Necessity of Nuclear Weapons Non-Use norm

Mains: *GS2 – International Relations*

Why in News?

Marking 80 years on from Hiroshima, the recent developments including hostilities involving nuclear possessors, nuclear modernization are putting the norm of non-use under immense strain.

What was the Hibakusha's role in shaping global views on nuclear weapons?

> *The people exposed to the radiation from the bombs are known as the* ***Hibakusha****, which literally translates to "explosion-affected people."*

- **Advocating moral and ethical needs** – It provided powerful testimony about the human consequences of nuclear attacks.
- It creates a strong moral and ethical case against nuclear weapons use.
- **Overcoming suppression** – Initially, U.S. occupation authorities suppressed information about the bombings' effects.
- Survivors fought to have their stories heard and respected, a recognition that took decades to achieve.
- **Educating and rising global awareness** – The survivors formed the Nihon Hidankyo, a group that traveled globally to educate people about the horror and prolonged suffering caused by nuclear weapons.
- **Linking radiation sickness to nuclear weapons –** Public understanding of radiation sickness in Japan only followed the 1954 Fukuryu Maru incident.
- This connected acute radiation illness to nuclear fallout and amplified the survivors' voices.
- **Disarming efforts** – It contributed to international awareness, culminating in their recognition with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 for disarmament efforts.

What are the factors supporting the "norm of non-use"?

- **Nuclear weapons unacceptability –** The use of nuclear weapons in conflicts is fundamentally intolerable, largely due to humanitarian issues and the pursuit of political stability.
- **Fear of mutual destruction –** The idea that the fear of destruction has been a greater factor in preventing nuclear weapon use than just legal or moral reasons alone.

- **Global political consensus –** As the memories of past nuclear conflicts fade, there's a risk that the international community may become satisfied that could increase the chances of dangerous nuclear miscalculations**.**
- **International treaties –** Treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty are in place to discourage the use of nuclear weapons.
- **Long-term risks –** Decision-makers are cautious about the potential for uncontrollable escalation and the long-term geopolitical consequences that deters them from using nuclear weapons.

What are the challenges for the "norm of non-use"?

- **Absence of legal prohibition –** There is no binding international law prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons.
- The existing treaties like the NPT and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty do not ban their use, only their proliferation and testing.
- **Evolving threats** – Recent developments, such as Russia's threats over Ukraine, India's nuclear posturing during *Operation Sindoor*, have introduced nuclear rhetoric into regional conflicts.
- **Modernization of nuclear arsenals –** Advances in nuclear weapon technology, including development of more "useable" tactical weapons, raise concerns that the threshold for nuclear use could be lowered in future conflicts.
- **Legitimizing nuclear use** – Nations strategically challenge the norm of nuclear non-use by deploying other norms that legitimize nuclear use, leading to debates of acceptable nuclear behavior.
- **Weakening of disarmament efforts** – Failures and fractures in nuclear treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) i.e. the neglect of disarmament obligations by nuclear states weakens non-use norm.

What measures can be taken?

- **Strengthening international norms** – It is needed to reinforce the unique status of nuclear weapons as unacceptable tools of war through sustained diplomatic efforts and international declarations.
- **Promoting universal adherence to non-use** – This emphasizing humanitarian and ethical imperatives can be established by the experiences of the Hibakusha.
- **Encouraging negotiation**s – New legal instruments that unambiguously prohibit the use of nuclear weapons, closing existing legal loopholes can leverage global cooperation.
- **Fostering trust among nuclear-armed states** – It can be done by establishing crisis communication mechanisms and confidence-building measures will help to prevent misunderstandings.
- **Investing in education and awarenes**s – Integrate the historical lessons of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and incidents like Fukuryu Maru into global educational curricula
    - This will help prevent complacency about nuclear dangers.
- Support the testimony and outreach of survivors (Hibakusha) and organizations

advocating for disarmament, ensuring their message remains relevant.

- **Modernizing deterrence without escalation** – Urge states to review and revise nuclear postures to avoid developing or deploying more "useable" tactical nuclear weapons.
- Advocate for security policies that prioritize non-nuclear deterrence and conflict resolution.
- **Enhancing global collective action** – Encourage major powers and nuclear possessors to lead by example by reducing their nuclear arsenals and upholding non-use norms.
- **Mobilize the international community** – This including civil society, NGOs, and non-nuclear states to campaign for complete nuclear disarmament.
- **Preventing nuclear miscalculation** – Stress the importance of robust verification and early-warning systems to avert missteps.
- Develop crisis management frameworks for de-escalation in case of rising tensions involving nuclear-capable states.

Reference

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