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## *Trump is looking to restart nuclear tests for the first time in 28 years, and we should all be worried*

How did it come to this – and what does world history tell us about Trump's dangerous de-regulation of arms control?



**Becky Alexis-Martin** Tuesday 2 June 2020 08:57 |

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With the world distracted by Covid-19 and the approaching 2020 presidential election, Trump has now threatened to undertake the first nuclear weapon tests in America since 1992, the idea was reportedly discussed by senior Trump officials at a meeting in the White House on **15 May**. These tests could start a new multilateral Cold War and have already provoked North Korea.

So how did it come to this – and what does world history tell us about Trump’s dangerous de-regulation of arms control?

During the **Cold War**, aspirant superpowers saw nuclear weapon tests as a way to regain geopolitical control after the Second World War – despite their bankrupted national economies and diminishing empires. This offers an unfortunate allegory for Trump’s contemporary aspirations, as he reflects upon the isolationist state that he has created, and battles for a distraction from the harm that he has caused.

While the historic **nuclear weapon tests** undertaken by the US, UK, China, Russia and France brought power, they also harmed the **soldiers** who undertook the tests, and devastated surrounding **local communities**. For example, **Runit Island** became uninhabitable due to radioactive waste from nuclear tests on the US’s **Marshall Islands**. The Marshallese can never return home, and **Runit Dome**, a tomb-like structure which holds thousands of tons of radioactive waste, poses a climate threat as **sea levels rise**. We know the devastation that **nuclear arms** can cause, yet progress is slow. The 1996 **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** has been ratified by 154 countries, but has not entered into force.

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It is now 50 years since the **Non-Proliferation Treaty** (NPT) became international law. This was the first treaty to aspire to non-proliferation and disarmament. While the US remains a member, it is

US pushing to punish Iran by invoking nuclear deal Trump abandoned

US-Russia agreement; the **Iran Deal**; the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty** (INF); and recently, the **Open Skies Treaty**. When asked about Open Skies, Trump said, “**I think what’s going to happen is that we’ll pull out, and they’ll come back, and want to make a deal.**” Even Russia is concerned

by Trump’s actions.

What Trump appears to misunderstand is that arms control is not merely a business trade-off. Nuclear treaties must be managed with delicacy and sensitivity. They are designed to maintain global geopolitical stability by cooperation and consensus. One does not simply “pull out”. Our wailing Cassandras were the Democrats, shouted down by a Republican majority when they tried to introduce a “Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act” in 2017. This is when the **nuclear taboo began to unravel.**

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the century for a world free of nuclear weapons?” It is preposterous to imagine these words being uttered by Trump.



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For Americans, Trump’s nuclear posturing is poorly timed. The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic could provide opportunities for investment in health, technology and sustainable economic growth – instead Trump appears to want to nuke state funding away. The cost of US nuclear tests will demonstrate nothing to the world, apart from the dangers of applying neoliberal ideologies of deregulation to arms control.

Meanwhile, the international community are pushing back against nuclear weapons. Fiji, Namibia and Belize have recently ratified the 2017 **UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**. Only 13 more ratifications are needed until it comes into force. **Nobel Peace Prize-winning** treaty developer **Tim Wright** told me, “While most nations are advancing disarmament through the new UN nuclear weapon ban treaty, the Trump administration is actively undermining that cause.”

Nuclear weapons are a dirty, dangerous, and dated technology at the best of times. Eight nations have detonated **2,056** nuclear explosions over the last 75 years, so I am pretty sure that we know how they work by now. When we reflect upon the global legacy of harm they have caused, it is clear that tight arms control and gradual disarmament are essential.