

New START and the Death of Non-Proliferation?

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A "New START" ?

The "New START" agreement celebrated with great fanfare promises to reduce the American and Russian strategic deployed warheads from a total of about 20,000 in 2011 to 1550 each by...2018!

Before you rejoice, a cold look at the facts and examining the details, one finds the following interesting and disappointing "political" arithmetic:

- Each bomber counts as 1 warhead, although they can carry multiple gravity bombs and cruise missiles: this adds another 300 to 900 deployed warheads and bombs
- Normally 2 or more submarines are on overhaul, but their warheads are counted as reserves, and not deployed. This adds another 300 to 400 available warheads (one can launch a SLBM while in dockyard) for each side.
- The "non-strategic" (yields between 0.5 and 170kT, non-ICBM delivered) warheads and bombs add another 100 to 200 bombs and warheads apiece
- Then there are "operational spares" in reserve, again, about 3000 to 5000 warheads apiece

and finally, the so-called non-operational warheads and bombs

- Retired warheads and bombs awaiting dismantlement are of the order of 3,000 to 5,000 warheads apiece. They can be "revived" by replacing the limited life components (Tritium gas bottles and neutron generators - which, by the way, are field replaceable) and are good to go.
- Last but not least are the Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium pits extracted from the actual dismantled weapons; these are easily in the 10,000 to 20,000 apiece. Fortunately most of these are not the latest generation (diamond-turned, gold-plated), and have incipient corrosion or other defects that do not make them easily reusable...

So, semantics and clever arithmetic aside, each side (Russian and American) still have close to 10,000 warheads and bombs available on relatively short notice...

A summary of estimate numbers just published by SIPRI and the Federation of American Scientists¹ (see Table 1) makes for sobering and disheartening statistics: the numbers are...going up!

Table 1 - Estimates of the Total Number of Nuclear Weapons - June 2011

Status of World Nuclear Forces 2011*					
Country	<u>Operational Strategic</u>	<u>Operational Nonstrategic</u>	<u>Reserve</u>	<u>Military Stockpile</u>	<u>Total Inventory</u>
Russia	2,430 ^a	0 ^b	5,500 ^c	8,000	11,000 ^d
United States	1,950 ^e	200 ^f	2,850 ^g	5,000	8,500 ^h
France	290	n.a.	? ⁱ	~300	~300
China	0 ^j	? ^j	~180	240	240 ^j
United Kingdom	160 ^k	n.a.	65	225	225 ^k
Israel	0	n.a.	80	80	80 ^l
Pakistan	0	n.a.	90-110	90-110	90-110 ^m
India	0	n.a.	80-100	80-100	80-100 ⁿ
North Korea	0	n.a.	<10	<10	<10 ^o
Total:^p	~4,830	~200	~8,650	~14,000	~20,500

* All numbers are estimates and further described in the [Nuclear Notebook](#) in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, and the nuclear appendix in the *SIPRI Yearbook*. Additional reports are published on the [FAS Strategic Security Blog](#). Unlike those publications, this table is updated continuously as new information becomes available. Current update: **June 7, 2011**.

Credit: Federation of American Scientists

What About "The Other" Nuclear Weapon Sates?

The grand total between UK, France, China, Israel, India and Pakistan is around 1000 warheads and bombs, with UK and France cutting back on their inventory and China, Pakistan, and India increasing their inventory. In any case, their increases are minuscule compared with America and Russia.

What About "Would-Be" Nuclear Weapon Sates?

The main covert justification for a state acquiring nuclear weapon capability is as a hedge against regime change.

Current events in Libya are a clear illustration that without nuclear weapons, a regime is vulnerable to conventional military pressure by its opponents. Iran's clerical regime pursuit of Uranium enrichment at Natanz and other sites, albeit with nuclear civilian power as cover, allows building a nuclear capability as a hedge against "regime change" by its archenemy, Israel, or the US.

The opposite example, nuclear weapons as a deterrent, is North Korea with a minuscule arsenal (2 to 10 fission type, 2 - 4kT Plutonium devices), which gets away with outrages such as the sinking of a South Korean warship or shelling of a border village. They get away with it precisely because the affected parties (South Korea, and indirectly, the US)

are afraid of the massive (hundreds of thousands) casualties if north Korea uses the few weapons available.

Is the Non Proliferation Treaty Dead?

International meetings in 2010 and 2011 sponsored by the US and the UN to review the status and implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, except for their symbolism, went nowhere.

Why?

Causes include:

- competing higher priority national interests, whether simmering disputes with neighboring states or as a hedge against "regime change"
- less intimidation by declining superpowers (the US and Russia)
- devaluation of nuclear weapons as a practical battlefield tool (everybody, without exception, is afraid of nuclear weapons after seeing the consequences in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but they have not been used since).

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was invented by the nuclear "haves" to prevent or decrease the threat to their freedom of action to protect their political and economic interests.

The original inventor and user of nuclear weapons, the US, tried to prevent other countries from acquiring nuclear weapons fearing they might be used against it. With the USSR breaking the US monopoly and other countries contemplating "going nuclear", the US decided to slow down the spread of nuclear weapons by offering a "sweet" deal in 1955 called Atoms For Peace, whereby a country that renounces the pursuit of nuclear weapons would be "allowed" to buy civilian nuclear technology. The other "sweetener" was the "nuclear umbrella" that US offered to members of NATO and other close allies.

The US underestimated the strong desire of other countries to be independent of the US in controlling their political and economic destiny or survival, and went nuclear over the objections of the US, whether the UK, France, China, India, Israel, Pakistan, and North Korea.

A minority, like Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and South Korea abandoned nuclear weapons programs, either because of pacifism, economics, or sometimes due to strong-arming pressure by the US.

The world in the 21st Century is in a state of flux, with the decline of US, and allies questioning its commitments (like dumping of long time US friend, H. Mubarak). As a result, Japan is seriously re-examining its posture on nuclear weapons, and South Korea again "waltzing" towards reprocessing.

The BRIC countries are becoming very assertive due to their robust economies; the only non-nuclear weapon state in BRIC is Brazil. However, Brazil has the enrichment infrastructure in place, and a highly trained and capable cadre of military scientists and engineers; if they ever decide to proceed, nothing will stop them.

Finally, most of the developed world, particularly EU countries, have the infrastructure in place, are in the forefront of research and development of Inertial Confinement Fusion (directly applicable to miniaturized warheads), a highly trained and capable cadre of scientists and engineers, and advanced industrial infrastructure. Fortunately for the world, they are also mostly pacifist or encumbered by economic problems...

Conclusion

For the moment, we cannot stop proliferation by force without an unacceptable level of civilian casualties, to wit, Korea.

On the other hand, we are reinforcing the idea that nuclear weapons represent the only sure way to prevent being attacked or be subject to regime change.

It is not clear at this time where we are going...No brilliant ideas in sight.

1 Kristensen, HM, in "Nuclear Notebook" in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (June 2011)