

**Lessons drawn from the war in Ukraine for the future of nuclear weapons (Prof Tom Sauer, Universiteit Antwerpen, Belgium)**

The classic debate about nuclear weapons is heavily polarized. Advocates of nuclear weapons point to the stabilizing effects of nuclear deterrence, while opponents lay out the catastrophic consequences of their use and the dangers related to their non-use. The war in Ukraine is an attack by a nuclear weapon state (Russia) on a non-nuclear weapon state (Ukraine). While nuclear weapons have not been used (yet), Russia has threatened to use them on many occasions during this war. Putin also ordered a higher level of alert of some of the nuclear forces at the end of February 2022.

This paper wants to assess the impact of this war on the debate about the usefulness of nuclear weapons both for the nuclear armed states and allies. Questions that arise are: does this war clarify the debate on the usefulness of nuclear deterrence in general and extended nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis allies in particular? Does this war have implications for the concept of nuclear coercion? Will the war lead more states to proliferate? Or will the war and related threats to nuclear weapons stimulate thinking about how to eliminate them? In other words, will this war bring nuclear elimination – one of the objectives of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – closer or further away? Lastly, have there already been short-term effects on nuclear arms control?

Our hypothesis is that the odds are that neither advocates nor opponents of nuclear weapons will change their deep-held views on the usefulness of nuclear weapons. Both groups use the war to strengthen their arguments. On proliferation, there seems to be the fear among many experts that the war may stimulate the spread of nuclear weapons. This paper hypothesizes that local and regional circumstances will be more determinate in this regard than the war in Ukraine. That said, the failure of the NPT Review Conference in August 2022 is directly related to the war. The jury is also still out with respect to the consequences of this war on nuclear disarmament. Much depends on whether nuclear weapons will be used. Another victim of this war is New START – the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control treaty - that was unilaterally suspended by Russia in February 2023.