

Arms Control History

This learning unit provides a brief history of arms control, arguing that arms control may be considered a relevant discipline from antiquity until today.

- 2 A Message from the Author
- 3 The Beginning of Arms Control
- 9 From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the Cold War
- 13 From Traditional Bilateralism to Universal Multilateralism: 1961–1980
- 18 Arms Control Since the End of the 20th Century
- 21 Arms Control and the European Integration's History
- 23 Summary and Further Reading

Benjamin Hautecouverture

Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS)

Cite as: Benjamin Hautecouverture, "Arms Control History" in EUNPDC eLearning, ed. Niklas Schoernig, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt. Available at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/lu-20/>, last modified 4 December 2025

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament eLearning Course aims to cover all aspects of the EU non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. It's produced by PRIF with financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of individual learning units are the sole responsibility of the respective authors and don't necessarily reflect the position of the European Union.



Funded by
the European Union

1. A Message from the Author

A quick video introduction from the home office.

A quick video introduction from the home office, as our planned video production was not possible due to Covid-19.

Hello, my name is Benjamin Haute Couverture and I'm a senior research fellow at the Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS) in Paris. I'm also technical director at Expertise France for the European Union's Outreach Programme on the Arms Trade Treaty and I am a senior fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute in Ottawa.

I have been focusing my research on the study of strategic relations between states, nuclear deterrence, non-proliferation and disarmament in the field of weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons, the nuclear proliferation phenomenon and

nuclear proliferation crisis and the North-East-Asian strategic landscape with a focus on North Korean nuclear and ballistic issues for more than twenty years. I also work on nuclear security, the chemical weapons prohibition regime and the European Union's security and defence challenges and prospects, including the various EU security strategies.

This learning unit builds on this experience as to help you think in problematic terms about a history of a discipline – arms control – whose definition is dense, evolving and sometimes equivocal. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I will provide the multimedia parts of the learning unit in audio format only. I really hope that you will enjoy and that you will gain an understanding of international arms control history.

2. The Beginning of Arms Control

This chapter sets the frame by debating forms of arms control from antiquity to the modern era.

Short History and Long History: Beyond the Controversy

This video debates the theory of arms control and its importance in the Post-Cold War era.

In 1962, French thinker Raymond Aron proposed a broad definition of arms control that remains useful. It included all mechanisms, initiatives or actions, concerted or uncoordinated, unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, legally binding or non-binding, designed to limit the volume of violence in international affairs rather than the actual use of violence.

Arms control under international law lies between the disarmament process, which is intended to be part of legally binding and universal processes, and the various reactive initiatives to combat the proliferation of weapons. These three approaches correspond to three successive periods. The first is schematically that of the League of Nations and the meeting of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in 1932. The second one accompanies the doctrinalization of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War. The third is the Post-Cold War era and the emergence of what were alleged "new threats" to security almost twenty years ago.

For those who say that arms control is a Cold War discipline, it must be based on a tripod: bipolar world order, structuring conflict between the two poles, bilateral acceptance of the notion of strategic parity.

Arms control then reminds us that generically, the subject seeks to frame and stabilize nuclear deterrence in a pragmatic way. Arms control is therefore an integral part of nuclear deterrence. Then arms control relates to any form of cooperation between adversaries aimed at reducing the risks of war and nuclear escalation and/or limiting competition in the field of armaments.

Arms control led the United States and the USSR to co-manage deterrence. It was a bilateral technique. Another generic characteristic: arms control must be consensual because it translates into reciprocal commitments that strengthen mutual trust. It is therefore a paradoxical form of partnership.

If we go even further into the implications of the theoretical core, arms control is not so much about eliminating a weapon system as it is about shaping a predictable relationship through transparency mechanisms with a dual virtue: avoiding strategic planning based on the worst-case scenario, avoiding miscalculations and perceptual errors more generally.

For the USSR and the United States, legally binding constraints on their arsenals gradually shifted towards two main objectives: approximate parity and force survivability.

Naturally, with the end of the Cold War, the very detailed numerical parity objective lost its prominence in the American debate, as illustrated by the American withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the conclusion of the SORT Treaty in spring 2002.

The Post-Cold War era tried to adapt arms control to a more flexible strategic environment based on non-binding cooperation and the ambition for flexibility. This shift has not worked, as illustrated by the almost complete deconstruction of the security architecture in Europe.

In any case, while arms control may have been considered by some to be a discipline strictly confined to nuclear weapons during the Cold War.

Arms Control in Ancient Times: Not Much of an Issue

Arms control practice during the Ancient World was relatively limited for several reasons.

Firstly, warfare, which was important to the cultures of many of the peoples of the ancient world, was extremely common across the world – be it in the Middle East, ancient Greece, the Roman world or pre-Han China.

Secondly, despite its highly violent nature, warfare was largely fought with unsophisticated concussion or simple cutting weaponry, which made controlling weaponry difficult.

Amphictyonic law of Delphi (4th century BC) from Aegina. vue d'ensemble © Musée du Louvre / Maurice et Pierre Chuzeville (public domain)



Fresco of an ancient Macedonian Greek heavy infantry soldier wearing mail armour, 3rd century BC.
Istanbul Archeology Museums (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Arms Control in Ancient Times: Early Exceptions Regulating Warfare

In the 4th century BC in ancient Greece the **Great Amphityonic League** established one of the first recorded attempts in arms control in the Ancient World: a set of rules for waging war. The League, an ancient religious association of Greek tribes exercised a political influence through its membership oath, which laid out a doctrine forbidding the destruction of member cities or the cutting off of water supplies – even in wartime.

Buffer Zones

Many initiatives predominantly featured the establishment of buffer regions or the disarmament of defeated Empires. In terms of establishing buffer regions, key initiatives included the establishment of a buffer between the Egyptian Rameses II and the Hittite Hattusilis III around 1280BC, or the agreement to manage the buffer state of Armenia between the Roman and Parthian Empires in 58 – 63 AC.

Disarmament Agreements

In terms of disarmament agreements, key initiatives included the Romans' imposition of 'unequal treaties' (also known as *foedus inaequum*) on both Carthage in 201 BC and then Macedonia in 196 BC. These unequal

treaties required the defeated states to accept significant disarmament measures, including the elimination of most of their navies and, in the case of Carthage, the destruction of its war elephants.

Controlling Arms Sales

During the 900s AD, the King of the Franks, Charlemagne made it illegal – and punishable by forfeiture of property or death – to sell or export swords and chain mail manufactured in the Frankish empire to foreigners.

Protection of Non-combatants

The end of the Ancient World era saw the Church, for the first time, seek to limit violence against certain classes of people and property in its **989 Peace of God – Synod of Charroux**. The Peace of God ruling sought to protect non-combatants, agrarian and economic facilities, and the property of the church from war.

Arms Control in Medieval Times

In this video, you will learn:

- the context in which arms control was thought in the **Middle Ages**
- the place of the **church** in the initiatives that tried to be taken
- key **examples of arms control** seeking to limit violence at certain times

Organised violence was a significant issue during the Middle Ages. Violence was both extra-legal, with bandits wreaking damage on both towns and in the country-side, as well as legal, with the acceptance of the feud and the joust

While major wars were often short, mercenaries and some knights continued to wreak destruction outside the standard army-warfighting times. Additionally, numerous invasions from outside Christian Europe also occurred (whether by Muslims, Vikings or Mongols).

