

The link between non-proliferation and disarmament in the NPT: is there consensus behind the conflict?

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The logo for British Pugwash, featuring the words "British" and "Pugwash" stacked vertically in white text on a dark teal rectangular background.

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Final report of a British Pugwash Group project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A British Pugwash team, led by Carol Naughton, conducted a project based on 29 one-to-one interviews with representatives of 24 key NPT states parties, as well as a diplomatic roundtable, to identify possible grounds for a new consensus on the link between non-proliferation and disarmament in the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, with consideration for the potential role of the United Kingdom. This report summarises the project's findings.
- There was broad agreement that non-proliferation and disarmament are linked, and that there should be balance in implementing obligations in both areas. However, there was little consensus on the precise nature of the link, which was argued to have become increasingly problematic since indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. Differences in defining the link stemmed in part from the treaty text, but also from different beliefs about the sources of leadership and agency in the non-proliferation regime.
- A fundamentally new consensus on this issue appears to be beyond the reach of NPT states parties. However, the regime can still be usefully served by a sincere effort to understand the sources of states' differences, and to identify those measures seen as demonstrating political commitment to the treaty.
- In the current review cycle, these measures include:
 - o development of a mechanism to monitor states' progress in implementing commitments;
 - o a pragmatic effort to universalise the additional protocol;
 - o continued pursuit of CTBT ratification and FMCT negotiations;
 - o continued investment in implementing the provisions of nuclear-weapon-free-zones, including, but not limited to, the potential zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East;
 - o reconciling diverse roadmaps towards nuclear disarmament; and
 - o a focus on key points within Action 5 of the 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document, particularly those concerning reducing stockpiles, reducing the role of nuclear weapons, and encouraging transparency and confidence-building.
- A number of problems will nevertheless remain beyond the ability of the NPT review process to solve unless there is renewed political engagement at a high level.
- Finally, there is a striking difference in the ways in which nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states view the challenges of, and necessary conditions for, nuclear disarmament, which contributes to a pervasive lack of trust between states parties. The report concludes that the United Kingdom could play an important role in leading a dialogue between states on this subject.

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper represents the final report of a project by the British Pugwash Group to identify the possible grounds for a new consensus on the link between non-proliferation and disarmament in the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The project was motivated by a seemingly wide gap between the expectations held by some nuclear-weapon states (NWS) and some non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS) about implementation of commitments made in the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document. The balance of efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament in the NPT sometimes takes on the appearance of a 'zero-sum game', in which nuclear-weapon states and their allies promote non-proliferation, whilst non-nuclear-weapon states, and particularly nonaligned countries, seek progress on nuclear disarmament.

The aim of this project was therefore to provide an environment for honest dialogue on these expectations, to promote a shared understanding of various aspects of the link between nonproliferation and disarmament, and, if possible, to seek consensus on how the two tracks can be promoted in parallel in the review process, given a recognition that actions on both tracks serve the security interests of NPT states parties.

The project was managed and implemented by Carol Naughton of the British Pugwash Group. It consisted of 29 one-to-one not-for-attribution interviews with representatives of 24 key NPT states parties, at the 2012 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom) and the 2012 IAEA General Conference, including of all five nuclear-weapon-states and a selection of key non-nuclear-weapon states spanning all the major regional and issue-based groupings; and a not-for-attribution roundtable held at the UN General Assembly First Committee meeting in the autumn of 2012. The responses of officials involved in the project are summarised below, and conclusions are drawn for priority areas for action in the run up to the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

HOW STATES VIEW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Defining 'linkages'

Unsurprisingly, there was general agreement on the existence of some kind of linkage between nonproliferation and disarmament. The terminology used to express this linkage varied: some states preferred to discuss the linkage in terms of the 'three pillars' of the NPT, including peaceful uses of nuclear energy; non-proliferation and disarmament were also described as 'two sides of the same coin.' The linkage, it was generally agreed, is established in the text of the treaty itself: Articles I, II and III represent non-proliferation, and Article VI represents the disarmament obligation.

