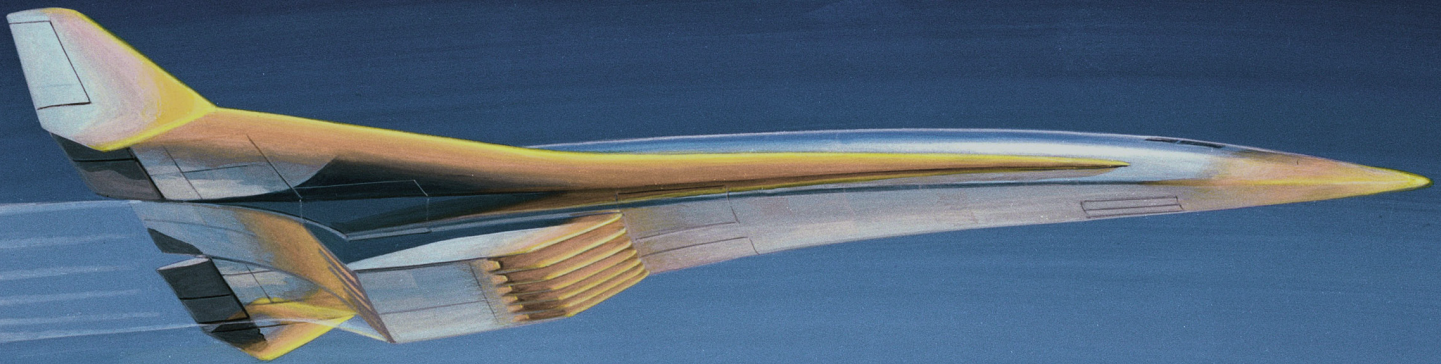


GGIN POLICY BRIEF | OCTOBER 2022

Bolstering Arms Control in a Contested Geopolitical Environment

Michael Moodie and Jerry Zhang



Authors

Michael Moodie recently retired after an extensive career in international security affairs. Among other positions he served in senior roles at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Congressional Research Service, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He is currently a Distinguished Fellow at the Henry L. Stimson Center.

Jerry Zhang is a Master's student at Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service where he focuses on science, technology, and international affairs. He interned at the Stimson Center's Global Governance, Justice and Security Program after graduating from Tufts University in 2021.

Editorial Team

Joris Larik (series editor), Muznah Siddiqui (deputy editor), Richard Ponzio (project lead), and Ceyda Guleryuz (intern).

The Stimson Center

The Stimson Center promotes international security and shared prosperity through applied research and independent analysis, global engagement, and policy innovation. For three decades, Stimson has been a leading voice on urgent global issues. Founded in the twilight years of the Cold War, the Stimson Center pioneered practical new steps toward stability and security in an uncertain world. Today, as changes in power and technology usher in a challenging new era, Stimson is at the forefront: Engaging new voices, generating innovative ideas and analysis, and building solutions to promote international security, prosperity, and justice. More at www.stimson.org.

About the Global Governance Innovation Network

The Global Governance Innovation Network brings world-class scholarship together with international policy-making to address fundamental global governance challenges, threats, and opportunities. Research will focus on the development of institutional, policy, legal, and normative improvements in the international global governance architecture. GGIN is a collaborative project of the Stimson Center, Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), Plataforma CIPÓ, and Leiden University.



Global Governance Innovation Network Policy Brief Series

This series provides a platform for leading and up-and-coming authors' thinking on major contemporary global governance challenges with view to stimulating further debate and influence policy debates. The views expressed in the policy briefs will be of their respective authors and not necessarily reflect those of the GGIN and its partner institutions.

Abstract

For decades, arms control has constituted one of the cornerstone frameworks for global governance and served as a critical tool for bolstering international security and stability. The global arms control regime is now under unprecedented pressure, due to heightened competition between major powers, a rapidly deteriorating security environment, and emerging technologies. Nevertheless, cooperation on arms control is important in today's contested geopolitical environment as it can encourage responsible competition broadly between great powers, avoid the proliferation of advanced weaponry, and reduce the risk of unintended military escalation. This paper recommends three measures to reinvigorate arms control: sustaining long-term engagement between major powers; adopting a multi-stakeholder approach by including smaller states and non-government entities in the process; and reconceptualizing the fundamentals of arms control.