Arms control initiatives during the Middle Ages were focused on limiting the scope of public and private violence, both within and between polities. Across the era, the Church set restrictions on the conduct of warfare and specified what constituted legitimate targets and time periods for committing such violence.

For example, extending beyond the 989 Peace of God which sought to protect certain classes of people and property from violence, the 1027 Truce of God sought to limit warfare more broadly. It was an initiative to stop all violence at certain times, specifying certain days and holy seasons that the nobility was prohibited from violence, including on Sundays. Several extensions of the Truce of God were made over time, including in 1041 and 1063, and the punishment for violation of both the peaces and truces was anathema or excommunication.

Similarly, the State enacted several measures designed to control violence, with temporal rulers decreeing so-called 'Peaces of the Land', outlawing feuds and other forms of violence for a limited time. These included the peace of the Land for Elsass (1085–1103) and Henry IV's Peace of the Land in 1103, for which the penalty of breaching was capital punishment or the removal of the offender's eyes or hand.

In addition to these limits on the conduct of violence and warfare, decretal law included specific prohibitions on the sale or transfer of certain weapons, especially to Non-Christians or Saracens (those who professed the religion of Islam during the Middle Ages), or restrictions in their use. For example, the Canon 29 agreement of the Second Lateran Council of 1139 prohibited the use of crossbows against Christians (but did not prevent their use against Non-Christians). Additionally, the Canon 24 agreement of the Third Lateran Council of 1179 threatened excommunication of anyone who provided the Saracens with weapons, iron and wood to build ships. Similarly, Canon 71 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 banned the transfer of weapons to the Saracens.

Arms Control in Medieval Times: Major Initiatives 1027 • Truce of God

The Truce of God sought to improve moratoriums on fighting at certain times.

1041 •

Its prohibition on fighting on Sundays and during 'feast days' was extended to specific days of the week.

1054 •

The Council of Narbonne brought the Church-led peace movement to a climax, espousing the lofty, if unattainable, ideal that "no Christian should kill another Christian, for whoever kills a Christian undoubtedly sheds the blood of Christ."

1063 •

The Bishopric of Terouanne further extended the Truce of God's limits on the permitted timeframes for warfare and included the penalty for breaking the set restrictions was to be declared anathema and face excommunication.

1085–1103 • Peace of the Land

The Peace of the Land for Elsass was established by local political leaders to limit violence.

1103 •

Henry IV established the Peace of the Land to limit violence and included the requirement to "keep the peace with churches, clergy, monks and merchants."

1139 • Council Canons

The Second Council of the Lateran agreed to Canon 29, which banned the use of crossbows against Christians.

1179 •

The third Lateran Council agreed to Canon 24, which threatened anyone who would provide the Saracens with weapons, iron and wood to build ships with excommunication.

1215 •

The Fourth Council of the Lateran agreed to Canon 71, which banned the transfer of weapons to the Saracens.

Arms Control and Thought of War in Modern Times

This video debates:

- the widespread use of the **destruction of fortifications** as one of the flagship disarmament measures
- the place of **demilitarization** as a means of ensuring strategic stability
- the impact of **industrialization** on the means of warfare and the first international conventions on the use of modern armaments

A key thematic aspect of arms control during the modern era, particularly from the beginning of the 1700s, was that of neutralizing territory and razing fortifications. These two concepts relate to each other as a neutralized territory was not allowed to have fortifications.

Several major agreements on neutralization included the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht – whereby the French agreed to the British demands "that all the Fortifications of the City of Dunkirk be Razed and that the Harbour be filled up" (according to the text of the Peace of Utrecht) – and the 1715 British-Spanish-Dutch Treaty, under which forts and other fortifications were to be demolished so as to never be rebuilt or restored.

Additionally, the 1856 Treaty of Paris neutralized the Black Sea, closing the region to all warships and prohibiting fortifications and armaments, while numerous treaties were signed to neutralize countries, such as the 1831 Treaty of independence and neutralization of Belgium, and the 1867 agreement to neutralize Luxembourg.

Other arms control initiatives of the modern era focused on demilitarization or the numerical limitation of a standing army. For example, the Anglo-French Naval Limitation Pact of 1787 reduced and equalized the size of the French and British navies, aiming to strengthen strategic stability between the two great powers following years of inter-state conflict. Shortly after, this agreement was followed by a joint declaration, whereby both agreed to the

discontinuation of armaments, and in general all warlike preparations.

The 1817 US-UK Rush-Bagot Agreement, considered the first arms control treaty of the modern industrial era, also incorporated mutual agreements to demilitarize. Following the war of 1812 between the UK and the US, which had witnessed a huge accumulation of naval forces, the Agreement imposed restrictions on both sides' naval deployments, leading to the naval demilitarization of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain between the US and the UK (in the current States of Vermont and New York, and the current Canadian province of Quebec). The 1871 Treaty of Washington signed between the US and UK resulted in total demilitarization of the Great Lakes region.

Additionally, 'unequal treaties' were established during the modern era – not dissimilar from the "foedus inaequum" arms control practices of the ancient world and usually imposed by a superior power. For example, the Franco-Prussian treaty of 1808 limited the Prussian army's troop numbers for a period of 10 years, and in 1841, the Ottoman Turks imposed restrictions on the Egyptian army, limiting its troop numbers and prohibiting it from building ironclad warships.

The Industrial Revolution was a major feature of the modern era that influenced warfare, increasing the mechanization of war and resulting in significant advances in modern weaponry, including the development of firearms.

While warfare had become increasingly destructive in the 17th and 18th century, the emergence of even deadlier weapons in the 19th century saw a corresponding effort to prohibit categories of weapons that seemed to cause unnecessary suffering or seemed to be indiscriminate in their effects. For example, the Hague Convention of 1899 formalized rules for the use of modern weaponry, including that states abstain from using expanding bullets and poisonous gases. It also laid out the rules of war, with humane treatment for prisoners of war or wounded and the protection of non-combatants and their property and led to the creation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Major Initiatives During the Modern Era

1675 • The Strasbourg Agreement

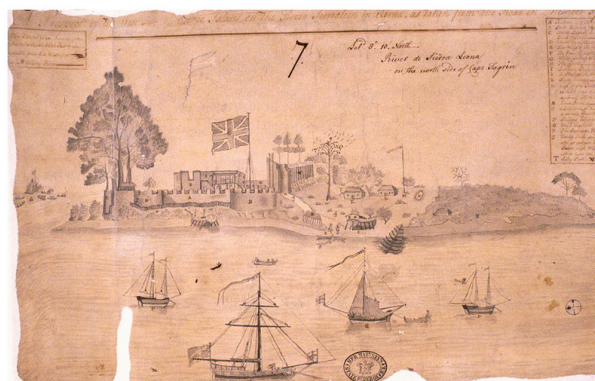
The Strasbourg Agreement between France and the Holy Roman Empire was the first international agreement limiting the use of chemical weapons, specifically poisoned bullets.

1713 • The Treaty of Utrecht

The treaty included an agreement on neutralisation or neutralised areas. For example, under Article IX, the French agreed to the British demands "that all the Fortifications of the City of Dunkirk be Razed, that the Harbour be filled up, and that the Sluices or Moles which serve to cleanse the Harbour be Levelled."

1715 • The British-Spanish-Dutch Treaty

In 1715, the British-Spanish-Dutch Treaty was signed, which included an agreement on neutralisation.



18th century fort and factory on George Island in the river Sierra Leone
The National Archives UK

1787 • Signing of the Anglo-French Naval Limitation Pact

Both states mutually declared that neither side would prepare any naval armaments beyond the peacetime establishment, both would limit their number of naval ships placed 'in the water,' and both would agree to provide preliminary notification if some different arrangement was found necessary.



