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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**Taking Stock of Global
Nuclear Disarmament**

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TAKING STOCK OF GLOBAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

In Context

- September 26 is observed as the **International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons** on the United Nations calendar. This day emphasizes the **urgent need to eliminate nuclear weapons globally**, advocating for a safer world free from the threat of nuclear conflict.

About

- Nuclear disarmament has been a persistent goal of the international community since the dawn of the nuclear age in 1945. However, the global landscape has changed, with the emergence of more nuclear states, rising geopolitical tensions, and recent events such as the **war in Ukraine** and **North Korea's** continued nuclear tests. The **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)**, also known as the Ban Treaty, and the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)** represent two key instruments in the fight for nuclear disarmament. While the NPT aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, the TPNW, which came into force in **2021**, seeks to ban nuclear weapons entirely.
- The **International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons** offers a moment to reflect on these efforts. Despite continued divisions between nuclear and non-nuclear states, efforts to promote nuclear disarmament remain active, with the TPNW gaining support and challenging the assumptions around nuclear deterrence.

Current State of Global Nuclear Disarmament Efforts

- NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons):**
 - Established in **1968**, it is a cornerstone of the global nuclear order.
 - The NPT's primary objectives are **non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful use of nuclear technology**.
 - The NPT divides the world into **nuclear-weapon states (NWS)** and **non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS)**. However, some states, including **India, Pakistan, and Israel**, have not signed the NPT.
- TPNW (Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons):**
 - Came into force in **2021**, it is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons.
 - As of **July 2024**, the TPNW had **70 state parties**, with 27 additional states having signed but not ratified it.
 - Nuclear-armed states and their allies, including **India, USA, and Russia**, have not signed the TPNW, viewing it as incompatible with their defense policies.
- Other Treaties and Efforts:**
 - Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT):** Though signed by 185 countries, it has yet to come into force due to non-ratification by key states like the **USA, China, India, and Pakistan**.
 - New START Treaty:** A **US-Russia** arms control agreement aimed at reducing strategic nuclear weapons, extended till **2026**, though tensions between these two powers persist.
 - Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs):** Several regions, including **Latin America** and **Africa**, have established NWFZs as a means of promoting disarmament.

Need for Nuclear Disarmament

- Humanitarian Impact: Nuclear weapons** are the most destructive and indiscriminate weapons ever created. A single detonation can cause mass death and destruction, with long-term effects on human health, the environment, and global climate.
- Preventing Nuclear Conflict:** Rising geopolitical tensions between **nuclear-armed states** increase the risk of nuclear conflict, either intentional or accidental. The consequences of such a conflict would be catastrophic on a global scale.
- Environmental and Health Impacts:** The production, testing, and use of nuclear weapons have devastating effects on the environment. **Radiation exposure** from nuclear fallout can cause **genetic damage, cancer**, and other long-term health issues.
- Moral and Ethical Imperative:** Many argue that possessing weapons capable of mass destruction is

inherently immoral. Efforts like the **TPNW** seek to establish a global norm against nuclear possession, similar to the bans on chemical and biological weapons.

- **Global Security and Stability:** Nuclear weapons contribute to **global insecurity** by fostering arms races and encouraging other nations to develop or acquire their own nuclear arsenals. Disarmament would help reduce the likelihood of arms races and promote global peace.

Challenges in Nuclear Disarmament

- **Nuclear Deterrence Doctrine:** Many nuclear-armed states, including **USA, Russia, India, and Pakistan**, view nuclear weapons as essential to their national security under the doctrine of **nuclear deterrence**. This belief holds that the threat of nuclear retaliation prevents adversaries from initiating conflict, making disarmament less attractive.
- **Geopolitical Tensions: Tensions between nuclear powers** such as **India and Pakistan, USA and Russia, and North Korea and the USA** make disarmament difficult. In regions of high conflict, nuclear weapons are seen as necessary for survival or maintaining a balance of power.
- **Lack of Trust:** Mutual suspicion among nuclear-armed states hampers disarmament efforts. **Verification** mechanisms and transparency measures are essential for disarmament, but countries often fear that disarmament could leave them vulnerable to adversaries.
- **Non-Participation in TPNW:** Key nuclear powers have refused to sign the **TPNW**, viewing it as **unrealistic** and incompatible with their security policies. **Persistent objectors**, including the USA, **Russia**, and **China**, do not consider themselves bound by the treaty's provisions.
- **Technological Challenges: Disarmament verification** and ensuring compliance with treaties like the **NPT** and **TPNW** remain significant challenges. The **CTBT** has faced hurdles due to the difficulties in monitoring and detecting nuclear tests.
- **Regional Conflicts and Proliferation Risks:** Continued nuclear programs in **North Korea** and nuclear ambitions in **Iran** raise concerns over further nuclear proliferation. Such programs destabilize regional security and complicate global disarmament efforts.

Way Ahead

- **Strengthening Multilateral Frameworks:** Existing frameworks like the **NPT** and **TPNW** should be strengthened by encouraging more countries to join and adhere to their provisions. Universalizing the **CTBT** would also prevent further nuclear testing and promote disarmament.
- **Engagement with Nuclear-Armed States:** Dialogue between nuclear-armed states, particularly the **USA, Russia, China**, and regional players like **India** and **Pakistan**, is critical. Confidence-building measures, transparency, and arms reduction talks must be prioritized.
- **Promoting Regional Nuclear-Free Zones:** The success of **Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZs)** should be replicated in other regions, such as the **Middle East** and **East Asia**, to promote regional disarmament and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- **Humanitarian Approach:** Continuing to emphasize the **humanitarian consequences** of nuclear weapons, as championed by the **Humanitarian Initiative** that led to the **TPNW**, can delegitimize the use and possession of nuclear weapons.
- **Incorporating Disarmament in Global Security Dialogue:** Disarmament must be integrated into broader global security discussions, including those concerning **climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical tensions**. Global security is interconnected, and the nuclear issue cannot be viewed in isolation.
- **Developing Verification Mechanisms:** Robust verification mechanisms for disarmament treaties are essential. Technological advancements can help monitor compliance and detect violations. **The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** and other monitoring bodies should be strengthened for this purpose.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Despite numerous global efforts, the world remains far from achieving nuclear disarmament. Discuss the challenges to nuclear disarmament and suggest ways to overcome these challenges.

