

Arms Control in Crisis: AI, Nuclear Weapons & the Future of War

Nuclear weapons remain a constant threat to global security, with states such as Russia and others continuing to signal their potential use. At the same time, traditional arms control treaties are eroding, weakening established frameworks for strategic stability. Rapid technological advances are transforming the landscape of modern warfare, and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and biotechnology introduce new regulatory and ethical challenges. This working group examines how the evolving capabilities and strategies of the United States, Russia, China, and other states affect the future of arms control, and considers what new frameworks and approaches may be necessary to maintain stability in a fragmented and multipolar international order.

Summary of the Discussion in the Working Group

In their discussions the working group highlighted the following points:

1. State preferences and political interests have shaped the development and deployment of arms technology and vice versa.
2. The reach of arms control is limited when in conflict with the interests of major states or against technologies especially relevant for security.
3. Evolving disruptive technologies currently face a lack of global, good-faith governance, and there is a need for proactive addressing of such technologies.
4. Arms control isn't fundamentally pacifist; it implicitly legitimises in a certain manner.

Key Questions Emerging from the Discussion

- How can arms control proponents convince states against nuclear proliferation when they are increasingly proving to be the most effective strategic deterrent?
- What does the withdrawal of European states from anti-landmine treaty mean for the future viability of arms control?

Summary of the Discussion at the Closing Panel

The discussion highlighted that there is always a pressure for allied proliferation, particularly during a period of greater US isolationism. However, nuclear weapons are not sufficient to protect conflict. You don't need to trust those you do arms control with, but you are likely to be able to agree on mutually beneficial guardrails. In this way we are more likely to see behavioural rather than treaty-based arms control.

Panelists further underlined that successful bi- or multilateral agreement is possible under adversarial conflict when diplomacy can find shared interests and, most importantly, shared anxieties. Many historical examples support this, like Cold War ballistic missile limitation or the famous Indo-China firearm ban in the Himalayas.