

***The 2010 NPT Review Conference:
Consequences for the future of disarmament and non-proliferation***

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British Pugwash discussion meeting

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The three speakers provided an overview of the NPT Review Conference process and an analysis of its outcomes. The tone of the conference was more positive than in 2005 and there was progress on all three pillars – non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The ‘Obama effect’ was seen as important and a change was noted in attitudes towards disarmament – with a greater willingness to consider de-emphasising the importance of nuclear weapons. It is no longer possible to argue that a Nuclear Weapons Convention is contrary to the NPT. The question was raised as to whether we have gone as far as is possible with the NPT process.

There were nonetheless numerous difficulties, including Iran’s blocking tactics, resistance within the P5 to further steps towards disarmament and sensitivities over North Korea. For the first half of the conference, the UK delegation was hampered by the absence of a government during the election period.

Although the final document (action plan) was seen as less coherent than the one produced in 2000, a key outcome was the last minute agreement to take action on the 1995 resolution to seek the establishment of a zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Egypt, as coordinator of the Non-Aligned Group, played a key role in bringing this major step to fruition, with support from the United States. Action is planned to lead to a regional conference in 2012. How to handle this conference will present a major challenge to the region and to the wider international community.

Other outcomes will also depend on how far the sentiments expressed at the conference are translated into action, particularly on the future of the CD and FMCT. An open question was how UK policy will now move forward under the new government across the range of NPT issues, from the Middle East WMD-free zone to Trident.