Global Nuclear Order (GNO)

Why in News?

Created in the shadow of the Cold War, the GNO has held reasonably well, but is facing pressures under changing geopolitics

What is GNO?

- **Historical background** – It was created in the shadow of the Cold War, with the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., leading the western and the Socialist blocs, respectively.
- Following the *1962 Cuban Missile Crisis*, both US and USSR understood 2 political realities leading to the creation of GNO.
    - A *need of bilateral mechanisms* to prevent tensions from escalating to the nuclear level.
    - The *nuclear weapons are dangerous* and, therefore, their spread should be curbed.
- **Pathway to control proliferation** – The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. initiated multilateral ***negotiations in Geneva in 1965*** on a treaty to curb the spread of nuclear weapons.
- In 1968, ***Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)*** began with less than 60 parties but today, it is widely described as the cornerstone of the global nuclear order with 191 adherents.
- **India's standpoint** - India had chosen ***not to sign the NPT***, and in 1974, stunned the world by conducting an underground peaceful nuclear explosive (PNE).
- **London club** – ***7 countries*** (the U.S., U.S.S.R, U.K., Canada, France, Japan, and West Germany) proposed ad hoc export controls to ensure that nuclear technology, transferred for peaceful purposes, not be used for PNEs.
- **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** – The London Club later transformed into NSG, with ***48 countries*** to observe common guidelines for exporting nuclear and related dual-use materials, equipment, and technologies.

Though the Soviet Union and India enjoyed close relations with the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in 1971, the USSR was committed to upholding the GNO, and a founding member of the London Club.

How GNO has performed?

- **Nuclear taboo** – It has been held since 1945 and humanity has survived 75 years of the nuclear age without blowing itself up.
- **Successful non-proliferation** – While more than 20 countries were predicted to

possess nuclear weapons by the 1970s, (5 in 1968 – the U.S., U.S.S.R., U.K., France, and China), ***only 4 countries have since gone nuclear***, i.e., India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan.

- **Strategic stability** – It is based on assured ***2nd strike capability***, guaranteed by the enormous arsenals that both US and Russia had built up.
- This eliminated any incentive to strike 1st ensuring deterrence stability.
- Arms control negotiations led to parity in strategic capacities creating a sense of arms race stability, and fail-safe communication links provided crisis management stability.
- **Denuclearisation** – ***Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan*** were denuclearised that hosted Soviet nuclear weapons and possessed some capabilities.
- **Extension of NPT** – ***In 1995***, the NPT, originally concluded for 25 years, was extended into perpetuity.
- **Active role of USA** - Between 1977 to 1988, the U.S. actively *subverted Taiwan's nuclear weapons programme* as it stepped up a normalisation of ties with China.
- During the 1970s, South Korea considered a nuclear weapons programme but France withdrew its offer to supply a reprocessing plant to South Korea under U.S. pressure.
- **Limitations** – Arms control did not end the US-USSR nuclear race.
    - In fact, their arsenals grew from 28,000 bombs in 1962 to over 65,000 bombs in the early 1980s.

Since the late 1980s, the U.S. and Soviet arsenals have declined sharply, to below 12,000 bombs today mostly due to the end of the Cold War rivalry and the breakup of the U.S.S.R.

How the changing geopolitics impacts GNO?

- **Multipolar world** – Today's nuclear world is no longer a bipolar world and U.S. faces a more assertive China, determined to regain influence, regionally and globally.
- **Emergence of China** – As its nuclear arsenal continues to grow, ***China may soon become the 3rd nuclear superpower***, joining the United States and Russia.
- **Withdrawal from treaties**
    - **USA** – It withdrew from the *Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002* and from the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019*.
    - **Russia** – It de-ratified the *Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 2023*.
- The only remaining agreement, ***New START***, will lapse in 2026.
- **Erosion of strategic stability** –The 2021 Geneva meeting got collapsed with the Ukraine war.
- Moreover, Russian nuclear warning to NATO and the U.S. against escalation in Ukraine has revived nuclear concerns.
- **US bias over non-proliferation** – The US turned a blind eye when Israel went nuclear in the 1960s-70s and again, when China helped Pakistan with its nuclear programme in the 1980s.
- Recently, it had the nuclear submarine ***AUKUS deal*** (Australia, U.S., and U.K.) reducing the influence of NPT.
- **Change in stance of countries** – Domestic compulsions are turning the U.S. inwards,

raising questions in the minds of its allies about its ‘extended deterrence’ guarantees, especially in East Asia.
    - A *shift is visible in Japan’s* decision to double its defence spending over next 5 years.

What lies ahead?

- There are 2 conditions to gain legitimacy
    - A convergence among the major powers.
    - A successful presentation of the outcome as a global public good to the rest of the world.

References

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