

The Evolution of International Arms Control from the 1800s to 2010

Olivia Ibbotson^{1,2}, Don MacRaild^{2,3}, Malcolm Dando² and Lijun Shang^{1,2}

1 School of Human Sciences, 2 Biological Security Research Centre, 3 Vice-Chancellor's Office
London Metropolitan University, London, N7 8D8, UK

0 Introduction

Civil society has played a significant role in arms control development. Discussions can be traced back to the early 19th century following the seventh coalition war of 1815 and were largely influenced by the destructive French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

Early formats of arms control focused on the reduction of the numbers of armed forces **not** the specific weapon or specific consequences.

1 St. Petersburg declaration

A draft convention was put forward by Russia after the creation of bullets of which explode when in contact with soft surfaces. Tsar Alexander II invited states to the International Military Commission to discuss a law to ban such projectiles. This declaration bans the use of explosive projectiles weighing less than 400 grams¹.

Signed in 1868, this declaration serves as the first international instrument for arms control.

2 The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907

1899 relates to the discharge of projectiles and explosives, use of asphyxiating gases and use of expanding bullets, and thus extends the Declaration of St. Petersburg (figure 1)



Figure 1 Delegates of the 1899 Hague Convention pose for photographers on the steps of the Dutch Huis ten Bosch (House in the Woods) palace.

1907 expands on the laws and customs of war, focusing on the roles of neutral powers (V), the status of merchant ships at the outbreak of hostilities (VI), the conversion of merchant ships into warships (VII), the laying of automatic submarine contact mines (VIII), the bombardment by naval forces in times of war (IX), adaptation of maritime war of principles of the Geneva Convention of 1906 (X), restrictions regarding the rights of capture in naval wartime (XI), establishment of an international prize court (XII) and the rights and duties of neutral powers in naval war (XIII).

3 The Geneva Conventions

Signed in August 1949, focused on the protection of armed forces, armed forces at sea, prisoners of war (POW), and civilians.

Recognized emblems and model identity cards for religious, medical personnel and POW (figure 2).



Figure 2 illustrates a Geneva Convention identification card issued after 1964²

4 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

- Signed in 1968 (figure 3)
- Signatories agreed to not transfer nuclear weapons/technology, cooperate to develop peaceful nuclear technology, and submit to safeguards against proliferation established by the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Extended indefinitely in 1995.



Figure 3 British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart (third from right) signing the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, London, 1968

5 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention

- Opened for signature in April 1972 and entered into force in March 1975.
- Prohibition of the use, development, production, stockpiling, and transfer of biological or toxin weapons.
- Biological or Toxin Weapon : Dissemination of a disease-causing organism or toxin which result in death or injury to humans, animal or plants.

6 Chemical Weapons Convention

- Opened for signature in January 1993 and entered into force in April 1997.
- Prohibition of the use, development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons.
- Chemical weapon: Any chemical of which through its chemical action on life processes results in death, temporary incapacitation or injury to humans, animals or plants

6.1 Organisation for the Prohibition for Chemical Weapons

Won the 2013 Nobel Prize for 'its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons' (figure 4).



Figure 4: OPCW

December 2023 saw the OPCW announce **100%** of the worlds declared chemical weapon stockpiles have been destroyed.

7 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

- Adopted in 1980 and entered into force 1983.

Based on three international humanitarian law principles:

1. Rights of state parties to an armed conflict to choose methods and means of warfare is **not** unlimited.
2. Prohibition of unnecessary suffering upon combatants.
3. Protection of the civilian population against the effects of hostilities.

8 Anti-personnel landmines Convention

- Opened for signature December 1997 and entered into force March 1999.
- Prohibits the production and transfer of anti-personnel mines.
- Signatories must provide details of stockpiles and agree to destroy them.

9 Convention on cluster munitions

- Opened for signature December 2008 and entered into force August 2010 (figure 5).
- Prohibits the use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of cluster munitions.
- Addresses the humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions.

