

Headlines:

- **Hollow Nuclear Pledges**
- **Pakistan Mini Budget to 'Increase Malnutrition'**
- **US-Russia Talks Begin**

Details:

Hollow Nuclear Pledges

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the US, Russia, China, France and the UK – signed a joint pledge to reduce the risk of nuclear war. The pledge stated that: *"We affirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we also affirm that nuclear weapons—for as long as they continue to exist—should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression, and prevent war. We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented."* These five nuclear weapon states are the only ones recognised as such in the 1967 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), with the other four nuclear powers – 'Israel', India, Pakistan and North Korea – having no such status. The NPT is reviewed every five years, with a review currently delayed by the pandemic. Under the NPT, the five permanent member states (known as the P5) are required to gradually disarm themselves of nuclear weapons. This has clearly not been taking place as these nuclear powers have been modernising their nuclear programs, increasing their warheads and work has begun on developing the next generation of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons play a critical role in power projection and to be considered a power, that's why like the other treaties its unlikely these nations will reduce let alone give up their atomic weapons.

Pakistan Mini Budget to 'Increase Malnutrition'

Pakistan's finance minister presented a contentious supplementary finance bill, known as the 'mini budget,' before the country's Senate on the 4th of January 2022. The bill was presented amid warnings by opposition lawmakers and economists that the measures it introduces were anti-growth and will trigger inflation. The bill was presented in the Lower House of Parliament the previous week and included the imposition of sales tax on nearly 150 items in order to revive the \$6 billion loan program IMF. Opposition politicians and economic experts say the new measures will usher in a new wave of inflation, which the government denies. The mini-budget, once passed by the National Assembly, according to experts will increase malnutrition and stunting in the country because of the increase in cost of goods that are critical for nourishment. With inflation increasing, GDP growth shrinking and the national debt increasing we will be watching for national discontent and whether the opposition can take advantage of this sentiment, as the country heads for elections in 2023.

US-Russia Talks Begin

NATO will not end its open door policy to potential new members despite Kremlin threats to take military action, the United States told Russia. Russian and American diplomats met for more than seven hours of talks in Switzerland on 11 Jan, but failed to make visible progress on a compromise to avert a feared Kremlin invasion of Ukraine. Russia has demanded security commitments including a formal promise that Ukraine and former Soviet states will never join the alliance in exchange for standing down a 100,000 strong invasion force massed on its southwestern border. Wendy Sherman, the Deputy US Secretary of State, told reporters after the meeting broke up that she was "firm in pushing back" on "non-starter proposals" from the Russian side. "We will not allow anyone to slam closed NATO's open door policy, which has always been central to the transatlantic alliance," she said.