18th century war ships at sea.
Pierre-Jacques Volaire via Smithsonian. Museum purchase through gift of various donors and from Eleanor G. Hewitt Fund

October 27, 1787 •

A joint declaration was signed between Britain and France in Versailles, with both sides agreeing to discontinue armaments, and in general all warlike preparations, and that the navies of both nations shall be again placed upon the footing of the peace establishment. The declaration sought to further bolster the bilateral arms control regime in light of the growing likelihood of war over Holland.

1808 • The Treaties of Tilsit

In 1808, two Franco-Prussian Treaties (also known as the Treaties of Tilsit) were signed, by which the Prussian army was limited to 42,000 troops for a period of 10 years from 1 January 1809 and Prussia was stripped of about half its territory.



Meeting of the Napoleon I of France and Alexander I of Russia in a pavilion set up on a raft in the middle of the Neman River. Adolphe Roehn (Public domain)

1817 • Signing of the Rush-Bagot Agreement



Historical marker for the Rush-Bagot Treaty in Washington, D.C., where the Rush-Bagot Agreement was negotiated. Eoghanacht / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

The agreement between the US and Great Britain led to the naval demilitarisation of the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain region of North America. Under the Agreement, each side was permitted to deploy a maximum of one ship on Lake Ontario, two ships on the Upper Lakes and one on Lake Champlain, and none could exceed one hundred tons and one eighteen-pound cannon.

1831 • Balance of Europe

In 1831, to avert major European war and preserve the 'balance of Europe', the five major European powers signed the Treaty of Independence and Neutralisation of Belgium. Any breach of neutrality required the active involvement of each of the powers.

1841 • Restrictions on the Egyptian Army

In 1841, the Ottoman Turks imposed restrictions on the Egyptian army, with Egypt's troop numbers limited to 18,000 and the Egyptians were prohibited from building ironclad warships. The Egyptian army size was increased in 1866 and 1873, but in 1879 the original limitations were reimposed.

1856 • Signing of the Treaty of Paris

The treaty made the Black Sea neutral territory, closed it to all warships and prohibited fortifications and the presence of armaments on its shores.



An early 19th century map of the Black Sea. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

1867 • Neutralization of Luxembourg

In 1867, the European powers agreed to neutralize Luxembourg. As part of the agreement, Willem III was required to dismantle its fortifications and guarantee that he would keep the territory demilitarised.

1871 • Signing of the Treaty of Washington

The treaty between Great Britain and the US, leading to total demilitarisation and inaugurating permanent peaceful relations between the US and Canada, and the US and Britain.



The British High Commissioners for the Treaty of Washington group for a picture.

Matthew B. Brady / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

1878 • The Treaty of Berlin

The Treaty of Berlin imposed limitations on diplomatic and military action on the Lower Danube and Bulgaria.

1899 • The First Hague Conference

The conference led to the signing of the Hague Convention of 1899. This Convention consisted of three main treaties and three additional declarations, which together established rules for declaring and conducting warfare as well as the use of modern weaponry and set up the Permanent Court of Arbitration



Tsar Nicholas II of Russia initiated the Hague Peace Conference of 1899.

Royal Collection / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

3. From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the Cold War

In this chapter, you will learn about the concept of disarmament and the genesis of modern arms control.

The First Conventional Attempts: The Genesis of Modern Arms Control

In this video you will learn about:

- the interplay between **arms transfer control** and the **limitation of armaments; and the emergence of disarmament and arms control thinking** in modern times (as part of the laws of war and international humanitarian law)
- the main multilateral initiatives taken during the second part of the nineteenth century: The **Hague conferences** leading to the Conventions of 1899 and 1907 concerning disarmament; the laws of war and war crimes; as well as other less well known, yet general arms control initiatives, such as the **Brussels Conference Act** (1890), the **first multilateral agreement for regulating the African firearms trade**

The **idea of disarmament** had not had a strong echo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Exceptions were the projects of perpetual peace imagined by philosophers and some initiatives taken in the nineteenth century, notably by the tsars, to reduce the inconvenience of armed peace and prevent the outbreak of war between European powers. As a consequence, the issue made it onto the agenda of the **Hague Peace Conferences** of 1899 and 1907.

The initiative came from Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, who feared an international arms race and invited the great powers to meet in The Hague. Because of the opposition of most major powers, no limitation of arms or military budgets could be agreed upon. But at least the use of certain existing munitions and weapons systems could be restricted:

First, aerial bombings were outlawed. **Second**, the use of submarines was prohibited. And **third**, the laws of war were revised and codified on the basis of the principle that belligerents do not have an, and I quote from the treaty text, “unlimited right to choose the means to injure the enemy” and that it is forbidden “to use weapons projectiles and materials calculated to cause superfluous injury.”

Unfortunately, these recommendations had no effect and the statements on “the prohibition of launching projectiles from balloons” and “the prohibition of asphyxiating and noxious gases” had no effect during the First World War.

Although the concrete results of the two Hague conferences were very limited, both conferences ushered in the era of **institutional multilateralism** on a global scale, introduced new actors and profoundly innovative principles into international relations. In particular, many of the provisions adopted or envisaged at The Hague were extended in the 1920s: The 1899 Convention “respecting the laws and customs of war on land” was followed in 1925 by the Geneva Protocol prohibiting the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons and the 1929 Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war.

Less well-known, **The Brussels General Act of 1890** “Relative to the Slave Trade and Importation into Africa of Firearms, Ammunition, and Spirituous Liquors” was a collection of anti-slavery measures signed in 1890 and which entered into force in 1891. Even if the scope of this legally binding multilateral instrument was bigger than arms control, it was the first of its kind for regulating the African firearms trade.

It was really in the aftermath of the Great War that disarmament became a full-fledged diplomatic exercise and that states sought to consolidate peace through a concerted reduction of their armaments.

After the United States intervention that hastened the end of the conflict, President **Wilson** set out how he envisaged the organisation of peace. Among the fourteen points of his programme was “the reduction of national armaments to the extreme limit compatible with the internal security of the country.” The League of Nations pact enshrined the Wilsonian philosophy of disarmament. However, the negotiations for general disarmament that opened in Geneva in 1932 were not successful and the Washington (1922) and London (1930 and 1936) naval disarmament agreements were limited in scope.

From Solferino to the Interwar Period

The Impression of Modern Warfare

The 19th century wars, like the **American Civil War** (1861–1865) or the Battle of Solferino (1859) paved the way for a legal framework for the conduct of hostilities by the belligerents. The first **Geneva Convention** dates from 1864.

The Great War

Proceeding in the same spirit and with a similar reaction, the **First World War** seemed to indicate to

the major witnesses and protagonists that the accumulation of armaments, their destructive power and technological innovations in the field of infantry and artillery had been decisive factors in the outbreak and longevity of hostilities.



A British machine gun team wears anti-gas helmets in WWI.
John Warwick Brooke / Imperial War Museum (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Hopes and Fears in the Interwar Period

The accumulation of armaments became one of the privileged targets of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy during the 1920s and 1930s, within the framework of the new **League of Nations**, as introduced by the **Treaty of Versailles** in 1919. The undertaking of **disarmament** was the great challenge and the great hope of the interwar period.

The Rise of Germany and Japan: The Failure of Disarmament?