Introduction

For much of the last seventy years, arms control has been a vital strand in the web of international institutions, bilateral and multilateral treaties, and other arrangements constituting the global governance framework and a critical tool for bolstering international security and stability. Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin offered the most widely accepted characterization of arms control in their seminal 1961 work, *Strategy and Arms Control*. Arms control, they argued,

rests essentially on the recognition that our military relation with potential enemies is not one of pure conflict and opposition, but involves strong elements of mutual interest in the avoidance of a war..., in minimizing the costs and risks of the arms competition, and in curtailing the scope and violence of war in the event it occurs.¹

During the Cold War, arms control became a central political tool for managing the security relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although their most important bilateral agreements focused on nuclear issues, a variety of multilateral agreements addressed other security concerns, including chemical and biological weapons, conventional weapons balances and deployments, confidence and security building measures, special weapons (e.g., lasers), arms transfers and many other factors. More recently, states have explored arms control approaches for dealing with newer issues, such as regulating weapons that incorporate disruptive technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence) and ensuring the continued demilitarization of space. In a number of cases, states created multilateral institutions to facilitate implementation of their agreements. Arms control, then, represented a significant example of cooperation that lies at the core of effective global governance and manifested the mutual interests of which Schelling and Halperin spoke.

For more than a decade, however, arms control has been under stiff pressure. The challenges of successfully implementing existing agreements, the barriers to securing effective new ones, and the questions about the erosion of the shared norms and values that serve as the foundation of successful arms control have all intensified in the face of profound changes arising from the evolving geostrategic environment. The Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, for example, has been unable to reach a single meaningful new agreement in more than twenty years. In the last years, the United States and/or Russia have ceased implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and withdrawn from the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces and the Treaty on Open Skies. Russia's shocking invasion of Ukraine has further cast a dark shadow over the future of arms control. The Kremlin has made explicit nuclear threats following the invasion. And the negotiation for a successor agreement to the New START treaty, one of the last remaining strategic arms control agreements between the United States and Russia has been suspended and set to expire in 2026.

In a report published in March 2021, the U.S. National Intelligence Council (NIC) describes an international environment that is at greater risk of conflict as states and non-state actors “exploit new sources of power and erode longstanding norms and institutions that have provided some stability in past decades.”² This has been the fate of the arms control regime as well: As arms control faced unprecedented pressure, the threat of a global arms race has waxed. Even before the war in Ukraine and despite the pandemic-induced economic downturn, military expenditure across the world rose to U.S. \$1,981 billion in 2020—the highest level since 1988.³

Arms control, thus, constitutes an important case through which to examine strategies for bolstering global governance. In the UN Secretary General’s recent “New Agenda for Peace,” he argues that the global vision must include seeking broader support for non-proliferation, a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, effective control of conventional weapons, and regulation of new weapons technology.⁴ These issues have all been part of the arms control agenda for a long time. Clearly, arms control must play a key role if these global objectives are to be achieved.

This paper first examines the increasingly confrontational global geopolitical environment and explores the potential of arms control to enhance security and stability. It then assesses critical challenges arms control must confront if it is to continue to play such a role. Finally, it recommends some measures for addressing those challenges and strategies for implementing them.

The return of great power politics

Since the turn of the century, the most significant change in the geostrategic environment is the rise of China. As a consequence of China’s military spending, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has emerged as Asia’s leading military force. At about U.S. \$240 billion in 2019, China’s military spending, though well below that of the United States, is the world’s second-largest.⁵ It now boasts the world’s largest maritime fleet,⁶ a sophisticated missile arsenal,⁷ and a cutting-edge and expanding strategic nuclear force.^{8,9}

Chinese foreign policy has also become more assertive through the regular use of coercive measures to secure national interests:¹⁰ China, for example, has intensified territorial disputes with neighboring countries; PLA forces have engaged in a brief but deadly border clash with their Indian counterparts; and China has constructed military facilities in the disputed South China Sea. Beijing has also reiterated its wish to reclaim Taiwan—with force if necessary—and has stepped up its military and political pressure against the self-governing democracy.¹¹ In response to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s early August visit to Taiwan, the PLA has conducted large-scale military drills in the Taiwan strait and launched missiles over the island.¹² Some American officials argue that these measures suggest a Chinese strategy to displace the U.S. as the preeminent power in Asia, and, ultimately perhaps, the world.¹³

Concerned by the rise of China, Washington has sought to adapt its diplomatic, military, and economic behaviors.¹⁴ President Obama first proposed the ‘Pivot to Asia’ although his effort was marred by entanglement in the Middle East. Both the Trump¹⁵ and the Biden Administrations proclaimed Great Power Competition as the primary focus of U.S. national security.¹⁶ One important difference, however, has been the Biden Administration’s emphasis on allies as a core of its foreign policy, embracing new Asia-Pacific security arrangements such as the Quad (U.S., Japan, Australia, and India) and the Australian-UK-U.S. nuclear-powered submarine agreement (AUKUS).¹⁷ U.S. armed forces are also retooling from counter-terrorism to conflict with peer competitors.¹⁸

