

'INDIA, CHINA NUCLEAR ARSENALS GROW'

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - China

War games: Nuclear-capable Agni missiles being fired during an IAF exercise in 2016. Vijay Soneji

All nations that have nuclear weapons continue to modernise their nuclear arsenals, while India and China increased their nuclear warheads in the last one year, according to a latest report by Swedish think tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

"China is in the middle of a significant modernisation of its nuclear arsenal. It is developing a so-called nuclear triad for the first time, made up of new land and sea-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft. India and Pakistan are slowly increasing the size and diversity of their nuclear forces..." according to the findings of SIPRI Yearbook 2020, released on Monday.

The report said China's nuclear arsenal had gone up from 290 warheads in 2019 to 320 in 2020, while India's went up from 130-140 in 2019 to 150 in 2020.

Pakistan's arsenal was estimated to be between 150-160 in 2019 and has reached 160 in 2020. Both China and Pakistan continue to have larger nuclear arsenals than India.

The nuclear arsenals of the nuclear-armed states other than the United States and Russia were considerably smaller but all these states were either developing or deploying new weapon systems or had announced their intention to do so, it noted.

Low transparency

Together the nine nuclear-armed states — the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea — possessed an estimated 13,400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020, which marked a decrease from an estimated 13,865 nuclear weapons at the beginning of 2019.

The decrease in the overall numbers was largely due to the dismantlement of old nuclear weapons by Russia and the U.S., which together possess over 90% of the global nuclear weapons.

The availability of reliable information on the status of the nuclear arsenals and capabilities of the nuclear-armed states varied considerably, the report noted. "The governments of India and Pakistan make statements about some of their missile tests but provide little information about the status or size of their arsenals," it said.

The U.S. had disclosed important information about its stockpile and nuclear capabilities, but in 2019, the administration ended the practice of publicly disclosing the size of its stockpile, the report stated.

The U.S. and Russia have reduced their nuclear arsenals under the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) but it will lapse in February 2021 unless both parties agree to prolong it.

However, discussions to extend the New START or negotiate a new treaty made no progress with the U.S.'s insistence that China must join any future nuclear arms reduction talks, which

China has categorically ruled out.

“The deadlock over the New START and the collapse of the 1987 Soviet–U.S. Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty) in 2019 suggest that the era of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S. might be coming to an end,” the report cited Shannon Kile, Director of SIPRI’s nuclear disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation programme, as saying.

Russia and the U.S. have already announced extensive plans to replace and modernise their nuclear warheads and delivery systems. “Both countries have also given new or expanded roles to nuclear weapons in their military plans and doctrines, which marks a significant reversal of the post-Cold War trend towards the gradual marginalisation of nuclear weapons,” the report observed.

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