Germany's rise to power and rearmament in the 1930s, as well as Japan's strategic emergence and expansion, ultimately put an end to multilateral disarmament efforts, but also indicated that the targeting of arms volumes was highly insufficient to break the dynamics of inter-state accumulation and competition. On the eve of the **Second World War**, the multilateral disarmament enterprise not only failed, but also had failed: indicating that disarmament, as such, was not a guarantee of security for states.

Thus, the **failure of disarmament** between the two world wars, even before the invention of nuclear weapons, was a methodological failure with regard to the objective of regulating the volume of violence between states. However, the **philosophy of disarmament** persisted after the Second World War and continued to inspire many diplomatic, political and civil initiatives.

The Disarmament Process Between the Two World Wars

1918 • Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points

View Wilson's whole message to congress at the Avalon Project.

[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp]

1919 •

- Treaty of Versailles
- Covenant of the League of Nations (Read the whole Charter of the League
[https://libraryresources.unog.ch/ld.php?content_id=32971179]).

1921-1922 • Washington Naval Conference

[give some information]

1925 •

- Locarno Accords
- Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (Geneva Protocol, entry into force 1928)

1928 •

Kellogg-Briand Pact (63 signatures, entry into force 1929)

1931 •

Japanese invasion of Manchuria

1932-1934 •

Geneva Disarmament Conference

1932 •

Japan quits League of Nations.

1933 •

Germany quits League of Nations.

1935 •

Italian invasion of Abyssinia

1937 •

Italy quits League of Nations.

1939 •

Soviet invasion of Finland, German invasion of Poland

Nuclear Weapons: Strategic Rupture and the Shift in Arms Control Thinking

The invention of nuclear weapons gave arms control the main form of its exercise even today, partly modifying the value and purpose of the discipline as traditionally conceived. In this video you will learn:

- how nuclear arms control was based on a **tripod**: bipolar world order, structuring conflict between the two poles, bilateral acceptance of the notion of strategic parity
- how the discipline has been reshaped to build a predictable nuclear relationship through **transparency mechanisms**
- how arms control led the United States and the USSR to co-manage deterrence and how it slowly

became a **bilateral technique** and a paradoxical form of partnership

Arms control as a technical and diplomatic discipline was not born with the invention of nuclear weapons, even if it is consubstantial with them. It was not until the turn of the 1950s that it emerged in Washington. But when nuclear weapons were used for the first time in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in the few years following the end of the Second World War, thinking about the limitation of violence in the nuclear age was still dominated by the more traditional objective of general and complete disarmament, which stemmed from inter-war thinking.

In 1945, disarmament had been revived by the United Nations. Articles 11 and 26 of the San Francisco Charter deal specifically with it.

It is worth noting that unlike the objectives of the League of Nations, the ambition to regulate armaments became a consequence rather than an essential condition of collective security. The main emphasis was on saving money on military expenditure.

Initially, disarmament negotiations took place in two subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The United States used the novelty of the nuclear threat to call for urgent measures: as a result, in January 1946, the General Assembly decided to create an Atomic Energy Commission to develop mechanisms to ensure the use of the atom for exclusively peaceful purposes. The so-called "Baruch Plan" was supposed to meet this requirement by providing for the creation of a supranational body to directly manage all atomic-related activities. Once this was in place, the destruction of nuclear weapons, of which the United States had a monopoly at the time, would take place.

Such an approach was unlikely to satisfy the USSR, and indeed, the USSR and the West maintained irreconcilable positions on disarmament until the mid-1950s.

It is therefore important to bear in mind the relative historical gap between the emergence of nuclear weapons and the specific thinking behind them. In this respect, nuclear weapons began to be perceived as a strategic breakthrough ten years after their appearance, and as the power of nuclear testing increased between the two main competitors.

The seminal "book" that launches modern, specifically nuclear, arms control thinking is the special issue of the American Academy of Sciences journal *Daedalus*, published in the autumn of 1960. Following this publication, Donald Brennan collected and prefaced some of the texts in this issue in a book entitled: *Arms Control, Disarmament and National Security*. Morton Halperin and Thomas Schelling published another seminal work at the same time: *Strategy and Arms Control*, in 1961.

According to all these Scholars, arms control has a threefold objective: to prevent nuclear war, to limit the damage if a conflict does break out, and to reduce military expenditure. In this scheme, priority is given to measures likely to prevent direct confrontation between the US and the USSR. The key word in this new thinking became "strategic stability."

The Idea Behind Strategic Stability

Strategic stability is both a concept and a phenomenon adopted and defined during the **Cold War**. At that time, it had complementary meanings. First, it meant the predictability of the strategic relationship between the two major actors in peacetime (**arms race stability**). To achieve this, stability meant not having an incentive to increase one's nuclear arsenal in order to prevent one of the adversaries from gaining a decisive advantage by using nuclear weapons first.

It was also about the predictability of the strategic relationship in times of crisis (**crisis stability**) as well as the absence of risk of an adverse first strike (**first strike stability**). This was a central theme of the strategic debate in the 1960s. Behaviour, perceptions and signals should not encourage the adversary to carry out a nuclear first strike to protect himself from an adverse first strike.

In the traditional sense, therefore, adversaries should not be tempted to carry out an anti-force first strike or a surprise attack without taking major risks, and each should have a protected second-strike capability, refraining from setting up strategic territory defences against a massive attack. In the same spirit, both sides must agree on **political and legal instruments that codify and control competition** between them.

In particular, it is necessary to prohibit the deployment, production and/or development of certain systems.

It can be seen that arms control during the Cold War is intimately linked to the notion of strategic stability. It was its operational extension.

Strategic stability may have been confused with mutually assured destruction, which is a narrow version of it. However, strategic stability is mainly measured by the ability of actors to respond to a first strike, and thus to have a credible second strike capability. In this respect, the **ABM Treaty** could be called a pillar of strategic stability because it largely limited the possibilities of deploying missile defence systems.

Over time, theorists and practitioners have sought to develop a broader and less schematic definition of strategic stability. Thus, the notion has gradually been conceived as a set of norms, rules and procedures designed to prevent one state from rapidly gaining a strategic advantage over another. In particular, stability can be enhanced by a range of measures that go beyond military and arms control.

Quiz

View quiz at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/lu-20/>

4. From Traditional Bilateralism to Universal Multilateralism: 1961-1980

This chapter dives deeply into the Cold War era, debating the SALT process and the ABM Treaty. Those bilateral instruments are accompanied and followed by multilateral agreements such as the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions.

After the Cuba-Shock: Addressing Nuclear Weapons

This video discusses:

- the unprecedented nature of the **Cuban crisis** in the history of the Cold War
- the establishment of **bilateral strategic arms control** structures between the United States and the USSR
- the first political reflections on the **reduction of nuclear risks** (hotlines, etc.)
- the first bilateral reflections on the challenge of **non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction** globally

The 13 days of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 are often seen as the climax of the Cold War. Its conclusion led to the first bilateral arms reduction decisions and initiated the so-called *détente* movement between the two superpowers between 1962 and the mid-1970s. But the concerns that launched the conceptualisation of arms control in the United States were first linked to the realisation that the balance of power had shifted after the successful launch of the first Sputnik in 1957. This successful launch of a missile capable of sending a satellite into space but also delivering a nuclear warhead highlighted the vulnerability of American territory to atomic retaliation, and led American strategists to adapt their doctrine.

The Kennedy administration considered it essential to reduce the vulnerability of American nuclear capabilities and began a major modernization of the arsenal: the production of 1,000 Minuteman rockets, launched from silos, and the commissioning of some 40 nuclear submarines, each carrying 16 Polaris rockets, during the 1960s.