Giving a consistent priority to China in U.S. policy, however, has been made enormously more difficult by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. For years, Russia has also engaged in increasingly aggressive

and adversarial policies. The Kremlin doubled military expenditure between 2005 and 2018 and significantly upgraded its strategic forces.¹⁹ Russian military influence has been evident in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Venezuela, and elsewhere. Moreover, Moscow interfered in elections in the United States and various European countries and engaged in massive disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks.²⁰

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is only the latest—albeit the most savage and shocking—example in this litany of assertive action. The invasion is a break with more recent history; it is the most significant military action in Europe since the end of World War II, and the first time since the 1991 Gulf War that military force has been used in an attempt to seize the sovereign territory of another state. Many expert commentators are calling it the ‘end of the post-Cold War era’ or ‘a new Cold War,’ with impacts on the future global order that cannot yet be determined but must await the outcome of Moscow's action and the global community's robust response.

Even before the Russian invasion, Western European countries were gearing up for a more hostile geopolitical environment. Both the United Kingdom²¹ and the European Union announced new Indo-Pacific strategies, promising deeper trade and defense ties with the region.²² European allies also began to reverse years of plummeting defense spending, a trend that Russia's action has only intensified. Britain has acquired two new aircraft carriers and plans to expand its nuclear arsenal.²³ France is repurposing its armed forces from counterinsurgency to high-intensity war.²⁴ Germany had already promised to raise its relatively low defense spending, but even more striking was its pledge to provide military support and heavy equipment to Ukraine, smashing a decades-long policy of refraining from offering such support to any country.²⁵

The evolving global environment, then, is almost certain to be more contentious, perhaps dangerously so, with nations locked in heated rivalries over trade, technology, diplomatic influence, and competing national security interests, to say nothing of potential military confrontations. A military conflict between China and the U.S. over Taiwan, for example, is no longer an unthinkable scenario.²⁶ This more adversarial geostrategic environment brings the world to the brink of a destabilizing arms race and complicates the prospect of multilateral cooperation on arms control. Coming under such severe pressure, global arms control will be challenged significantly to play its traditional role as a crucial contributor to global governance.

The need for global arms control

In this environment, arms control could become a crucial tool for promoting global security and stability. Successful cooperation in arms control is not only in the long-term economic and strategic interests of leading countries, but it can also serve to strengthen global governance. By contrast, the failure to reinvigorate arms control might only intensify competitive stresses with potential implications for the norms and institutions that are core components of the international system.

First, arms control can contribute to a more stable and predictable relationship between the great powers. While arms control will not halt U.S. strategic competition with Russia, China, or others, it could dampen its most dangerous aspects. Historically, U.S.-Soviet arms control arrangements, such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (1969-1979) or the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force Treaty (1987), helped to foster *détente* and a *modus vivendi* in their relations. Arms control provided a mechanism for confidence-building and crisis-management by creating valuable personal and organizational relationships and helping officials better understand each other's approaches. This was the case not only bilaterally but multilaterally through entities like the Conference (now Organization) for Security and Cooperation in Europe (C/OSCE).²⁷

Second, arms control can strengthen strategic stability by avoiding an intensifying arms race that locks rivals into an indefinite cycle of arms expansion and fosters greater insecurity with increased chances for miscalculation. Arms races, moreover, are expensive, absorbing immense financial, technological, and human resources. Keeping military expenditure under control is in the economic interests of every party, whether their economies have been hurt by the pandemic as in the U.S., or they have noticeably slowed in recent years as in China.²⁸ One reason that arms control garners support among politicians and the public is that resources spent on an arms race could have been devoted to other efforts such as fighting climate change or helping post-pandemic reconstruction in the developing world.

Third, arms control can also mitigate the negative impacts of the proliferation of advanced weaponry. As emerging technologies become more accessible, the risk also grows that they will fall into the hands of terrorists, criminals, warlords, or other malign actors —“vertical proliferation” in arms control parlance.²⁹ In the conventional weapons sphere, drones, which used to be state-of-the-art, are now being used not just by military forces but by non-state actors in such places as Syria, Libya, and Yemen.³⁰ The failure to create a multilateral arms control regime that addresses and regulates the acquisition and use of weapons incorporating advanced and emerging technologies, such as lethal autonomous weapons, could exacerbate competition and make conflicts more destructive.

