for legitimate self-defence, thereby introducing the principle that military capability should be limited by collective international agreement rather than determined solely by national interests. Furthermore, Article 5 discouraged the private manufacture of arms and ammunition, reflecting concerns that commercial arms production could encourage militarization and prolong international conflicts. These provisions demonstrated an emerging belief that effective arms control required not only governmental restraint but also regulation of the private defence industry.

A particularly significant contribution of the treaty was its prohibition of chemical warfare. Article 171 expressly forbade Germany from manufacturing or importing poisonous gases and similar chemical agents, reinforcing the international condemnation of chemical weapons following their devastating use during the First World War. The treaty declared that the manufacture and importation of “asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and all analogous liquids, materials or devices” were strictly prohibited in Germany [14]. This provision represented an important milestone in the evolution of international humanitarian law by recognizing chemical weapons as inherently inhumane and by laying the legal foundation for subsequent international agreements, including the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which expanded the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons beyond Germany to the broader international community.

Overall, although the Treaty of Versailles has often been criticized for its harsh treatment of Germany and its contribution to the political instability that eventually culminated in the Second World War, it nonetheless constituted a landmark in the historical development of international arms control. Its disarmament provisions, restrictions on military production, and prohibition of chemical weapons established important legal precedents that influenced later international treaties aimed at promoting collective security, regulating the manufacture and use of weapons, and preventing the recurrence of large-scale armed conflict [14].

4.2.3. The NPT (1968), CTBT (1996) and TPNW (2017)

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) emerged from the efforts of the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament under the auspices of the United Nations. It was opened for signature simultaneously in London, Moscow and Washington, D.C., on 1 July 1968 and officially entered into force on 5 March 1970 after receiving the required ratification from forty states. The treaty established a global legal framework designed to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons, prevent the transfer of nuclear weapons technology, encourage international cooperation in the peaceful application of nuclear energy, and promote the long-term objective of comprehensive nuclear disarmament [15].

Building on the objectives of the NPT, the international community adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on 10 September 1996 through the United Nations General Assembly. Signed initially by 178 states, the CTBT sought to prohibit all nuclear test explosions, regardless of their location, thereby restricting the further development and modernization of nuclear arsenals. The treaty represented a significant milestone in strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and advancing international peace and security [15].

The commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons was further reinforced with the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on 7 July 2017. Although it required several years to secure the necessary ratifications, the treaty entered into force on 22 January 2021. Its primary objective is the complete prohibition and eventual

elimination of nuclear weapons through legally binding commitments, reflecting the growing international consensus that sustainable global security depends on the eradication of these weapons of mass destruction rather than their continued possession [15].

4.2.4. The Ottawa Treaty (1997)

The Ottawa Treaty, commonly known as the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, was concluded during the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction. It was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, on 3 December 1997 and subsequently entered into force on 1 March 1999. The treaty established a comprehensive international legal framework that prohibits the use, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition and transfer of anti-personnel landmines while obligating States Parties to destroy existing stockpiles and prevent future proliferation [16]. Central to the treaty is Article 1, which unequivocally forbids the use, development, production, acquisition, retention, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines under any circumstances. In addition, Articles 4 and 5 impose binding obligations on member states to destroy stockpiled mines within specified timeframes and to identify, clear and eliminate mines buried in affected territories. These provisions reflect the international community's commitment to reducing the humanitarian consequences of landmines, protecting civilian populations, and promoting post-conflict recovery through effective mine clearance and disarmament initiatives [16].

4.2.5. The Arms Trade Treaty (2013)

This treaty was negotiated in New York City, USA, from July 2012 to March 2013, and was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on 2 April 2013. The main aims of the treaty were the reduction of suffering caused by the illegal transfer of arms, the improvement of national security and stability, and the promotion of accountability and transparency in the transfer of conventional arms by states. The treaty required states to adopt regulations that controlled the transfer of weapons across international borders and set out common standards in authorizing arms exports. It also mandated states to produce annual reports of imports and exports to be submitted to the UN Secretariat [17].

4.2.6. The Outer Space Treaty (1966)

On 19 December 1966, the USA, Russia and the UK, with the approval of the UNGA, committed the principles of the use of space outlined by the UNGA in 1963 to solemn treaty form. The treaty covered freedom for exploration and scientific investigation by all states; cooperation and mutual assistance in the exploration and use of space; agreement that outer space is not subject to national appropriation; international responsibility for national activities in space; agreement not to place in orbit or on any celestial body weapons of mass destruction or military installations; assistance to astronauts; liability for damage; jurisdiction and control over objects launched into space; and avoidance of contamination. Compliance with the treaties discussed above depended on enforcement mechanisms [18].