This means that the launch of bilateral nuclear arms control would not aim for disarmament but stability and de-escalation in times of crises. The goals of arms control involved, above all, the existence of a reliable system of communication between belligerents and the adoption of counterforce positions allowing for flexibility in the use of conventional and nuclear weapons. Arms control was therefore the counterpart

of nuclear deterrence and the exclusive domain of the two big powers.

Arms control was thus seen as the means of preventing direct confrontation between the two protagonists, whether deliberately provoked, the result of a widening local conflict or triggered by accident, misunderstanding or miscalculation.

The first was to avoid the reckless or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, as the Cuban crisis highlighted. In the United States, devices known as permissive action links (PAL), were put in place for this purpose.

Another example is the establishment of direct communication systems to facilitate crisis management and reduce the risk of nuclear war. The most emblematic example of this policy is the Agreement of 20 June 1963, which provided for a teletype link between Moscow and Washington, often mistakenly referred to as the "red telephone." Later, the terrestrial relays were doubled by communication satellites (agreement of 30 September 1971).

Agreement was also reached on procedures to prevent the accidental outbreak of nuclear war (30 September 1971). Together, these measures constitute what we now call strategic nuclear risk management, which is still a major component of the P5 countries' strategic dialogue today.

It is important to understand that it was in this context of bilateral nuclear deterrence management that the two superpowers launched the negotiation of a nuclear non-proliferation treaty in the mid-1960s, generically intended to maintain bilateral strategic stability: On 1 July

1968, a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was opened for signature, which was an agreement between the two superpowers but took into account, to some extent, the aspirations of non-nuclear weapon states. In particular, they obtained that in exchange for their renunciation of nuclear weapons, the major powers would undertake to "pursue negotiations on disarmament in good faith" (Article 6): arms control was again moving towards disarmament.

The SALT Process

The launch of the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) process between the United States and the

USSR at the end of the 1960s indicates a shift in American and Soviet strategic thinking, with the questioning of the notion of strategic superiority.

In this video, you will learn about:

- the process of **bilateral talks** beginning in November 1969
- the spirit and main provisions of the **ABM Treaty**
- the launch of the **SALT II** process

The launch of the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) process between the United States and the USSR at the end of the 1960s indicated a paradigmatic shift in American and Soviet strategic thinking, with the questioning of the notion of strategic superiority.

To the critics of SALT I, who feared that such an initiative would give the USSR a strategic advantage, Henry Kissinger (then National Security Advisor to President Nixon) replied: "What in the name of God is strategic superiority? What is the significance of it, politically, militarily, operationally, at these levels of numbers? What do you do with it?"

It is this critical new way of looking at bilateral strategic competition that Ronald Reagan would later say: "A nuclear war can never be won, and must never be fought."

However, the argument that a nuclear war can be won did not disappear in the SALT environment, partly due to the failure of SALT II, but lost its salience in the strategic debate.

The SALT process started when bilateral talks began on November 1969 on strategic offensive armaments and defensive systems. The two sides had a disagreement on the types of weapons to be included in a treaty: the USSR insisted that US nuclear systems in Europe should be included, while the United States wanted them to be dealt with in a different framework, along with short- and medium-range Soviet systems. On May 1971, the United States and the USSR announced that they had reached an agreement on two texts: an interim agreement to limit certain strategic offensive systems and a treaty to limit anti-ballistic missiles (ABM) systems.

For the first time, a legally binding agreement set a ceiling for two categories of armaments: intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and ballistic missiles launched from submarines. Strategic bombers and other nuclear weapons deployed in Europe were not covered.

The ABM Treaty gave concrete expression to the link between the limitation of strategic defensive armaments and the limitation of strategic offensive armaments agreed by SALT. Under this Treaty, signed at the same time as SALT in May 1972, the deployment of a missile defence system on all American and Russian territory was prohibited. This system was authorised only on a single site, either the country's capital or around an ICBM missile launch site. In this way, a common strategic vulnerability was shared by both States Parties.

The SALT process and the ABM Treaty shaped for the first time the notion of strategic stability in a concrete, coordinated and accountable way between offensive and defensive systems.

As a continuation of SALT I, SALT II brought additional limitations and defined a precise ceiling of tolerated bombers and missile launchers, with destruction of the excess. It also banned the delivery of nuclear weapons into space and the Fractional Orbital Bombardment System. But the degradation of the strategic environment prevented the Treaty from entering into force, even though in reality its terms were respected by both parties.

The SALT Process and the ABM Treaty

MAIN PERMISSIONS UNDER THE ABM TREATY

- Each side can have one limited ABM system to protect its capital and another to protect an ICBM launch area (100 ground-based missile interceptors).
- no more than 15 missile interceptor launchers at designated missile defense test ranges
- R&D, fixed land-based testing of any type of missile defense
- **verification:** national technical means to verify compliance

MAIN PROHIBITIONS UNDER THE ABM TREATY

- missile defenses that can protect the territory against strategic ballistic missiles
- development, testing, deployment of sea, air, space, or mobile land-based ABM systems
- development, testing, deployment of ABM launchers able to launch more than 1 interceptor missile at a time
- deployment of radars for early warning of strategic ballistic missile attack
- At each site there may be no more than 100 interceptor missiles and 100 launchers.



A Safeguard Missile Site Radar, built to defend US missile bases. Craftsman2001 (public domain)

SALT AND THE ABM TREATY: A TIMELINE

The Cold War era faced different agreements between the US and the USSR – perhaps most remarkably the

ABM Treaty, which lasted for thirty years! Discover the history from the first ABM negotiations in 1969 until its termination in 2002.

November 1969 • Starting Negotiations

After the US had proposed to the USSR to launch negotiations on the prohibition of ballistic missile defences in 1966, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the US and the USSR started in 1969 (Helsinki, Finland). Part of this first SALT process were formal negotiations of an ABM Treaty.



The Finnish foreign minister Väinö Leskinen and the Soviet diplomat Vladimir Semyonovich Semyonov shake hands at the SALT I negotiations in Helsinki. The negotiations lasted from 1969 to 1972.
Martti Peltonen / Helsingin Sanomat / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

May 1971 • Agreement on ABM Treaty



US President Nixon announces that an agreement between the US and the USSR has been reached.
MCAmericanpresident / Miller Center University of Virginia

1972—2002 • Signing of the ABM Treaty

A year after agreements were reached, the ABM Treaty [https://media.nti.org/documents/abm_treaty.pdf] is signed by US President Richard Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev (Moscow, USSR). It enters into force in October 1972.



President Nixon and General Secretary Brezhnev signed the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement on strategic offensive arms.
Richard Nixon Presidential Library Photo Gallery / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

May 1972—1977 • SALT I

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement (SALT I)

[<https://web.archive.org/web/20140502005429/http://cns.miis.edu/inventory/pdfs/aptsaltI.pdf>] is signed for a period of five years.



US President Richard Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev – still in a good mood in 1973.
Oliver F. Atkins / White House Photo Office

June 1973 • The Washington Summit

US President Richard Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev agree to remove the danger of a nuclear war through avoiding direct and military conflict.

July 1974 •

The US and the USSR sign a protocol halving the number of permitted defences (from 200 to 100).

October 1975 • Serving the ABM Treaty

The US decide to shut down its permitted ABM defence pursuant to the Treaty.