Finally, arms control can diminish the risks of war through accident and miscalculation. The Cold War witnessed a number of close calls, be it the Cuban Missile Crisis or the war scare over the 1983 Able Archer exercise. Although the world has escaped the catastrophe of an unintended nuclear war thus far, in the future nothing is guaranteed. The advance in disruptive technology further increases such a risk: cyber-attacks might escalate into a nuclear exchange, and plausible scenarios can be conceived in which the possible exploitation of artificial intelligence in future chains of command plunges the world into a devastating war by error.³¹

The challenges of global arms control

The return of great power rivalry gives little incentive to countries to reduce arms; in particular, countries have stepped up investment in emerging and disruptive technologies with innovative military applications, such as drones, autonomous weapons, hypersonics, quantum computing, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and additive manufacturing. Rapid advances in these technologies contrast starkly with the slow pace at which arms control efforts usually progress.³² Moreover, they have complicated arms control especially since they are often integrated with existing capabilities. Lethal autonomous weapons, for example, incorporate artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and highly advanced sensors. Hypersonic missiles significantly reduce an opponents’ reaction time; that such missiles can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads also means that a conventional conflict could inadvertently transform into a nuclear one.³³ For any future arms control regime to be successful, policy-makers must take these new advanced and emerging technologies into account.

Some degree of cooperation among great powers must be a central feature of all successful global arms reduction efforts, and a constructive working relationship between the United States, Russia, China, and others is a necessary, if not sufficient condition for any major future arms control success. With respect to nuclear weapons and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM), the United States did reach out to China over the possibility of either bilateral talks or trilateral ones involving Russia. China has so far rejected these proposals, although it was reported after the Biden-Xi 2021 summit that Washington and Beijing would pursue “conversations” on arms control and “discussions on strategic stability.”³⁴ To be clear, it does not seem that Beijing is fundamentally uninterested in arms control; like any other state, however, most experts see China as willing to engage in arms control only when it judges that the benefits outweigh the costs and serves the national interest.³⁵

It is also not clear how much China or Russia is willing to compromise in order to secure its objectives. China regards U.S. arms control proposals as unfair since its nuclear arsenal is still much smaller than that of the United States. Beijing is also concerned about U.S. missile defense systems, conventional precision strike capability, and space-based military assets that further enlarge the disparity between the two sides. Suspecting that Washington is only interested in arms control to secure its own competitive advantage, Beijing is unlikely to concede its advantage in intermediate-range ballistic missiles.³⁶

With respect to Russia, as a consequence of its actions in Ukraine, it is hard not to conclude that arms control involving the Kremlin has been thrust into a very deep freeze for the foreseeable future, particularly given the intense uncertainty regarding the war's ultimate outcome. President Putin and other Russian officials have repeatedly made nuclear threats against the West and raised concerns that Russia might use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine to reverse its military setbacks—eroding the decades-long taboo against nuclear use.³⁷ It is hard to see that President Putin will be in any mood to engage with other leading states in any situation that would involve making concessions of any kind.

Examining the record

Prior to the devastating consequences for arms control flowing from the Ukraine invasion, the gap between the United States, Russia, China (and others) on arms control was highlighted by several developments. Prior to convening the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September each year, every member state can participate in each of the UNGA's six committees, where they consider proposals relevant to the committee's specific responsibility and recommend resolutions for adoption by the General Assembly. While these resolutions are not legally binding, they can indicate guidelines for appropriate behavior.

The First Committee on Disarmament and International Security deliberates on resolutions related to arms control, disarmament, and security. In the First Committee session that ran from October 4 until November 4, 2021, the committee considered 61 such resolutions. Of these, 33 (54.1%) were subject to a vote. In these votes, the United States and China highlighted their disagreements by voting differently on 26 resolutions (78.9%), while they agreed on only 7 (21.1%). In comparison, Russia voted with the United States on 15 resolutions (45.4%) and differently on 18 (54.6%), while it voted with China on 16 resolutions (48.4%) and differently on 17 (51.6%).³⁸

Another UN locale where competition and its negative impact has been manifest is the Security Council. There Russia has used its veto to quash a resolution condemning its invasion of Ukraine. It also has cast a series of vetoes to block attempts to hold the Syrian government accountable for a number of chemical weapons attacks during its ongoing civil war.³⁹ Another issue can be seen in votes of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); one assessment contends that in voting on Syria-related matters, two key groups emerged that do not seem to consider it important to hold Syria accountable nor offer an effective response to its non-compliance: “first, U.S. adversaries and the lesser powers in their orbit, which actively side with Russia in OPCW voting, and second, member states that frequently abstain, thereby making it harder to reach the two-thirds threshold needed to pass decisions...stifling decisive action...”⁴⁰ The analysis identifies 27 states in the first category and 38 in the second. China is included in the first category.⁴¹

The UN Security Council and the UN system more generally highlight many analysts' view that the effectiveness of international organizations is diminishing, including in arms control. In this view, these organizations are not “fit for purpose,” neither fast nor agile enough to cope

with the increasing complexity of global issues. National competition for leadership positions in these organizations is fierce as member states seek to gain an edge in tilting the organization in more favorable directions. They are also plagued by financial problems, with many members well in arrears.

