



The issue of the possession of nuclear weapons by newly formed states by ~~the dissolution of the Soviet Union~~

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Introduction

On the 26th of December 1991 the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought an end to the General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's governing, as the internal stagnation and ethnic separatism within the Soviet Union had led to a period of political instabilities and economic recession. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was made up of 15 constituent nations inhabited by populations of different cultures and ethnicities. Estonia was the first Soviet republic to declare state sovereignty inside the Union on 16 November 1988. Lithuania was the first republic to declare full independence restored from the Soviet Union by the Act of 11 March 1990. This resulted in other countries that were formerly members of the USSR to follow in their footsteps and seek independence from the Soviet Union. Following the collapse of the empire, a period of chaos and confusion ensued, as fears started to arise among the Western powers concerning the USSR's possession of nuclear weapons. As the Soviet Union imploded more than 27,000 nuclear weapons remained dispersed across the former USSR's territory, which extended to both Europe and Asia. This led to the growth of fear in the outside world as the lack of protection of nuclear facilities and materials made them vulnerable to theft. Adding to this were concerns over the desperate economic conditions that disgruntled nuclear workers might be encouraged or self-motivated to sell nuclear material or weapons to the highest bidder. This introduced the issue of terrorism, as the former USSR's 22,000 tactical nuclear weapons with smaller yields and shorter ranges were of great interest to terrorist organizations around the world. Given the threat of illicit access to nuclear weapons, Russia and the United States began to collaborate on a program of technical assistance to shore up the physical security of nuclear facilities and to design and implement security regimes and practices. This was aimed at ultimately ensuring the protection of not only the former Soviet Union's civilian population, but the entire planet's.



Definition of Key Terms

Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Process of internal disintegration within the Soviet Union which resulted in the fifteen constituent republics gaining full sovereignty and independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (USSR) central government in 1991.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

Transcontinental country which spanned across both Asia and Europe. It was originally founded in 1922 and its capital city was Moscow. Although the central government of the USSR was based in Russia, the union included fourteen other constituent states. These are Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and Uzbekistan.

Internal Stagnation

Prolonged period of time during which a country, meaning all of the members of the Soviet Union, experiences a slow or flat growth in its economy. It is characterized by substantial unemployment and underemployment rates, and can be caused by specific events which induce an economic shock, or cultural and population characteristics.

Ethnic Separatism

The process by which an ethnic group seeks to separate themselves from the country's or union's central government in order to obtain autonomy and independence. Ethnic separatism can be a result of dissatisfaction with any combination of social, political and economic conditions in the territory in which the ethnic group is located.

Nuclear Weapon State

Any state or nation that possesses nuclear weapons and is therefore recognised as a nuclear weapon State Party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). These are the United Kingdom and the United States, which signed onto the treaty in 1968; China and France, which signed onto the treaty in 1992; and the Soviet Union, which signed onto the treaty in 1968. However, after its dissolution the terms of the treaty are upheld by the Russian Federation.



General Overview

Although the Soviet Union officially dissolved on the 26th of December 1991, most former members had already declared their sovereignty and independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) before this day. The collapse of the USSR was the result of the years of fear of the country's strict regime endured by the population, which drove them to question the Soviet Union's policies and way of governing. The lack of mobility within and outside of the USSR and the fear induced by the Soviet security authorities of state, also known as the KGB, resulted in the formation of fifteen new countries. Due to many of these countries being independent nations for the first time in history, the time period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union is characterized by economic, social and political chaos.

The Redistribution of Nuclear Weapons within former Soviet Territory

During the Soviet years the country's nuclear arsenal was distributed among its constituent members' territories. Although most of the USSR's nuclear weapons were situated in Russia, a large number of missiles and nuclear reserves were also found in Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, as these are the three other founding members of the Soviet Union. The USSR's regime and the isolation of nuclear and military facilities provided an effective deterrent against access to, much less, theft of nuclear materials and weapons. However, with the dismantlement of the Soviet apparatus, fears in the outside world grew that the lack of protection of nuclear facilities and materials made them vulnerable to theft. Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the former Soviet countries possessed more than 30,000 nuclear weapons. World powers such as the United States were therefore concerned that the precarious economic conditions in most former Soviet countries would lead to the nuclear arsenal being used as a weapon of mass destruction. The US thus acted as a mediator between Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, in the hopes of returning all of the nuclear arsenal to the Russian government. This was due to the Russian Federation having the stablest economic and political situation compared to other former Soviet states. While Kazakhstan and Belarus saw being nuclear-free as an increase of national safety, Ukraine fought to retain its nuclear weapons as it sought total independence from the Russian government. However, all countries ultimately agreed to return their nuclear arsenal as they received significant economic compensation which had the potential of alleviating the ongoing economic crises faced by the Ukrainian government, in addition to the Belarusian and Kazakh governments. This led to all four powers signing an international treaty that declared Russia as the sole possessor of the former Soviet