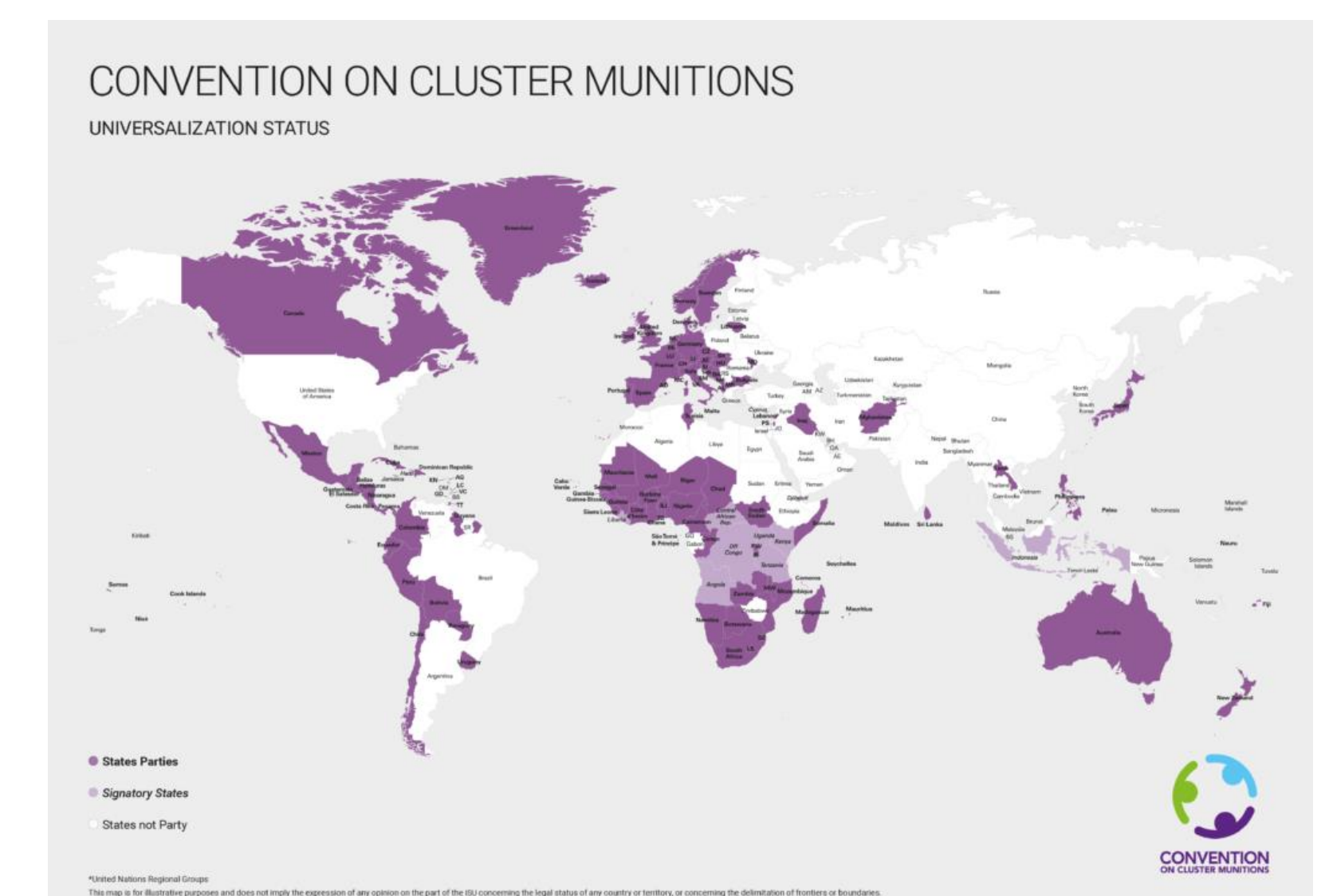


Figure 5 Shows Convention on Cluster Munitions universalisation status³

10 Conclusion

International arms control measures have been steadily advancing since the 19th century. Early control measures focused on a reduction of the number of armed forces, then transitioning to the types of weapons and treatment of civilians, soldiers, POWs, in addition to religious and medical personnel. Control then shifted to focus on weapons of mass destruction. Control measures since the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty have taken a more humanitarian approach, focusing on the consequences to humanity now and future generations.

Acknowledgements:

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References:

1. Crawford. E 2019
2. National Museum of America
3. Convention on cluster munitions (online)

* Please note all information regarding conventions was taken from the original or amended text of the convention.