From this perspective, the multilateral organizations concerned with arms control have too often fallen short. As mentioned, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, formed in 1979 to be “the single multilateral disarmament and negotiations forum of the international community,”⁴² has not successfully negotiated anything of significance for more than two decades. In the face of Iran’s assertive response to the Trump Administration’s withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency has been notably hampered in conducting activities for which it is responsible under the agreement. In addition to Russia’s effort to undermine the OPCW’s work on chemical weapons in Syria, Moscow also attempted to hack into OPCW headquarters.⁴³

Recommendations

The international community must take a number of critical steps to reverse the negative trend lines of arms control. Some steps demand urgent action, such as dialogues between major powers on confidence-building and increasing the number of stakeholders involved in the process. Others will require more time given the need for a fundamental reconceptualization of at least some arms control paradigms. In short, policy-makers should make the arms control enterprise more multilateral and rethink some of the basic assumptions behind arms control.

Engaging major powers in arms control

Engagement and cooperation between major powers will be imperative for the success of any attempt to reinvigorate multilateral arms control. In the short term, however, it is difficult to imagine that Moscow would have any interest in joining talks at which the Russians would be expected to give as well as to gain. Similarly, the Kremlin has made it quite clear through its actions that it views its military forces as the ultimate tool for securing its interests, which is hard to square with the logic of arms controls that military capabilities must be restricted or diminished in order to advance global peace and security. Before the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow may have been a reluctant participant in arms control; with the invasion and especially the strong global response in opposition to it, the Kremlin now is likely to be monumentally disinterested in such a process.

With China’s rise as a leading geopolitical power, securing Beijing’s involvement in arms control would also be important. Compared to other major powers, China has much less experience in arms control and has been reluctant—if not skeptical—towards binding agreements that would curb its strategic arsenal or limit other perceived critical components of its military power.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it has participated in several multilateral arms control agreements and, more recently, it is a party to the joint UNSC statement on avoiding nuclear war and reducing strategic risks.⁴⁵

To secure Chinese engagement, Western countries should leverage China’s own self-interests as well as its self-perception as a vital player in global affairs. Avoiding a destabilizing arms race in the Asia-Pacific will create a more favorable strategic environment for Beijing and is also in its economic interests. Moreover, participating meaningfully in arms control could also contribute to China’s self-image as a responsible global power.

Dissuading Chinese skepticism on arms control will require dedicated long-term U.S. engagement. In the shorter term, Washington should focus on crisis management and confidence-building to

reduce risks and lay favorable groundwork for eventual bilateral or multilateral treaties on strategic arms control and other issues.⁴⁶ Rules of the road and codes of behavior for operations in controversial areas such as the South China Sea would also make developments there more predictable and diminish prospects of costly mistakes.

At the same time, the United States needs to redress the damage done to the global arms control system that has in part been Washington's own doing. The previous administration, for example, pulled out of the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces, unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 deal to limit Iran's nuclear program, and threatened to let the New START treaty expire. Equally if not more important, as U.S. domestic politics become increasingly polarized, policymakers must prioritize sustaining support for arms control at home. They need only look at the 1980s and 90s, a period when some of the most significant arms control breakthroughs were accomplished by successive Republican and Democratic presidents with significant bipartisan support.

A multistakeholder approach to arms control

Arms control has been traditionally a state-based process, dominated by a handful of great powers. This is incompatible with the multilateralist principles that leading countries of the world all claim to support. The consequences of any future armed conflict between major powers will be transnational and affect every nation of the world. Thus, a major requirement for the future success of arms control is to involve more participants, not just governments but other stakeholders such as industry, the scientific community, and civil society.

Major powers should not only engage in arms control efforts among themselves or with regional powers reluctant to enter arms control commitments, such as India and Pakistan, but also more robustly involve smaller countries that do not possess nuclear weapons or a strong military. To make arms control less state-centric, civil society should also be represented in the arms control process. Smaller states and non-government entities have little direct influence over great powers' disarmament policy. However, they have the power to set norms and expectations for the use of certain weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 2021, offers one example of how various stakeholders can shape the norms of state behavior. As the first international treaty to ban nuclear weapons comprehensively, it was adopted in the UN General Assembly with the support of 122 countries.⁴⁷ While states retained the ultimate decisions regarding the treaty, it is not likely that an agreed text could have emerged without the contribution of civil society groups that worked ceaselessly for its development and adoption. Unfortunately, as an indication of the current problems besetting arms control, none of the nuclear weapons states—many of whom are permanent members of the UNSC—support the agreement. Nevertheless, non-nuclear weapons states working through the treaty with the strong support of civil society entities could, over time, foster change regarding nuclear weapons norms as they have done regarding such problems as landmines, blinding lasers, and cluster munitions.

