

## January/February Topic Analysis

# Resolved: States ought to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

### Definitions:

*States:* For the resolution, it is notable that the actor is defined as States and not a specific country. While evidence will likely reference examples from specific scenarios, this wording will affect how a more narrow impact scenario is able to function within a debate round. The plural use of *States* rather than *a sovereign state* or *a just state* seems to indicate that the arguments made to denuclearize would be applicable to all nuclear countries and not just a specific scenario.

*Ought:* As our good friends at [Merriam Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ought), remind us, ought is used to express duty or obligation. This will likely serve as the lynchpin for many of the framing arguments that are made. Debaters should think about the obligation that states have to their own people and to the global community and how nuclear arsenals help to either further that obligation or undermine it as they set up their cases.

*Eliminate:* This is another straightforward [definition](#) that will likely have a substantial impact on the debate when evaluating what a post-fiat world looks like. Affirmative debaters should be advocating for a state completely dismantling their nuclear arsenal. “Eliminating arsenals” also makes the assumption that the arms discussed in the resolution already exist.

*Nuclear Arsenals:* It is worth noting when looking at this definition that [arsenal](#) refers specifically to the “manufacture or storage of arms and military equipment”. This means that affirmative debaters would likely only defend the eradication of nuclear weapons, not all nuclear energy.

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## Background:

Before we dive into the specific arguments, it is helpful to have a quick overview of the status of nuclear arsenals throughout the world. The Federation of American Scientists has a [compilation of data](#) about the status of nuclear forces. Though it is worth reading all of it, the big takeaways are that, as a whole, nuclear stockpiling has been trending down (mostly) and that most of the world's nuclear weapons are concentrated in just a few countries (the US and Russia).

Defense News further looks at these trends [here](#). In addition to this, the Council of Foreign Relations put together a summary of how each of the world's nuclear states view the idea of a [No First Use](#) policy. Business Insider also has put together [ranking of the nuclear arsenals](#) around the world.

Several countries have pledged to never go nuclear and there are a series of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones (NWFZ) throughout the world that can be [found here](#). The UN also [has information](#) about the NWFZ across the world as well as various treaties that have existed since nuclear technology has been in existence. This information can be used to help contextualize the arguments being made on the topic.

Another helpful concept to read up on would be the [Stability/Instability Paradox](#). This concept posits that, as the risk of nuclear conflict goes up, the risk of conventional conflict goes down. Conversely, as the risk of nuclear war goes down, the risk of conventional conflict goes up. Understanding this relationship can help you when evaluating potential impact scenarios.

[The Stability-Instability Paradox: Nuclear Weapons and Brinkmanship in South Asia](#)

[Nuclear weapons, existential threats, and the stability–instability paradox](#)

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## Affirmative Arguments:

Many affirmative arguments are grounded in one of two ideas: 1. while nuclear war has not happened, the devastating impacts that would be caused by a nuclear attack are so great that they cannot be risked; or, 2. A world with nuclear weapons-- even if they never actually go off-- is net worse than a world without nuclear weapons and therefore they ought to be eliminated.

### *Nuclear Weapons Increase the Cost of Miscalculation-*

The premise of [miscalculation](#) is that, when tensions are high, a country can perceive military exercises, missile tests or other posturing activities as a real threat and respond accordingly. This risk is compounded in a world where false stories often permeate the internet and spread rapidly. Miscalculation is not checked by mutually assured destruction or no-first strike policies because, in these instances, the country who would be responding would be reacting to a situation where they perceive they are under a real attack.

While there are a number of measures in place to try to minimize the chances of miscalculation, such as [the NRRC](#), there is no way to fully prevent a situation like this from occurring. In a world where States have access to nuclear weapons, a miscalculation can escalate to irreversible destruction.

Removing nuclear arsenals would not necessarily mean that there would no longer be any risk of miscalculation occurring; however, it does dramatically decrease the impact that such miscalculation could have.

[Fake News And Nuclear Weapons Don't Play Well Together In The South China Sea](#)

[Why Tensions Between the U.S. and Iran Fuel Fears of War](#)

[Old grudges, new weapons... is the US on the brink of war with Iran?](#)

[Growing US presence in South China Sea threatens accident that sparks war](#)

### *Irrational States-*

While mutually assured destruction has been credited with the reason why no conflict has ever escalated to nuclear war, one prerequisite to MAD being an effective form of deterrence is that both states involved are "rational actors"-- that they will make decisions from a place of logic and not emotion.