4.3. Enforcement of Disarmament Regulations

Disarmament treaties and protocols are international instruments. The treaties stipulate compliance and enforcement procedures. Mechanisms for compliance include national implementation, technical and legal assistance, transparency mechanisms, information exchange and reporting, and verification procedures. Enforcement of the instruments is done by states and international organisations [19].

States and the United Nations enforce disarmament through UN agencies. The UN established the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) by its General Assembly Resolution 1722 (XVI) in December 1961; the committee served as an agency for the negotiations on arms control and disarmament during the Cold War. Other agencies of the UN

responsible for disarmament include the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and others. The UNODA advises the UN on arms control, non-proliferation and other aspects of disarmament; it also coordinates the regional centres of the UN and aids states in their implementation efforts. The IAEA oversees states' compliance with treaties on the proliferation and use of nuclear weapons, and ensures that nuclear technology is developed by states only for peaceful usage. The OPCW works with other agencies of the UN to implement the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiled by states, and the UNMAS helps to enforce states' compliance with the Ottawa Treaty of 1997 and other mine-explosion ordinances. The agencies of the UN enforce disarmament jointly with the General Assembly and Security Council of the Organization [15].

Enforcement of disarmament treaties is done through verification of compliance and the imposition of economic and military sanctions by states and the UN. In the 1990s, the US imposed sanctions on Iran for nuclear enrichment development; from then, the United States, the European Union and individual states continued to introduce tougher measures of sanctions on Iran for non-compliance with the investigation committees of the UN. Also, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), in its Security Council Resolution 1737, froze Iran's assets for its continuous uranium enrichment. In 2015, Iran agreed to comply with IAEA recommendations for sanctions relief. North Korea, Iraq, Libya and Syria have also been sanctioned for developing nuclear weapons. North Korea was sanctioned by the UN for testing ballistic missiles in 2006. In the 1990s and in 2011, Libya was subjected to an arms embargo by the UN for non-compliance with the organisation's investigations. For non-compliance with safeguard agreements, refusal to cooperate with investigators, and use of chemical weapons, Syria was also sanctioned in 2011. Iraq has also faced UN sanctions, including an arms embargo, for violations of disarmament treaties and non-compliance with IAEA investigations [20].

5. Discussion

5.1. Challenges of Disarmament

The achievement of world peace through disarmament arrangements faces several challenges. The world is comprised of 195 countries, with 193 UN members and the Holy See and Palestine as observer states. They are all parties to at least one of the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation treaties, which they pledge to comply with. Notwithstanding the pledge and the monitoring by regulatory agencies, states continue to breach treaty agreements. China and France, neither of which signed the 1963 limited nuclear test ban, pressed ahead with nuclear tests between 1960 and 1996: France conducted 210 nuclear tests, 16 in Algeria and 194 in Polynesia, between 1964 and 1996, and China conducted 23 atmospheric and 22 underground nuclear tests at the Lop Nur site, Xinjiang. In 1998, Pakistan also conducted nuclear tests. The last nuclear test was conducted on 3 September 2017 by North Korea at the Punggye-ri site [21].

Disarmament treaties also face the challenge of disagreement over scope and modes of implementation. In treaties negotiated by the ENDC, Russia and the US expressed disagreements on certain issues. For instance, the US disagreed with Russia over the verification mechanisms to ensure compliance with the comprehensive nuclear test ban; it insisted that the treaty should include the actual number and kind of on-site inspections for underground tests. Also, on the Seabed Arms Control Treaty, the US disagreed with the Soviet proposal for the complete demilitarization of the seabed, arguing that it was unverifiable. ENDC negotiations for a comprehensive test ban also had an inspection issue: the United

States and Great Britain expressed disagreement with a verbal prohibition of explosions that could not be identified. World powers used these disagreements to continue to develop and test nuclear weapons even after ENDC negotiations.