As the sources of new technologies with potential military applications and the underlying science that make them possible, the scientific community and the business sector also have an important role to play. The global chemical industry, for example, worked closely with government negotiators on some aspects of the CWC, notably verification and confidentiality issues. By cooperating closely with governments and civil society, industries and the scientific community can help raise awareness of the risks associated with their activities, such as potential malevolent uses of new technologies.

In the context of enlarging the participants in the arms control process, one concept outlined in the UN Secretary General's report, *Our Common Agenda*, has especially interesting implications

for the conduct of arms control. The Secretary-General calls it “networked multilateralism.”⁴⁸ As his report explains:

Today, a broader range of State and non-State actors are participating in global affairs...This is a form of multilateralism that is more networked, more inclusive, and more effective... Networks can be more flexible, allowing for variable participation by a wide range of actors and the possibility of open coalitions or small “mini-lateral” or even “micro-lateral” groups...

Networked multilateralism, in theory, could represent a new paradigm for arms control that might ameliorate many of its challenges. If the Secretary-General’s enterprise moves forward successfully, it could have profound implications not only for arms control’s future agenda, but also for shaping its approaches and the resulting policies, processes, and practices. Governments should already be preparing to offer new and innovative approaches in response to the Secretary General’s call.

The need to reconceptualize the arms control enterprise

While these steps are critical for moving forward, the concept of “networked multilateralism” suggests an argument can be made that for too long the international community has been working from an agenda and utilizing an intellectual infrastructure that has become too familiar and too comfortable in the face of major geopolitical changes. In the face of such changes, the need to reconceptualize arms control must be considered. Doing so, however, entails answering tough questions, both for today and the future. Even a few examples of such questions show how difficult this effort is likely to be:

- Have states parties consistently demonstrated and promoted the responsible exercise of national sovereignty in terms of meeting their treaty obligations? It can be argued that abstaining on key votes, as many nations have done with respect to Syria’s chemical weapons attacks at both the UNSC and in arms control bodies, is an abrogation of that responsibility. Every country has some risk management responsibility. Not every country can do everything, but every nation can do something. It is time to stop standing on the sidelines doing nothing and to take action.
- Does an insistence on universal multilateralism governed by the principle of consensus become a recipe for gridlock? Operating solely on the basis of consensus leaves necessary action subject not just to the tyranny of the minority but to the possibility of a tyranny of a single opponent. The OPCW’s creation through a majority vote rather than consensus of an accountability mechanism to determine who is responsible for confirmed chemical attacks has demonstrated what might be accomplished.
- Is putting all of one’s eggs into the single basket of a commitment to legally-binding, formal treaties the best way forward to address multiple and diverse challenges? As the UN Secretary General has argued, arms control must become more flexible, creating situations in which those states parties who share an interest in a line of inquiry or in testing potential new transparency or information-sharing measures are able to try them and promote them if they are deemed to be valuable.

The horizon is not entirely bleak, and a number of near-term occasions may provide opportunities to begin to address such questions. One example is the recent U.S. proposal to engage with other states parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) to explore new approaches for enhancing confidence in treaty compliance. It is an issue that has plagued BWC implementation for most of the treaty’s 50-year existence, especially following the 2001 U.S. rejection of a draft “verification protocol.” According to Bonnie Jenkins, the Biden Administration’s Under Secretary

of State for International Security and Arms Control, the United States now seeks to “examine possible measures to strengthen implementation of the Convention, increase transparency, and enhance assurance of compliance.”⁴⁹ Jake Sullivan, President Biden’s National Security Advisor, commented further, “This will be challenging work; *success will require delegations to break out of old all-or-nothing mindsets and build new habits of constructive cooperation.*”⁵⁰

The international community should seize any opportunity of giving new momentum to cooperation on arms control. Another means is offered by UN Secretary General Guterres’ plan to convene a “2023 Summit of the Future,” announced in his report *Our Common Agenda*.⁵¹ An important part of the summit will be consideration of his proposed “New Agenda for Peace,” which gives priority to “preventing war and strengthening global peace and security.”⁵² As mentioned, the Secretary General’s approach identifies a critical role for arms control in moving his agenda forward. What is clearly needed now is the refurbishment of the arms control enterprise to ensure that it is fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusion

Profound changes in the world’s geopolitical environment over the last several decades include political dynamics that have intensified competition among a much wider range of players than during the Cold War. Many of them, such as China, find themselves in new positions that could have major impacts not only on their interests and objectives, but on the roles they are determined to play in the world. Others, including Russia, have found their roles changed, while they continue aggressively to exert major international power and influence. The speed and scope at which science has advanced and disruptive technologies have emerged is a second dramatic change. A third is the sharpened competition among alternative models of governance, with authoritarian regimes exploiting an expanded set of tools not only to tighten their grip on their own populations but also to work with like-minded partners to redefine the foundations of the global order.