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Before going further into the research, it is important to note that any debater looking to run this type of argument should be mindful of using research so that they can avoid making assumptions about different countries or generalizations when talking about a country or world leader “rational” or “irrational”. [This article](#) gives some helpful reminders about how these words are framed within the world of political science.

While [different countries have different procedures](#) for how a nuclear strike could be called, the power to call a nuclear strike is almost always centralized to one or two people within a country and there are generally no checks on the decision making of that individual. [This article](#) goes through the first strike and second strike policies of the United States, as an example.

Rather than argue that a specific leader unilaterally *is* or *is not* rational, one way to consider approaching this argument would be that any leader has the potential to make an irrational decision. Whether it is because there is a high stress situation, because they don’t have complete information, because they are being coerced or because of extreme ideology, world leaders are not immune to making a decision that is not rational. The argument here is that nuclear power raises the stakes way too high. Giving any single person the ability to wipe out millions of people in a matter of minutes is dangerous.

### [To Launch a Nuclear Strike, President Trump Would Take These Steps](#)

#### *Reinforcing Hegemony and Perpetual Arms Races-*

Having nuclear capabilities brings a whole new level of power to a state. [This article](#) does a great job of outlining how the same action-- developing a nuclear program-- creates a very different reaction on the world stage depending on the country. Many countries have been dissuaded from starting nuclear programs based on nonproliferation treaties as well as [international pressure](#); however, the political power given to those with nuclear weapons can be a powerful incentive for countries who are looking to gain hegemonic power.

Debaters looking to run this type of argument should consider how giving nuclear power to some countries reinforces the [hegemonic standing](#) and what impact this has to the dynamic between negotiations that are happening with and without nuclear power.

The other dynamic that is worth analyzing is that between two nuclear-capable states that are vying for the spot of “dominant world power”. As technology advances, so does the [deadliness of weapons](#) and the risk that [these weapons will be used](#).

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Debaters running this argument will need to be cognizant of establishing uniqueness from the get-go. After all, countries fighting each other for power has happened long before nuclear weapons were developed and it is almost certain that, even in a world without nuclear capabilities, it would continue. That being said, the additional risk comes with nuclear weapons means that there is an unnecessarily high risk and that more lives would be lost, whether due to increased aggression or [accidents](#).

[The U.S. And Russia Are Stocking Up On Missiles And Nukes For A Different Kind Of War](#)

[Russian views of US nuclear modernization](#)

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## Negative Arguments:

Many common negative arguments will hinge on the concept of nuclear weapons being necessary for deterrence through MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction). You can read a little bit more on the US Army's view of deterrence [here](#).

It is important to note that, even in the affirmative world, the technology for creating nuclear weapons would still exist. In addition, the wording in the resolution is "to eliminate" and not "ought not to have." This implies that nuclear states who already have stockpiles of weapons would need to get rid of them. While the affirmative does not need to defend a specific way for how this would happen, it may become important in rounds insofar as the material used in these weapons would need to go someplace.

Some arguments can also be tied to word "ought" and the framing used in the resolution. Ought, as established above, typically denotes something that is a moral obligation or imperative. Debaters on this side should consider If an action (in this case, eliminating arsenals) can be a moral obligation if it will cause substantial harm.

### *Deterrence and Counterbalancing-*

The idea of deterrence through MAD is likely a familiar one. In game theory, this is known as the [Nash Equilibrium](#). More information about the four schools of deterrence can be found in [this article](#). While there are certainly flaws to deterrence, it is credited as the reason why, despite times of rising tensions between different nuclear states, a nuclear war has never ensued. Even if the intention is never to use nuclear weapons, having a state eliminate it's arsenal would also eliminate the deterrence that arsenal provides, risking greater conflict (whether nuclear or conventional).

One way that countries can prevent conflict is [counterbalancing](#). As a note, the term counterbalancing is also used in a different context when talking about how vulnerable regimes can prevent coups by dividing their troops. Be sure the evidence you are reading for this topic is using the word in a way that you intend. Debaters on the negative side can argue that having nuclear weapons will allow for a state to serve as a counterbalance to other states with nuclear weapons but different agendas.

