

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MAJOR ARMS RACES IN PRE-21ST CENTURY INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Over the past century, the struggle for the acquisition of arms amongst states had assumed a prominent place in political, military, and diplomatic affairs, often leading to international rivalries. The aim of this study therefore is to highlight a historical overview of major global arms races during the pre-21st Century. The study would serve as a prerequisite for understanding the rationale behind arms races amongst states and the key actors involved as well as its consequences in attaining global peace and stability. From the basic assumptions of realism, theoretical frameworks in this study namely deterrence theory was derived and applied to arms race. Prior to the First World War in 1914, naval arms race on shipbuilding was the commonest. But, a combination of shipbuilding and aircraft arms races became prevalent between the two World Wars. Nuclear arms race erupted after the Second World War in 1945 and it was mainly between the USA and the USSR. Furthermore, regional arms races were experienced amongst countries of the same region. This study revealed that Cold War was the turning point into the in-depth study of arms race by relevant stakeholders. Historically, it was found that arms races between rival states did lead to war in most cases like the First and Second World Wars. Where arms races did not lead to war, it could serve as manifestations of other underlying causes of war.

Keywords: Arms Races; Arms Struggle; Deterrence Theory; Pre-21st Century