These are only some of the geostrategic changes posing major challenges to strengthening global governance and the tools through which that goal can be achieved. Arms control is one of those tools. Historically, it has demonstrated time and again how agreements that help define the “rules of the road” in the international system can contribute to peace, security, and stability for all members of the global community. Today, arms control is under unprecedented pressure and confronts enormous challenges in adapting to new realities and maintaining its contribution to global governance. But steps can be taken to ease those pressures and overcome those challenges if the commitment is strong enough, the innovations creative enough, and the participation deep and broad enough to break out of business as usual.

Endnotes

1. Quoted in Michael Krepon, “Defining Arms Control,” *Arms Control Wonk*, October 8, 2009. p.1.
2. Ibid.
3. Diego Lopes da Silva, Nan Tian and Alexandra Marksteiner, *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2020* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2021), 1, https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/fs_2104_milex_o.pdf.
4. United Nations, *Our Common Agenda -Report of the Secretary-General* (New York, NY, 2021), p. 60.
5. Nan Tian and Fei Su, *A Estimate of China’s Military Expenditure* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2021), 18-19 <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/other-publications/new-estimate-chinas-military-expenditure>.
6. Mallory Shelbourne, “China Has World’s Largest Navy With 355 Ships and Counting, Says Pentagon,” *USNI News*, November 3, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/11/03/china-has-worlds-largest-navy-with-355-ships-and-counting-says-pentagon>.
7. “Missiles of China,” Center for Strategic and International Studies Missile Defense Project, April 12, 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/china/>.
8. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Arlington, VA: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2021), <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874-1-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>.
9. Reports indicate China has tested a Fractional Orbital Bombardment System (FOBS) that can bypass U.S. missile defense systems. Demetri Sevastopulo, “China conducted two hypersonic weapons tests this summer,” *Financial Times*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/c7139a23-1271-43ae-975b-9b632330130b>.
10. Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg and Edoardo Saravalle, *China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2018), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/chinas-use-of-coercive-economic-measures>.
11. “China is ratcheting up military pressure on Taiwan,” *The Economist*, October 9, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/china/2021/10/09/china-is-ratcheting-up-military-pressure-on-taiwan>.
12. Davis Rising, “China’s Response to Pelosi Visit a Sign of Future Intention,” *AP News*, August 19, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-china-beijing-congress-8857910a1e44cefa70bc4dfd184ef880>.
13. Rush Doshi, “The long game: China’s grand strategy to displace American order,” *The Brookings Institution*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-long-game-chinas-grand-strategy-to-displace-american-order/>.
14. Elbridge A. Colby and A. Wess Mitchell, “The Age of Great Power Competition,” *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-12-10/age-great-power-competition>.
15. “Remarks by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy,” U.S. Department of Defense, Jan 19, 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1420042/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-on-the-national-defense-strategy/>.
16. Cornell Overfield, “Biden’s ‘Strategic Competition’ Is a Step Back,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 13, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/13/biden-strategic-competition-national-defense-strategy/>.
17. “AUKUS Reshapes the Strategic Landscape of the Indo-Pacific,” *The Economist*, September 25, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2021/09/25/aukus-reshapes-the-strategic-landscape-of-the-indo-pacific>.
18. Gordon Lubold, “U.S. Works Up New Effort to Shift Military’s Focus to Asia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-works-up-new-effort-to-shift-military-focus-to-asia-11571840433>.
19. “Russian military forces dazzle after a decade of reform,” *The Economist*, November 7, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/11/02/russian-military-forces-dazzle-after-a-decade-of-reform>.
20. Margaret Taylor, “Combating disinformation and foreign interference in democracies: Lessons from Europe,” *The Brookings Institution*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2019/07/31/combating-disinformation-and-foreign-interference-in-democracies-lessons-from-europe/>.
21. Patrick Wintour, “Why Britain is Tilting to the Indo-Pacific Region,” *The Guardian*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/15/why-britain-is-tilting-to-the-indo-pacific-region>.
22. “Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” European Commission, September 16, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709.
23. *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy*, United Kingdom Government, March 16, 69-86, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf.
24. “The French Armed Forces are Planning for High Intensity War,” *The Economist*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/03/31/the-french-armed-forces-are-planning-for-high-intensity-war>.
25. “Merkel promises to meet defense spending target amid U.S. criticism,” *Reuters*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-politics-merkel-nato/merkel-promises-to-meet-defense-spending-target-amid-u-s-criticism-idUSKCN1V31NX>.
26. Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, “What Will Drive China to War?,” *The Atlantic*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/11/us-china-war/620571/>.
27. David C. Logan, “Trilateral Arms Control: A Realistic Assessment of Chinese Participation,” Stimson Center, August 9, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/trilateral-arms-control-a-realistic-assessment-of-chinese-participation/>.
28. Tong Zhao, “Opportunities for Nuclear Arms Control with China,” *Arms Control Today*, Vol 50 (January/February 2020), <https://www.arms-control.org/act/2020-01/features/opportunities-nuclear-arms-control-engagement-china>.

29. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, *Ensuring Effective Interagency Interoperability and Coordinated Communication in Case of Chemical and/or Biological Attacks* (New York: United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2017), https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/uncct_ctitf_wmd_wg_project_publication_final.pdf.
30. “Why Drones are Becoming Iran’s Weapons of Choice,” *The Economist*, November 13, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/why-drones-are-becoming-irans-weapons-of-choice/21806199>.
31. George Perkovich and Ariel Levite, “How Cyber Ops Increase the Risk of Accidental Nuclear War,” *Defense One*, April 21, 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/04/how-cyber-ops-increase-risk-accidental-nuclear-war/173523/>.
32. Negotiation of the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, for example, took almost seven years to complete; arms control related to chemical weapons accomplished little for more than a decade until the 1991 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).
33. Douglas Barrie, “Unstable at Speed: Hypersonic and Arms Control”, International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 18, 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2019/10/hypersonics-arms-control>.
34. “U.S. Says It is Not Engaged in Formal Arms Control Talks with China,” *Reuters*, November 17, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/us-says-it-is-not-engaged-formal-arms-control-talks-with-china-2021-11-17/>.
35. Bates Gill, *Exploring Post-INF Arms Control in the Asia-Pacific: China’s Role in the Challenges Ahead* (London: IISS, 2021), June 29, 2021, 4-5, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2021/06/post-inf-arms-control-asia-pacific-china>.
36. Tong Zhao, “Practical Ways to Promote U.S.-China Arms Control Cooperation”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 7, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/07/practical-ways-to-promote-u.s.-china-arms-control-cooperation-pub-82818>.
37. “Russia Invasion of Ukraine has Eroded the Nuclear Taboo,” *The Economist*, June 2, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2022/06/02/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-has-eroded-the-nuclear-taboo>.
38. This analysis is based on data from Reaching Critical Will, *Draft Resolutions, Voting Results, and Explanations of Votes from First Committee 2021*, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/disarmament-fora/unga/2021/resolutions>
39. See, for example, Gregory D. Koblenz, “Chemical-weapon use in Syria: atrocities, attribution and accountability,” *The Nonproliferation Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2019.1718336>
40. With the exception of China and a few others, most of the countries that abstained or voted with Russia are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which, for much of arms control’s history, has demonstrated their priority to be peer solidarity rather than positive arms control outcomes. Andrea Stricker, “OPCW Member States Must Counter Russian Obstruction,” *Foundation for the Defense of Democracies*, April 8, 2021.
41. *Ibid.*
42. “Conference on Disarmament,” Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) Education Center, p. 1.
43. Alicia Sanders-Zacre, “Russia Charged with OPCW Hacking Attempt,” *Arms Control Today*, November 2018.
44. Henrik Stålhane Hiim and Magnus Langset Trøan, “Hardening Chinese Realpolitik in the 21st Century: The Evolution of Beijing’s Thinking about Arms Control,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2021), 86-100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2021.1926095>.
45. The White House, “Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races,” The White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/03/p5-statement-on-preventing-nuclear-war-and-avoiding-arms-races/>.
46. David C. Logan, “Trilateral Arms Control: A Realistic Assessment of Chinese Participation,” Stimson Center, August 9, 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/trilateral-arms-control-a-realistic-assessment-of-chinese-participation/>.
47. Ray Acheson et al., *First Committee Briefing Book* (New York, NY: Reaching Critical Will, 2021), 4-5, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/1com/1com21/briefingbook/FCBB-2021.pdf>.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 66
49. U.S. Department of State, “Remarks to the 2021 Biological Weapons Convention Meeting of States Parties by Ambassador Bonnie Denise Jenkins, Under Secretary For Arms Control And International Security,” 2021 Biological Weapons Convention Meeting Of States Parties, Geneva, Switzerland, November 22, 2021.
50. The White House, “Statement by National Security Advisory Jake Sullivan on the U.S. Approach to Strengthening the BWC,” November 19, 2021 (emphasis added).
51. United Nations, *Our Common Agenda -Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, NY, 2021.
52. United Nations, “Secretary-General’s Remarks at the Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission: Our Common Agenda and the New Agenda for Peace,” October 21, 2021.

STIMSON

© Copyright 2022 by the Stimson Center. All rights reserved.

Cover: illustrated rendering of hypersonic vehicle. Source: NASA's Lewis Research Center.