

**CBCS B.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE**  
**SEM-IV HONS - CC-10 : Global Politics:**  
**TOPIC-II : Contemporary Global Issues - b. Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**  
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## **PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

### **Introduction:**

Nuclear proliferation is the spread of nuclear weapons, weapons-applicable nuclear technology and information to nations not recognized as "Nuclear Weapon States" by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT.

Thus Nuclear proliferation indicates the spread of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology or material to countries that do not already possess them. The term is also used to refer to the possible acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorist organizations or other armed groups.

During World War II the prospect of a nuclear-armed Nazi Germany led the United States to intensify its efforts to build a nuclear weapon. The U.S. program, known as the Manhattan Project, produced the first atomic bomb in July 1945. Only three weeks after the first test of an atomic bomb in the U.S. state of New Mexico, a uranium-based atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan; a second, plutonium-based bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later.

The United States remained the sole nuclear power until 1949, when the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb, code-named First Lightning, in a remote area of Kazakhstan.

Klaus Fuchs, a German-born British physicist who was involved in the Manhattan Project, was later convicted of passing secret information on the theory and design of atomic bombs to the Soviet government.

The intense competition of those two countries during the Cold War led them to develop the more-powerful thermonuclear bomb (also known as the hydrogen bomb, or H-bomb) and to enlarge their stocks of nuclear weapons.

At the height of this competition, the United States and the Soviet Union together possessed many thousands of nuclear warheads, enough to eradicate all life on Earth many times over.

Confronted with the growing prospect of nuclear proliferation, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower launched in 1953 his Atoms for Peace program, which eventually provided non-military nuclear technology to countries that renounced nuclear weapons.

In 1957 the Atoms for Peace program led to the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a United Nations organization promoting the safe and peaceful use of nuclear technology. In response to the growing threat of nuclear war, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), was concluded by the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China in 1968.

The treaty required states with nuclear weapons to make non-military nuclear technology available to other countries and to take steps toward their own nuclear disarmament. In exchange, states without nuclear weapons pledged not to transfer or obtain military nuclear technology and to submit to IAEA regulations.

**The objectives of the NPT were thus twofold:**

- To prevent the spread of nuclear weapons without impeding the development of peaceful uses of nuclear technology and
- To promote global disarmament.

The two objectives proved difficult to achieve, however, because nonmilitary nuclear technology could sometimes be redirected to military use and because the possession of nuclear weapons provided a powerful deterrent against attack, which the nuclear-armed states were reluctant to give up.

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by developing countries such as India (1974), Pakistan (1998), and North Korea (2006) raised new challenges. While developing countries can acquire nuclear weapons, they lack the elaborate system of command and control that limited the risk of nuclear accident and conflict escalation in countries like the United States and the Soviet Union.

Similar concerns were raised following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when some former Soviet republics inherited a portion of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Many experts warned that neither these countries nor a weakened Russia could guarantee the security of their nuclear weapons.

Under the Lisbon Protocol (1992), Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, as well as Russia and the United States, became parties to the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) treaty between the United States and the former Soviet Union, and the former Soviet republics agreed to destroy or transfer to Russia all strategic nuclear warheads in their territories.

While these examples show that poor states can develop an atomic bomb, a nuclear weapons program generally remains a complex and costly enterprise. Some states, such as Libya, tried and failed to develop nuclear weapons; others, such as Argentina and Brazil, abandoned their nuclear weapons programs; and one state, South Africa, voluntarily dismantled its nuclear weapons and joined the NPT in 1991 as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Because the main value of nuclear weapons lies in their deterrent effect, states that possess nuclear weapons have tended not to conceal the fact that they do.

An exception is Israel, which was widely believed to have acquired nuclear weapons in the 1950s. That country, which did not sign the NPT, maintains a policy of "nuclear ambiguity," neither confirming nor denying that it possesses nuclear weapons.

Some international relations theorists have rejected the idea that nuclear proliferation necessarily increases the likelihood of nuclear conflict. According to the American scholar Kenneth Waltz, for example, the spread of nuclear weapons can actually generate stability and peace, because nuclear powers will be deterred from attacking each other by the threat of nuclear retaliation. Other scholars, however, have argued that nuclear proliferation inevitably increases the risk of a catastrophic nuclear explosion, whether deliberate or accidental.

**Conclusion** - be it among nations or terrorists - greatly increases the chance of nuclear violence on a scale that would be intolerable. Proliferation increases the chance that nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of irrational people, either suicidal or with no concern for the fate of the world. Irrational or outright psychotic leaders of military factions or terrorist groups might decide to use a few nuclear weapons under their control to stimulate a global nuclear war, as an act of vengeance against humanity as a whole.