An end to the New START in 2021

What is the issue?

- On August 2 2019, the US formally quits the US-Russia Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
- Concluded in 1987, it had obliged the two countries to eliminate all ground-based missiles of ranges between 500 and 5,500 km, an objective achieved by 1991.

What is about to change?

- At risk is the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) signed in 2010 and due to lapse in February 2021.
- It has a provision for a 5-year extension but Mr. Trump has labelled it a bad deal negotiated by the Barack Obama administration.
- In May 2019, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) declared that Russia had not adhered with the provisions of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- The provision is the nuclear testing moratorium in a manner consistent with the CTBT-imposed zero-yield standard.
- The CTBT has not entered into force but the US is a signatory and Russia has signed and ratified it.
- Taken together, these ominous pointers indicate the beginning of a new nuclear arms race.

What happened in the 1980s?

- The decade of the 1980s saw heightened Cold War tensions.
- Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan (1979) provided the US an opportunity to fund a jihad with the help of Pakistan.
- President Ronald Reagan called the USSR an evil empire and launched his space war initiative.
- Soviet deployments in Europe of SS-20 missiles were matched by the US with Pershing II and cruise missiles.

What are the Cold War talks about?

- In 1985, the two countries entered into arms control negotiations on three tracks. They are,

1. Strategic weapons with ranges of over 5,500 km, leading to the START agreement in 199
2. Intermediate-range missiles, of particular concern to the Europeans, and this led to the INF Treaty in 1987.
3. Nuclear and Space Talks was intended to address Soviet concerns regarding the US's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) but this did not yield any concrete outcome.

What was the effect of INF Treaty?

- Under the INF Treaty, no nuclear warheads were dismantled and similar range air-launched and sea-launched missiles were not constrained.
- Since it was a bilateral agreement, the treaty did not restrict other countries, but this hardly mattered as it was an age of bipolarity and the US-USSR nuclear equation was the only one that counted.
- By 1991, the INF had been implemented. The USSR destroyed a total of 1,846 missiles and the US did the same with 846 missiles.
- Associated production facilities were also closed down.
- In keeping with Reagan's motto of 'trust but verify', the INF Treaty was the first pact to include intensive verification measures.
- With the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the USSR in end-1991, the arms race was over.
- The US was investing in missile defence and conventional global precision strike capabilities to expand its technological lead.
- Some of these were blurring the nuclear-conventional divide.

What happened when US withdrew from ABM?

- In 2001, US announced its unilateral withdrawal from the Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972. The INF Treaty had been under threat for some time.
- As Russia began production, formal allegations of violation of the INF Treaty were raised by the Obama administration in 2014.
- Russia believes that nuclear stability began getting upset since the US's unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.
- As the US used its technological lead to gain advantage, Russia became more dependent on its offensive nuclear arsenal and began its modernisation and diversification.
- The US 2017 National Security Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review says,
    1. Russia as a 'disruptive power' pushing for a re-ordering of security and economic structures in Europe and West Asia in its favour.
    2. For the first time, China was identified as a strategic competitor in the

Indo-Pacific region in the near-term and displacement of the US to achieve global pre-eminence in the future.

- With the geopolitical shift to the Indo-Pacific, the US believes that the INF Treaty was putting it at a disadvantage compared to China which is rapidly modernising and currently has 95% of its ballistic and cruise missile inventory in the INF range.
- Against this political backdrop, the demise of the agreement was a foregone conclusion.

Is there any future for New START?

- New START 2011 was a successor to the START framework 1991, limited both sides to 700 strategic launchers and 1,550 operational warheads.
- It lapses in February 2021 unless extended for a 5-year period.
- Mr. Trump has indicated that a decision on the agreement will be taken in January 2021, after the 2020 election.
- Given his dislike for it, if he is re-elected, it is clear that the New START will also meet the fate of the INF Treaty.
- This means that, for the first time since 1972, when the Strategic Arms Limitation Act (SALT) I concluded, strategic arsenals from the US and Russia will not be constrained by any arms control agreement.

Why is the testing of low-yield weapon done?

- The 2018 NPR envisaged development of new nuclear weapons, including low-yield weapons.
- The Nevada test site (silent since 1992) is being readied to resume testing with a six-month notice.
- DIA’s director pointed fingers at Russian violations and also declared that China’s preparing to operate its test site year-round in a development that speaks directly to China’s goals for its nuclear force.
- He suggested that China can’t achieve such progress without activities inconsistent with the CTBT.
- Since the CTBT requires ratification by US, China, Iran, Israel and Egypt and adherence by India, Pakistan and North Korea, it is unlikely to ever enter into force.
- Continuation of testing by the US would effectively ensure its demise. A new nuclear arms race could just be the beginning.
- Unlike the bipolar equation of the Cold War, this time it will be complicated because of multiple countries being involved.
- Technological changes are bringing cyber and space domains into contention.
- All these raise the risks of escalation and could even strain the most

important achievement of nuclear arms control — the taboo against the use of nuclear weapons that has stood since 1945.

Source: The Hindu

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