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Q1(e)

The changing global order and ongoing regional conflicts, with the global powers taking sides, have jeopardized the progress made towards disarmament in the past. Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Changing International Political Order

Changing International Political Order: Rise of super powers; strategic and ideological Bipolarity, arms race and Cold War; Nuclear threat; Non-aligned movement; Collapse of the Soviet Union; Unipolarity and American hegemony; relevance of non-alignment in the contemporary world.

Core demand of the question

- State past disarmament and arms-control gains (NPT, INF, START, conventions)
- Show how a changing order and sided regional wars reverse those gains
- **Comment:** jeopardised is accurate; total collapse is not yet the only reading

Revision summary

Post-1968 progress included the NPT bargain, INF and START/**New START** cuts, and chemical and biological bans.

Russia's war, INF collapse, frozen **New START** practice and China's expansion reopen nuclear politics.

Great powers taking sides in regional conflicts raise the value of nuclear hedges and missiles.

Idealism's institutions remain; Waltzian anarchy is again the loud fact.

Jeopardised is accurate; total erasure of the non-proliferation majority is not yet true.

Introduction

- **The decades after 1968 built a thin but real disarmament and arms-control architecture:** the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**, bilateral United States-Soviet and then United States-Russian cuts, and bans on chemical and biological weapons. The statement that a **changing global order and regional wars with great powers taking sides** have jeopardised that progress is **largely right**. The comment should say how, and how far.

Body

What progress existed

- **The NPT created a bargain:** non-nuclear-weapon states abstain; recognised weapon states pursue disarmament in good faith; civilian nuclear cooperation is allowed. The **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty**, START and **New START** cut and capped deployed strategic arms. The Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention set legal floors. Nuclear-weapon-free zones and IAEA safeguards were the daily machinery. None of this abolished nuclear weapons. It **slowed spread and reduced some inventories**.

How the present jeopardises it

Great-power rivalry has returned as the organising fact. **Russia's** war on Ukraine, discussed in 1(c), came with nuclear threats and a breakdown of cooperative verification. The **INF Treaty** collapsed earlier amid United States-Russia accusations. **New START's** implementation has been frozen in political terms even when paper remains. **China's** arsenal expansion sits outside the old bilateral frame. The **United States, NATO** allies and Russia treat nuclear weapons again as usable political currency, not as a residual Cold War stockpile.

Regional wars pull patrons in. Ukraine is a NATO-supported defence against a nuclear-armed invader. In West Asia, great-power alignment around Israel, Iran and armed groups raises the value of missiles and, for some states, of a nuclear hedge. The **Korean** peninsula and **AUKUS** nuclear-powered submarines show that proliferation and naval nuclearisation remain live. Export controls and sanctions replace inspections when trust dies. **Waltz** would say anarchy was always there. The idealist machinery of 1(d) needed a minimum of great-power concert that no longer exists.

Conventional arms racing, hypersonic missiles, and dual-use space and cyber tools further blur the old counting rules of warheads and bombers.

Comment

'Jeopardised' is the correct verb. Treaties are unravelling or unused. Disarmament Article VI of the NPT looks empty when weapon states modernise. The progress is **not fully erased**: most states remain non-nuclear; chemical weapons still carry stigma; the IAEA still inspects. A comment that says 'disarmament is over' is too neat. A comment that says the architecture is healthy is false. The 2020s are a **backsliding decade** for arms control, driven by revisionist war and by a order in which the United States, China and Russia do not share one security regime.

Flow diagram

Past gains NPT START INF -> Jeopardy
Changing order -> Jeopardy
Regional wars patrons -> Jeopardy
Jeopardy -> Modernisation threats frozen verification

Conclusion

Past gains in non-proliferation and bilateral cuts depended on a workable great-power bargain. Sided regional wars and a contested order have broken that bargain. Disarmament is jeopardised. It is not yet a blank page, because the NPT membership and the stigma of some weapons still exist.

Facts & figures

NPT 1968/1970

Cornerstone non-proliferation bargain; Article VI disarmament obligation is the idealist core now under strain.

INF Treaty

1987 U.S.-Soviet ban on a class of missiles; collapse in 2019 marked the return of open intermediate-range racing.

New START

Last major U.S.-Russia strategic treaty; implementation and political trust have been badly damaged since the Ukraine war.

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