Union's nuclear weapons.

The Prevention of Nuclear Disasters during the 1990s

Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, US President George Bush and Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev had signed an intercontinental treaty known as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was previously introduced by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. This treaty was aimed at reducing the long-range nuclear weapons of both world powers by more than 30% over the next seven years, in addition to limiting the number of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and nuclear warheads either country could possess. As the Soviet Union separated the newly elected Russian President Boris Yeltsin took over the negotiations and was later joined by the leaders of Germany, Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Canada to discuss how best to stabilize the Soviet economy. By 1995, more than 178 nations had also joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in order to further prevent the worldwide production and spread of nuclear weapons. Although this treaty was originally introduced by the United Nations between 1965 and 1968, not all member states signed the agreement, and instead continued carrying out nuclear tests and experiments. The NPT was therefore a significant step in the prevention of global nuclear catastrophes to ensure safety from nuclear arsenal worldwide.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
11 th March 1990	The Republic of Lithuania is proclaimed an independent state from the Soviet Union
4 th May 1990	The Republic of Latvia declares their autonomy from the USSR and becomes an independent nation
8 th May 1990	The Republic of Estonia is proclaimed an independent state
9 th April 1991	The Republic of Georgia is recognized as an autonomous power and therefore is no longer a member of the Soviet Union



<p>31st July 1991</p>	<p>President of the US George Bush and leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev signed a historic agreement known as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which limited both countries' possession of nuclear missiles and warheads</p>
<p>24th August 1991 27th August 1991</p>	<p>Ukraine is proclaimed an independent nation The Republic of Moldova joins the other former Soviet nations as an autonomous power</p>

<p>31st August 1991</p>	<p>The Republic of Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan are both declared independent states and consequently both exit the Soviet Union</p>
<p>9th and 21st September 1991</p>	<p>The Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Armenia are respectively proclaimed autonomous states from the Soviet Union</p>
<p>27th October 1991</p>	<p>The Republic of Turkmenistan is recognised as an independent nation</p>
<p>10th December 1991</p>	<p>The Republic of Belarus declares they are an independent nation</p>
<p>12th December 1991</p>	<p>The Russian Federation proclaims their autonomy and is now considered independent from the Soviet Union</p>
<p>16th December 1991</p>	<p>The Republic of Kazakhstan declares their independence and sovereignty and therefore leaves the USSR</p>
<p>26th December 1991 23rd May 1992 July 1992</p>	<p>This is the official date for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, all former members of the USSR had already declared their independence before this day</p> <p>The newly independent Republic of Belarus, Republic of Kazakhstan and Ukraine return their nuclear arsenal to Russia, and therefore join the NPT</p> <p>President Bush announced the United States would no longer produce plutonium or enriched uranium</p>

	for nuclear arsenal
3 rd August 1992	France signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
3rd January 1993	President Bush and President Yeltsin sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II), which reduces their nations' arsenals nuclear weapons to 3,000-3,500
11 th May 1995	178 other nations join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
August 1995	President Clinton announces a total ban on all nuclear testing conducted on US ground
29 th January 1996	French President Chirac announces an end to French nuclear tests
11 th April 1996	The Treaty of Pelindaba is signed by 49 of the 53 members of the Organization of African Unity, creating an African nuclear weapons-free zone
26th November 1996	The last of the nuclear warheads stationed in Belarus were finally removed to Russia



Major Parties Involved

Russia

The Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal was located mainly in Russia, in addition to other former Soviet countries such as Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. This meant that following the dissolution of the Soviet Union all former Soviet powers were to have equal access and control over the nuclear weapons located in Soviet territory. However, after the separation of the USSR in 1991, the newly independent Russia demanded that all weapons be returned to their territory. According to former leader of the Soviet Union Michail Gorbachev and the new President of Russia Boris Yeltsin this would increase nuclear security and prevent any possible global catastrophes.