1977 • Continuing the SALT process

The US and the USSR announce that they will continue to observe the provisions of SALT I as long as negotiations on the Salt II Treaty continue in parallel.

June 1979 • SALT II

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement (SALT II) is signed (Vienna, Austria), but not ratified by the US Senate.



President Jimmy Carter and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev sign the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) treaty.
Bill Fitz-Patrick / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

1991 • START I

SALT II is superseded by START I

[https://www.nti.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/start_1_treaty.pdf].



US President George Bush and USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev sign the START I Agreement for the mutual elimination of the two countries' strategic nuclear weapons.
Susan Biddle / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

1997 • The US and Russia: Negotiations Continue

The US and Russia sign a demarcation agreement between "strategic" and "non strategic" missile defence.

June 2002 • The End of the ABM Treaty

The US withdraws from the ABM Treaty, leading to its termination. US president George W. Bush had announced the step already in 2001.

The circumstances affecting U.S. national security have changed fundamentally since the signing of the ABM Treaty in 1972. The attacks against the U.S. homeland on September 11 vividly demonstrate that the threats we face today are far different from those of the Cold War. (...) Under the terms of the ABM Treaty, the United States is prohibited from defending its homeland against ballistic missile attack. (...) Given the emergence of these new threats to our national security and the imperative of defending against them, the United States is today providing formal notification of its withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.

ABM Treaty Fact Sheet, Statement by the Press Secretary:
Announcement of Withdrawal from the Abm Treaty



Under George W. Bush administration, the US withdraws from the ABM Treaty.
George W. Bush Presidential Library

Biological and Chemical Weapons Prohibition

The inadequacies and gaps in the **Geneva Protocol** of 17 June 1925 and the desire to prohibit not only the use, but also the manufacture and stockpiling of bacteriological and chemical weapons led the United Nations General Assembly and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament to take up this issue in the late 1960s. A **Biological Weapons Convention** was negotiated and concluded by the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament and adopted by the UN General Assembly in December **1971**.

The text was eventually limited to biological weapons, partly because an agreement on the international control of a ban on chemical weapons could not be reached at the time, and partly because the issue of biological weapons was considered less strategic at the time, as the use of biological weapons was less relevant at the tactical level.

In any case, the adoption of this prohibition convention, which paved the way for future negotiations on the **prohibition of chemical weapons** (which were concluded in the **early 1990s**), was

another success for multilateral arms control, three years after the opening for signature of the **NPT** (1968).

The Arms Control Process and Multilateralism at the End of the Cold War

In this video you will learn about:

- the process of multilateralisation of the negotiation of the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons** (NPT) in the 1960s
- the progress of discussions on other **universal strategic arms control instruments** (such as the cessation of nuclear tests)
- the reopening of multilateral discussions on the **prohibition of chemical and biological weapons**
- the place of the **Conference on Disarmament** in the arms control machinery (for further information on the UN Disarmament Machinery, see also LU 18 [/1u-18/])

The multilateralization of arms control from the 1960s onwards is inseparable from the global decolonization movement. It is also linked to the accession of new states to the UN international system, in a world that was gradually trying to move away from the polarization between a so-called communist pole and a so-called liberal pole. The number of neutral states increased, many of which have been very active in the field of disarmament ever since. Many non-aligned states participated to the disarmament debates from the end of the 1950s.

The first and most significant process of multilateralization of an arms control negotiation was that of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It started in the second half of the 1960s, when the negotiation was initially confined to a bilateral US-Soviet format. Incidentally, there was no article devoted to the disarmament process in the early versions of the treaty drafted by Soviet and US negotiators. UNGA Resolution 2028 of 19 November 1965 revived the negotiation of a non-proliferation treaty by formulating five principles that the text would have to respect.

Two of these principles formulated an “acceptable balance” between the obligations of nuclear-weapon

states and non-nuclear-weapon states, as well as a place for general and complete disarmament “and, in particular, nuclear disarmament.” Nuclear disarmament was then conceived as a second “step” in a process starting with non-proliferation effort. This progress was made possible by the multilateralization of the NPT negotiating round in the mid-1960s.

Other features of this period in the 1960s and 1970s are the advancement of discussions on other universal strategic arms control instruments and the opening of multilateral discussions on the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons. After almost twenty years of a rising public anxiety, a Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water (so-called Partial Test Ban Treaty, PTBT) could eventually be negotiated and entered into force in October 1963.

After the conclusion of the NPT and thanks to a 1968 British initiative to first negotiate a treaty on biological weapons separately from chemical issues, a Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) could be negotiated in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva from 1969 to 1972. It entered into force in March 1975. It was the launching of this separate dynamic that made it possible to negotiate a convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons in the early 1990s.

In this new arms control dynamic, the UN system played a significant role in contrast to the unsuccessful attempts of the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s. Whatever the changes in the name of what would become the Conference on Disarmament between 1960 and 1979 (when it became the current Conference on Disarmament), it grew from the original 10 nations to 31 nations in 1975 (the Conference on Disarmament currently has 65 nations). This growth was not accompanied by a slowdown in conventional action, contrary to what one might spontaneously think.

Quiz

View quiz at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/1u-20/>

5. Arms Control Since the End of the 20th Century

This chapter explores the post-Cold War decade, highlighting the INF Treaty, nuclear disarmament efforts, and the adoption of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Peace Dividends: The Gilded Decade (1988-1997)

This video discusses:

- the process that led, during the 1980s, to the signing and entry into force of the **INF Treaty** between the United States and the USSR
- the succession of **initiatives** which strengthened the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime during the 1990s
- progress on other WMD and conventional arms control issues, including the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (also known as the **Chemical Weapons Convention**) which was opened for signature in 1993 and entered into force in 1997

Historically, the end of the Cold War was the high point of unilateral, bilateral and multilateral arms control efforts. The decade of the 1990s is remembered as the gilded decade of arms control based on legally binding mechanisms with verification procedures.

This movement began in the 1980s with the resolution of the Euromissile crisis. The signing of the INF Treaty between the US and the USSR in 1987 and its entry into force the following year was a major disarmament event: an entire class of weapons – medium and intermediate range nuclear-capable ground-to-ground missiles – was eliminated; other European states joined the initiative, making the INF the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty.

This event, which heralded the end of the Cold War with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991, generated three dynamics: the finalisation of negotiation efforts that had been underway for several decades, like the Chemical Weapons Convention for instance, the taking of unilateral initiatives by states, and the launch of a major multilateral movement designed to reap the greatest possible peace dividend.

The emblematic successes of this period concern nuclear weapons. For example, a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was opened for signature in September 1996, with 71 states signing the treaty on the first day.

Another important milestone was the unilateral Franco-British disarmament initiatives: France

withdrew its Mirage IV-P fighter jet from service, abolished the ground-to-ground component, dismantled the Albion plateau missiles and the 30 Hades missiles on wheels, with a short range (400 km). The number of its Ballistic Missile Submarines, SSBNs, was reduced from six to four. The UK decided in 1993 not to renew its airborne component. Its nuclear forces were limited to an oceanic component consisting of four “Vanguard” class SSBNs capable of carrying 16 Trident II D5 ballistic missiles. The UK authorities have indicated that each missile carries no more than three warheads and that the operational stockpile does not exceed 200 warheads, compared to a stockpile of around 430 at the end of the Cold War.

Other major developments relate to chemical weapons and conventional arms control: The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (also known as the Chemical Weapons Convention), which opened for signature in 1993 and entered into force in 1997.

