The Fragile State of Nuclear Disarmament

What is the issue?

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its yearbook, highlighting some worrying trends of the past year in international security.

What have been the trends in military spending?

- The comprehensive report claims that while absolute numbers of nuclear arsenal have reduced, they are expected to grow over the next decade.
- During 2012-2021, military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has largely been stable.
- Russia leads the charge in absolute numbers of nuclear inventory (5977 against the U.S.'s 5428), however it is the U.S. that has the largest number of deployed warheads (1744 against Russia's 1588).
- The U.K. has 225 nuclear weapons in its inventory, while France has 290, China has 350, India has 160, Pakistan has 165.
- Israel is estimated to have 90 and North Korea 20.
- India's military expenditure increased to USD 76.6 billion in 2021, marking a 0.9 per cent hike over the 2020 figures.

What about global arms imports?

- The yearbook has highlighted that India being the top weapons importer during the 2017-2021 period.
- Other countries to feature in the top five arms importers list include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China, and Australia.
- According to SIPRI, these five nation states account for 38% of total global arms import.

What are the key concerns flagged by the yearbook?

- It mentions few incidents as worrying indicators of an unstable system –

1. Low level border clashes between India and Pakistan,
2. The civil war in Afghanistan, and
3. The armed conflict in Myanmar.

- It also highlighted three cause of concern trends –

1. Chinese-American rivalry,
2. Involvement of state and non-state actors in multiple conflicts
3. The challenge that climatic and weather hazards pose.

- The marginal downsizing observed in the nuclear arsenal has come mostly from the U.S. and Russia dismantling retired warheads.
- But the Russian invasion of Ukraine has raised some serious eyebrows because of the continuous rhetoric from the Kremlin over them not shying away from the use of nuclear

weapons.
- China's recent activities surrounding construction of 300 new nuclear missile silos have also been turning heads.
- **Iran –** The report reports that Iran's military budget grew to $24.6 billion, growing for the first time in four years.
- It claims that while there were some advances over the rollout of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran increased its enrichment of Uranium-235 to 60% in 2021.

What is the general attitude among countries?

- The leaders of the P5 countries (China, France, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.) issued a joint statement affirming the belief that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought".
- The tactic here seems to be to milk the treaties and agreements to the hilt.
- The states are aware of the value of the rhetoric and the security dilemma that their actions present.
- The recent Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent NATO bids by Finland and Sweden seem to be telling events.
- While the Russia's Ukrainian invasion hype-up its nuclear attack rhetoric, its primary leadership (both civil and military) had been rather diplomatic and 'relatively' cordial in its treatment of the Finnish and Swedish NATO bids.
- The year 2021 also saw the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 2017 coming into effect.
- The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the Missile Technology Control Regimes (MTCR) held their annual meetings despite decision making being limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the way forward?

- The recent geopolitical events transpiring around the world in practically all regions have made the global security climate more unstable.
- A strong political opposition would be needed to help keep the ruling dispensation in check.
- Furthermore, the two largest nuclear weapons holding states need to take on a more engaging role in the international arena.
- SIPRI's yearbook, while not being devoid of some challenges, forces us to look critically at how the global disarmament project seems to be going.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/the-fragile-state-of-nuclear-disarmament/article65529602.ece?homepage=true
2. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/at-76-6-bn-india-s-military-spending-third-highest-in-world-sipri-report-122042500616_1.html#:~:text=India's%20military%20expenditure%20increased%20to,Institute%20(SIPRI)%20on%20Monday

Quick Facts

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

- It is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments,

arms control and disarmament.

- Established in 1966, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.
- Based in Stockholm, SIPRI is regularly ranked among the most respected think tanks worldwide.
- SIPRI was established on the basis of a decision by the Swedish Parliament and receives a substantial part of its funding in the form of an annual grant from the Swedish Government.
- The Institute also seeks financial support from other organizations in order to carry out its research.
- SIPRI's vision is a world in which sources of insecurity are identified and understood, conflicts are prevented or resolved, and peace is sustained.

Nuclear Disarmament Treaties

- Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), 1963
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968
- Interim Agreement on Offensive Arms (SALT I), 1972
- Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), 1972
- Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II), 1979
- Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), 1987
- Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), 1991
- Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II (START II), 1993
- Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT or Moscow Treaty), 2002
- Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), 1996
- New START Treaty, 2010
- Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 2017

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