United States

The United States (U.S.) were the main mediator during the nuclear crisis of the 1990s, as they aimed at nuclear security not only within the former Soviet Union, but also on a global scale. This is why according to the U.S. the only solution to this nuclear crisis was to return all nuclear weapons to Russia, as it was the most economically stable nation out of the former Soviet powers. During the period of nuclear negotiations, President Yeltsin therefore explained to the U.S. Secretary of State how the nuclear program and nuclear weapons control would develop within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although the leaders of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan believed that they would have nuclear weapons, Russia was the only country able to detonate them.

Ukraine

Following the collapse of the USSR, Kiev possessed the third most powerful nuclear arsenal in the world after the U.S. and Russia. Intercontinental missiles aimed directly at the U.S., along with 1,240 warheads, had ended up on Ukrainian territory. Unlike the other founding members of the Soviet Union, the newly formed government of Ukraine wanted to retain its nuclear weapons in order to ensure its independence and autonomy from Russia. However, after further negotiations with Russia and the United States, President Leonid Makarovych Kravchuk signed off on the return of all nuclear weapons to Russian territory. This is because after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 the newly built Ukrainian government was struggling to maintain social, political and economic stability. Returning all nuclear weapons would therefore allow for economic aid and security assistance to be received by Ukraine, which would facilitate economic growth and stability in the country.



Belarus

As a founding member of the former Soviet Union, Belarus was one of the four powers to possess nuclear weapons within their territory. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Belarusian government's main concern was to ensure safety for its newly independent population. This led to Belarus signing a treaty in 1994 on the withdrawal of its arsenal in exchange for security guarantees. The country's leader Alexander Lukashenko later regretted this decision as the nuclear weapons they had returned to the Russian government would have been a valuable commodity to the country's economy.

Kazakhstan

Being one of the most powerful countries in the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan had inherited the second largest nuclear test site on the planet at Semipalatinsk. However, the newly elected president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev was concerned about the safety of the nation, and therefore returned the entirety of their nuclear arsenal to the Russian government by 1992, in return for military hardware and financial investments. This was in the hopes of stabilizing the country's political situation, in addition to further benefiting Kazakhstan's precarious economy.

Possible Solutions

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was first proposed by US President Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s, and then signed on the 31st of July 1991 by US President George W. Bush and former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. This treaty aimed at reducing the number of nuclear arsenal possessed by each world power, by limiting the number of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and nuclear warheads found on either country's territory. When fully implemented, the treaty resulted in the removal of about 80 percent of all strategic nuclear weapons then in existence. The treaty was later renamed START I as START II was introduced. Both treaties directly led to the deactivation and destruction of most nuclear launch facilities in addition to excess delivery vehicles. However, their enforcement was delayed due to the collapse of the Soviet Union as it took time and efforts to denuclearise Ukraine, the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Kazakhstan, in addition to them joining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is an international treaty opened for signature in



1968, which aims at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, in addition to achieving nuclear disarmament worldwide. Moreover, the NPT also promotes cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The treaty recognised China (signed 1992), France (signed 1992), the Soviet Union (signed 1968; obligations and rights now assumed by the Russian Federation), the United Kingdom (signed 1968), and the United States (1968) as Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Although they still possessed nuclear arsenals, all five powers agreed not to transfer "nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices" and "not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce" a non-nuclear weapon state (NNWS) to acquire nuclear weapons. Although the Democratic People's Republic of Korea joined the treaty in 1985, it did not comply with its terms and obligations, and later announced its withdrawal from the treaty in 2003.

- Treaties and agreements between member states of the United Nations (UN) could be signed, in order to prevent the further spread of nuclear arsenal, in addition to achieve the disarmament of nuclear powers
- Conferences could be held by member states of the UN in order to promote peaceful negotiations and cooperation between nations aimed at achieving global safety and security - Treaties and agreements between certain member states could be signed in order to prevent nuclear weapons and arsenal from being distributed all around the world, and to instead ensure it is located in a restricted number of facilities
- Accords could be signed by UN member states to discuss alternative uses for nuclear arsenal aimed at the replacement of missiles and other weapons

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