It was also the launch of a conventional security architecture in Europe based on three pillars: the CFE Treaty (open to signature in 1990, into force in 1992), the Open Skies Treaty (signed in 1992, into force in 2002), and the Vienna Document (adopted in 1990 and regularly updated since then).

These three instruments, subsequently extended to a plurality of states in Europe and Central Asia, were intended for the annual exchange of information on conventional armaments, the notification of changes in the structure or size of the conventional armed forces of the States Parties, the establishment of unarmed surveillance flights over the territory of the States Parties to enhance mutual understanding and confidence, *inter alia*.

Against the backdrop of all these initiatives, a positive spiral towards ever more arms control and disarmament seemed to be emerging in the early 1990s. This gilded era, however, soon came to a sudden end and today's experts look back wistfully on these years.

New Challenges

At the end of the last century, the non-proliferation norm began to show signs of fragility. In addition, a number of new types of threats to security emerged.

What they had in common was that they involved the proliferation of components of unconventional weapons systems with the potential to cause large-scale damage.

This video debates:

- the **cracking of the world security** order at the turn of the century
- a typology of **new types of threats** to international security
- the generalization of the concept of **“counter-proliferation”**

At the end of the last century, the non-proliferation norm began to show signs of fragility:

- Flaws in the IAEA verification system had already been exposed by the 1991 Gulf War.
- The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in the spring of 1998 dealt a blow to the vocation of the NPT's universality.
- The North Korean and Iranian nuclear crises dealt a blow to compliance with the treaty and to the conditions for withdrawal.
- The NPT review process became tense after the 2000 conference.

In addition, a number of new types of threats to security emerged. What they had in common was that they involved the proliferation of components of WMDs with the potential to cause large-scale damage. Examples include:

- the perception, after the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, of the lasting anchoring of a risk or threat of terrorism of mass destruction,
- the discovery of the proliferation network orchestrated by the Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan in December 2003,
- the revelation of the growing involvement of non-state entities, that is scientists, the industry, etc., in the proliferation economy.

In sum, WMD proliferation seemed to be increasing, in ways that would make it less detectable than in the past, and in response to motives that were as threatening as they were debatable. The world order was decaying and the forms of its recomposition were poorly understood. The global non-proliferation regime was deeply affected by such perceptions.

Until then, counter-terrorism and non-proliferation issues had been advancing two separate and parallel agendas. From the turn of the century onwards, counter-proliferation emerged, essentially a number of new instruments, hybrid and under one banner. Their purpose was to respond in a single package to the failures of the non-proliferation regime and to sub-state threats of strategic importance.

Actually, the concept of “counter-proliferation” emerged in the early 1980s. It is its generalization that

dates from the 2000s. Counter proliferation can be defined as the set of political initiatives launched on the fringes of the major traditional intergovernmental legal instruments, the aim of which is to increase the operational effectiveness of the global non-proliferation regime for state and non-state actors.

There is no suitable classification of the new instruments for combating proliferation, of which the best known are the Proliferation Security Initiative (2003), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004), or the generalization of the tool of proliferation sanctions from 2006 onwards.

They were intended to be used in a timely manner, which is why people started to talk about them as a “toolbox.”

All these instruments share, for the most part, two key characteristics:

First, The search for operational efficiency. The fight against proliferation has become an enterprise of technicians divided by profession: monitoring of financing flows, export controls, drafting of national legislative instruments, detection equipment, boarding exercises on the high seas, etc.

Second, emphasis on the notion of cooperation between actors, both states, as well as technicians. Without cooperation, none of these instruments can provide anything other than a false sense of security. Cooperation has been claimed everywhere since the beginning of the 2000s.

The Dark Decades

The approach to reducing the volume of violence in international affairs through legally binding instruments has not been favoured by major states for many years. The beginning of the erosion of this edifice can be dated to George W. Bush's first term in office.

In this video, you will learn about:

- the deterioration of the bilateral American-Russian strategic dialogue despite the Obama administration's attempt to “reset” it
- the factors and terms of the challenge to strategic stability
- the relative stalemate in nuclear disarmament efforts despite the implementation of the **New Start Treaty**

The approach to reducing the volume of violence in international affairs through the negotiation and conclusion of legally binding instruments has not been favoured by major States for many years now.

The beginning of the erosion of this patiently nurtured edifice during the Cold War can be dated to George W. Bush's first term in office, when the United States first officially announced its mistrust in the existing arms control system itself.

The beginning of the erosion of the conventional arms control architecture in Europe during the 2000s – for example the problems concerning the CFE Treaty or the Vienna Document – should have alerted states concerned about the preservation of the system.

This obviously was not the case. What we are experiencing today reflects a widespread lack of political foresight, particularly on the part of liberal democracies. They were supposed to be the guarantors of a world order based on the rule of law, which has been slowly eroded over the last twenty years.

The deterioration of US–Russian strategic relations since the annexation of Crimea in 2015 has weakened the scope of arms control instruments, which, although essentially bilateral, condition the global security. Russia's proven violation of the INF Treaty and the American withdrawal from it in 2020 accentuate the risk of the disappearance of this entire architecture, which is subject to serious tensions. At the same time, the implementation of commitments in the field of non-strategic weapons remains opaque and the Russian and US nuclear doctrines are subject to criticism.

In addition to arms control challenges, the stakes of nuclear and ballistic proliferation (in North Korea, and in Iran, for instance) and the development of new strategic weapons systems raise new questions in terms of strategic stability. The questioning of US–Russian arms control instruments is therefore forcing Europeans and the Allies to rethink their security architecture: what place is there for deterrence? What should be arms control objectives? What new systems could be destabilising? What should be the follow-up to New Start?

These questions arise in a context of heightened public expectations in terms of nuclear disarmament,

fueled by the prohibitionist movement and NGOs like Ican, the context of ethics through the rising importance of humanitarian approaches and, finally, a loss of familiarity with the culture of deterrence and even with the strategic issues at stake.

In detail, each case of weakening or deconstruction has its own causal link, but at least the following facts can be established:

- The international security instruments developed during the 20th century perish because they are not adapted to the changing strategic environment: The collapse of the INF Treaty is the perfect illustration of such a reality.
- The global nuclear order that emerged from the Cold War is being challenged and will continue to be challenged in the future (e.g. North Korea's unilateral withdrawal from the NPT).
- The ban on the use or threat of use of so-called unconventional weapons is not accompanied by any taboo. These are wishful thinking or largely fantastical ideas. The use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's regime is a clear example of how chemical weapons are not a taboo subject.

Quiz

View quiz at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/lu-20/>

6. Arms Control and the European Integration's History

This chapter focusses on the EU and its approach towards arms control through different instruments.

The Genesis

From Early Initiatives to the Maastricht Treaty

EU countries have been cooperating in the foreign and security area since the early 1970s within the framework of the **European Political Cooperation Process** (EPC). In addition, some elements of common external engagement in economic terms, in particular trade and aid but also political-diplomatic engagement, date back to the 1960s.

With the entry into force of the **Maastricht Treaty** in **1993**, the EU adopted and implemented a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) under which member states sought to agree on foreign and security policies. Since the 1990s, the EU has sought to promote certain standards such as multilateralism, a rules-based international system and respect for human rights. As such, the idea of Europe as a standard-setting power has generated a great deal of work on the type of power the EU holds.

Superpower or "Civil Power"?