5.2. Contemporary Trends and the Limits of Disarmament

Numerous disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation treaties have been signed by nations. States, the UN and other institutions have also been seen to adopt different modes of implementation prescribed in the treaties. The instruments have helped to prevent the usage of nuclear weapons during wars. At the end of the Second World War in 1945, only the USA had nuclear weapons. By 1960, Britain, France and Russia also possessed nuclear weapons. The number of countries that possess the weapon has increased to nine, including the USA, Russia, Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. At the time of the NPT in 1968, there were about 12,000 warheads. In 2024, the USA and Russia hold by far the largest arsenals, with thousands of warheads each. Despite the increase, the weapons have not been used again after those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Nevertheless, the purpose of the treaties in ensuring world peace has not been completely achieved. States, including superpowers, have failed to disarm. In defiance of non-proliferation treaties, some states have continued to produce and sell both light and heavy arms to other states and terrorist organizations. Despite restrictions, knowledge of nuclear arms technology is shared among states for the production of nuclear weapons and their utilization for non-peaceful purposes. Non-adherence to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation treaty provisions has impacted adversely on the world, causing the increase of arms in the world and thereby endangering world peace. Peacock summed up the UN's failure to achieve arms reduction between 1945 and 1968 in these terms: world disarmament would evidently be among the most important steps towards securing global peace, yet the UN could claim no real progress in that period towards actually cutting conventional or nuclear arsenals; it had, however, helped contain the spread of the most destructive weapons and had preserved a measure of restraint throughout those years [22].

The situation described by the above quotation has not changed even in the 21st century; instead, it could be said to have worsened, as there is an increase of weapons in states' armouries and the emergence of new modes of deployment of the arms. The Global Firearms Holding stated that there were more than one billion small firearms in the world in 2024 [23]. According to SIPRI, a top arms producer, revenues from the sales of arms and military services by the 100 largest arms-producing companies increased by 5.9 percent in 2024, reaching \$679 billion [3].

Recent years have brought a marked rise in armed conflict and terrorist activity, casting doubt on the effectiveness of global disarmament efforts. The war between Russia and Ukraine has intensified since 2024, producing heavy casualties, mass displacement and the destruction of essential infrastructure. The conflict between Israel and Hamas, begun on 7 October 2023, has continued into 2026 and inflicted severe humanitarian harm, with civilian facilities in the Gaza Strip destroyed on a large scale and substantial loss of life recorded there.

The growing technical sophistication of warfare exposes further limits in existing arms control mechanisms. On 22 June 2025, the United States carried out Operation Midnight Hammer, coordinated air strikes on Iran's nuclear sites at Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan. Drones, meanwhile, have become central to both the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, marking a shift in how combat is conducted. Weapons technology is advancing faster than the treaties meant to contain it, and this gap is generating new threats to international peace.

That such conflicts persist suggests that international disarmament treaties have done little to curb the spread and use of advanced weapons. Their failures stem from mistrust between states, the lack of a supranational body capable of enforcement, disparities in military power and the routine non-compliance of signatories with their obligations. Pejstrup observes that the shifting international order — marked by multipolar rivalry, rising geopolitical tension

and accelerated militarisation — has reshaped disarmament, arms control and nuclear non-proliferation as pursued through the United Nations [21].

6. Research Limitation

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, treaty documents, encyclopaedias, and internet materials, which may contain differences in interpretation, completeness, and accuracy. The broad historical scope from 1899 to 2024 also restricts the depth of analysis of each disarmament agreement, state policy, and enforcement mechanism. In addition, the study does not employ primary data such as interviews with policymakers, diplomats, military officials, or representatives of international organizations. Therefore, the findings mainly provide a historical and descriptive overview and may not fully capture confidential negotiations, current strategic considerations, or the internal motivations influencing state compliance with disarmament, arms-control, and non-proliferation frameworks.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has historicised the evolutionary trends of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regulatory frameworks from 1899 to 2024. From the medieval prohibitions of the crossbow to the Hague Conventions, the interwar naval and disarmament conferences, and the post-1945 regime of the NPT, CTBT, TPNW, Ottawa Treaty, Arms Trade Treaty and Outer Space Treaty, states and international organizations have constructed an extensive body of instruments intended to restrain the manufacture, spread and use of weapons. These instruments have helped to contain the most destructive weapons — nuclear arms have not been used in war since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 — and have preserved a measure of restraint among states.

Yet the central aim of the treaties — a durable global peace — has not been secured. States, including the superpowers, have failed to disarm; some have continued to produce and sell arms in defiance of their obligations, and knowledge of nuclear technology has spread. The continued growth of global arsenals, the routine non-compliance of signatories, the absence of a supranational enforcement body, and the emergence of new means of deploying weapons — through computers and drones — indicate that disarmament efforts have not yet achieved their central objective. The persistence of major conflicts, and the widening gap between rapidly advancing weapons technology and the treaties meant to contain it, underscore that the search for world peace through disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation remains unfinished.

8. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, interpretation of findings, or publication of this article. The study was conducted independently and was not influenced by any personal, institutional, commercial, or financial interest.

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