What is important to keep in mind is that each state has its own perspective and, as a result, may see their place within this counterbalancing different than those around them. [This article](#) is a good example to illustrate this. Reactions in these situations are often based on perception rather than intention. By eliminating nuclear arsenals, one could argue that the equilibrium

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needed to keep peace would be thrown off and would embolden other countries to be more aggressive.

### [Deterrence in the 21st Century: Integrating Nuclear and Conventional Force](#)

#### *Deconstruction or Downgrading is Dangerous*

If a State with nuclear capability was to decide it no longer wanted to have a nuclear arsenal, getting rid of it would pose a significant challenge. Though you may not need to know all of the mechanics, [this article](#) outlines some of the difficulties that come with trying to downgrade weapon grade power into something that could be used for creating energy. The short answer is that, while possible, the process is risky and harmful to the environment.

To be clear, if you try to run that getting rid of weapons is worse for the environment than the environmental impact of a nuclear bomb detonating, you would be incorrect. The [waste that is created](#) when nuclear weapons are made and the [environmental damage](#) that is done when they go off is far, far worse. That being said, the negative position does not require new weapons are made or that they are used so there is no certainty that those environmental impacts will occur. Eliminating a nuclear arsenal would require that something is done with the weapons, which means one of two things would have to happen if you vote affirmative: either 1. States would disassemble the weapons and need to store the waste somewhere (increasing the risk of groundwater contamination and destroying the ecosystem of wherever they choose) or 2. [partially disassembling them](#). The latter option runs the risk of being stolen or misused. Instead, debaters on the negative side could argue that maintaining nuclear arsenals is, on net, the safer option.

### [The Cost to Clean Up America's Cold War Nuclear Waste Jumps to \\$377 Billion](#)

#### [First-of-its-kind US nuclear waste dump marks 20 years](#)

#### [Nuclear accident in New Mexico ranks among the costliest in U.S. history](#)

### [The 60-Year Downfall of Nuclear Power in the U.S. Has Left a Huge Mess](#)

#### *Terrorism/Non State Threats-*

The resolution focuses on what State actors ought to do regarding their nuclear arsenals but countries must take into consideration non-state actors when making decisions. It is important to [understand the motivations](#) of non-state actors when determining an effective strategy. Many of the current policies that many countries have adopted to limit the potential of non-

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State actors acquiring weapons technology [involve pressuring States](#) that could potentially act as allies to non-state actors in these circumstances.

While these have been mostly effective thus far, having a state eliminate their arsenals may increase the likelihood of [a scenario](#) where a nonstate actor is able to acquire nuclear weapons. Even if nuclear arsenals are dismantled and protected without the weapons being acquired by non-state actors, the technology for nuclear weapons exists. Debaters looking into this argument should explore what impact having no nuclear arsenal would have on a country's ability to respond to non state actors with the capability for weapons.

[International Law of Nuclear Weapons Nonproliferation: Application to Non-State Actors](#)

[States Must Step Up Efforts to Check Spread of Deadly Weapons as Non-State Actors Exploit Rapid Technological Advances, Speakers Tell Security Council](#)

[Combating Complacency about Nuclear Terrorism](#)

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## **Additional Resources:**

[The Dangerous Illogic of Twenty-First-Century Deterrence Through Planning for Nuclear Warfighting](#)

[Russia's Navy Will Be the First To Use Hypersonic Weapons](#)

[A hegemonic nuclear order: Understanding the Ban Treaty and the power politics of nuclear weapons](#)

[The diplomacy of resistance: power, hegemony and nuclear disarmament](#)

[Australia and the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative: difficult times for disarmament diplomacy](#)

['It's not a problem of who has them; it's a problem of the weapon.'](#)

[Living with nuclear energy: A systematic review of the psychological consequences of nuclear power](#)

[Why Fear of Nuclear Threatens National Security And World Peace](#)

[Transparency in Nuclear Warheads and Materials: The Political and Technical Dimensions](#)

[Defense Primer: Command and Control of Nuclear Forces](#)

[Proliferation & Instability: How Nuclear Weapons Acquisition Alters Inter-state Relations](#)

[National Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Terrorism](#)

[For Nations Seeking Nuclear Energy, The Option To Build A Weapon Remains A Feature Not A Bug](#)

[Nuclear Proliferation in the Twenty-First Century: Realism, Rationality, or Uncertainty?](#)

[Moral and Political Necessities for Nuclear Disarmament: An Applied Ethical Analysis](#)

[FAS Nuclear Notebook](#)

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