The launch of the **CFSP** and then the **Common Security and Defence Policy** (CSDP, formerly the European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP) in 1999–2000 sparked a debate on whether the EU could become a full-fledged power in the strategic sense of that term. The 2000s made it clear that the EU was not becoming a new superpower. With almost 30 CSDP missions in the early 2010s, the EU has not become a major global power.

In contrast, the EU could be characterised as a "civil power," a "normative power," or an illustration of the exercise of "soft power." These three concepts help to capture significant elements of the character and behaviour of the **EU as an international actor**. The exercise of diplomatic pressure and the intensive use of the imposition of economic sanctions to persuade a third party to change its behaviour are also now historical features of the EU's external action.

A Focused Approach

The EU's contributions to the various non-proliferation and global security agendas at regional and global level were not absent from European action before 2003 but remained fairly concentrated. They concerned in particular the strengthening of the nuclear safeguards system under **Euratom**, the research initiatives taken by the **Joint Research Centre** (JRC), and the

Commission's actions to support former military scientists in the USSR in their civilian conversion.

The Security Architecture in Europe: CFE, VD and OST

The development of a strictly European strategy took place in parallel with the adoption, in a bilateral and in a European framework outside that of the EU, of a number of instruments designed on the one hand to ensure **strategic stability on the continent** and on the other hand to provide a **framework for conventional armaments** in Europe in the last years of the 20th century and the first years of the present century.

In the first case, the **Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty**, which in 1988 put an end to the so-called Euromissile crisis, was the first bilateral US-USSR and then Russian strategic disarmament treaty. This Treaty became one of the main symbols of the post-Cold War era and what has been called for more than twenty years "the peace dividend."

In the second case, along with the **Conventional Forces Europe Treaty** (CFE; 1990) and the **Vienna Document** (VD; 1990, updated in 2011), the **Open Skies Treaty** (OST, 1992) constituted a mutual reinforcing framework of arms control and confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) in Europe.



A Soviet inspector examines a BGM-109G Tomahawk ground launched cruise missile (GLCM) prior to its destruction.

Jose Lopez / Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

For almost two decades, these three instruments have underpinned the security and stability of Europe as far as conventional weapons are concerned, having both symbolic importance and significant effects on the ground. For example, the CFE Treaty has resulted in

the destruction of more than seventy thousand weapons systems; more than five thousand on-site inspections have been carried out and tens of thousands of notifications concerning exercises and military movements were exchanged between parties.

Enlarging the Union: Harmonising Export Controls

The main change with regard to the EU at the beginning of the century was the enlargement of the Union from 15 Member States in 2003 to 25 Member States in 2004 and then 27 in 2007. This changed not only the internal balances and processes of the Union, but also and primarily the strategic environment of the EU as an area of free movement of goods and people.

Thus, the priority was first of all to harmonise the export control policies of the new entrants so that all were aligned with the guidelines of the multilateral control regimes: **Wassenaar Arrangement** (conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies), **Australia Group** (biological and chemical goods and technologies), **Nuclear Suppliers Group** (NSG, nuclear goods and technologies), **Missile Technology Control Regime** (MTCR).

View interactive component at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/lu-20/>

The European WMD-Strategy (2003), the ESS and the Action Plan

The adoption of the 2003 WMD Strategy marked the institutionalisation of the non-proliferation objective in the **EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy** (CFSP). It was accompanied by the adoption of two other important doctrine documents: the **European Security Strategy** (ESS) and the **Action Plan** for the implementation of the basic principles of a European strategy against the proliferation of WMD.

At the Thessaloniki Summit, the European Council adopted a declaration on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Building on the basic principles already established, Member States committed themselves to further develop, before the end of 2003, a coherent EU strategy to address the threat posed by proliferation and to continue, as a matter of priority, to develop and implement the relevant Action Plan adopted by the Council in June.

Council of the European Union

Latest Developments and Questions

The implementation of **effective multilateralism** by the European Union since 2004 has come up against several **obstacles**:

- proliferation crises in Iran and North Korea, which have highlighted the privileged place of the United States in major international disputes
- a reduced appetite of major states for multilateral solutions to international security problems
- the disintegration of strategic bilateral arms control between the United States and Russia in the course of the decade 2010

In addition, several prohibition norms were undermined in the second part of the decade 2010, particularly the norm of prohibition of chemical weapons in the context of the conflict in Syria.

Outside its borders, the EU still knows how to promote international instruments, whether legally binding or not, such as the NPT, the ATT, or the Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation, but its know-how is never as good as when cooperation and assistance can flourish on favourable ground. In critical situations, EU states always find it hardest to act together and/or effectively (North Korean crisis, Iranian crisis, Ukrainian crisis, European security crisis).

From this point of view, the EU is not yet a global strategic actor in the sense that a state defends national strategic ambitions with the support of proportionate military means on various regional scenes where it identifies interests. It must be noted that European **"soft power"** has not produced any gain in power. This raises the question of the meaning of European action in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament today and in the 2020 decade. Is the EU merely a bridge-builder between states with opposing positions? Or on the contrary, does the EU now have to defend specific and clearly identified European interests? This question drives the most recent arguments on arms control in Europe, against the backdrop of the debate on European strategic autonomy.

View quiz at <https://eunpdc-elearning.netlify.app/lu-20/>

7. Summary and Further Reading

General Resources

- EU institutions' archives [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/historical-archives-eu-institutions_en]
- publications on several topics [<https://www.nonproliferation.eu/thematics/>] including nuclear arms control [<https://www.nonproliferation.eu/thematics/nuclear-arms-control/>] and proliferation crises [<https://www.nonproliferation.eu/thematics/proliferation-crises/>]
- history of the United Nations [<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>] including information on the San Francisco Conference
- historical documentary on the League of Nations [https://cdnapisec.kultura.com/index.php/extwidget/preview/partner_id/2503451/uiconf_id/43914941/entry_id/1_drpbjdj3v/embed/dynamic]

Good Reads

- Burns, Richard D. (2009): *The Evolution of Arms Control – From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, Prager Security International.
- Buzan, Barry (1987): *Strategic Studies. Military Technology & International Relations*, Houndmills: MacMillan Press.
- Croft, Stuart (1996): *Strategies of Arms Control: A History and Typology*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Fanning, Richard W. (1994): *Peace and Disarmament – naval Rivalry & Arms Control, 1922 – 1933*, The

University Press of Kentucky.

- Gillespie, Alexander (2011): *A history of the laws of war*, Oxford, Portland, Or: Hart Pub.
- Goldblat, Jozef (2002): *Arms Control. The New Guide to Negotiations and Agreements*, London: Sage.
- Goodby, James (2006): *At the Borderline of Armageddon: How American Presidents Managed the Atom Bomb*, Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hauteceuvre, Benjamin (ed.) (2019): *The end of arms control?* Note de la FRS 10.
- Kaplan, Fred M. (2020): *The bomb: presidents, generals, and the secret history of nuclear war*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Krepon, Michael (2021): *Winning and losing the nuclear peace: the rise, demise, and revival of arms control*, Stanford, California: Stanford Security Studies, an imprint of Stanford University Press.
- Lynn, John A. (2003): *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture from Ancient Greece to Modern America*, Boulder, Westview Press.
- Towle, Philip (1997): *Enforced Disarmament – From the Napoleonic Campaigns to the Gulf War*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schlosser, Eric (2013): *Command and Control*, New York: Penguin
- Schultz, George P. / Goodby, James (2015): *The War that Must Never be Fought*, Hoover Press.
- van Creveld, Martin (1989): *Technology and War. From 2000 B.C. to the Present*, New York: The Free Press.