When pressed on the causal linkage between the two concepts, however, there emerged clear differences of opinion. Some officials were quick to challenge the idea of conditionality between nonproliferation and disarmament, emphasising that both obligations should be pursued in parallel. It was argued, for example, that a judgment on non-proliferation progress should not be used as an 'excuse' for the nuclear-weapon states not to disarm. However, most officials chose to emphasise conditionality in one direction or the other. As one nuclear-weapon state representative explained, for a country to lower its numbers of nuclear weapons and alter its nuclear strategy, it must have confidence that there will be no increase in the number of nuclear-armed states in the future. Similarly another NWS diplomat suggested that the NWS 'require quite a lot of assurances, particularly on the nonproliferation pillar, [to] feel they have the appropriate level of comfort to start making those big steps that all states including the NWS...are hoping for and are aiming for in the long term.' A European NNWS representative also remarked that 'the more states stick to their non-proliferation obligations, behave how they should behave, the more pressure we [the NNWS] can make on the NWS to disarm.'

However, most NNWS officials chose instead to describe a causal link in the opposite direction: as one Latin American representative asked, 'If you don't see a clear timeframe of abolishing [nuclear weapons], what is the incentive we are giving to other states not to acquire them?' An East Asian NNWS official agreed, and predicted that 'if the NWS cannot produce tangible results on disarmament, many of the NNWS may lose interest in the NPT regime.' Nevertheless, another Latin American official suggested that the connection between non-proliferation and disarmament was most relevant in a regional, rather than global, context, and observed that 'for us there is no immediate danger in the fact that the five are not fulfilling their [disarmament] obligations.'

Defining 'balance'

Several states referred to the need for 'balance' in implementing the regime's three pillars, and in particular to the need for balance between non-proliferation and disarmament. There was a widespread perception among NNWS representatives, however, that there is an imbalance in the favour of non-proliferation. Three types of imbalance can be distinguished here. Firstly, there is an imbalance in the nature of the obligations themselves: as one Western NNWS official noted, nonproliferation 'requires non-action. You don't [proliferate], and if you do then you're in violation, whereas disarmament actually requires action.'

Secondly, there is an imbalance in how the obligations are expressed in the treaty. Another Western NNWS representative called Article VI 'appallingly drafted, so unclear, so unspecific... Article VI enables the NWS to say "we are moving towards it", whereas [the non-proliferation obligations] are "bang, yes or no."'

Lastly, it was argued that there has been an imbalance in implementing the two obligations. In the words of a NAM diplomat, 'we do all the non-proliferation and we [now] expect disarmament. This issue has reached a saturation point... I think there is a fundamental disbelief...that the treaty will actually deliver on its disarmament obligations – which then means the original bargain is in question.' A Latin American representative interpreted references by nuclear-weapon states to concepts such as minimum deterrence, extended deterrence, and the need for regional stability, as evidence that they are only 'prepared to seek disarmament on their own terms... [N]on-proliferation is sought in the short term, and disarmament is some kind of long-term objective.'

A concern for balance was nevertheless also present in remarks by NWS representatives, who emphasised the need to maintain balance between the three pillars. Whilst acknowledging the perception that the NWS are not fulfilling their side of the bargain, and that some NNWS have 'an axe to grind' on disarmament, one NWS diplomat observed that some NNWS statements to the 2012 PrepCom were 'promising' and highlighted one NAM intervention as particularly balanced, but found some 'disappointing', in focusing only on disarmament. Another NWS official also suggested that the fact that post-Cold War cases of proliferation had taken place against the background of concrete disarmament steps by the NWS was evidence that disarmament progress could not be expected to come first, as an incentive for work on non-proliferation.

HOW STATES VIEW LEADERSHIP AND AGENCY IN NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Nuclear-weapon-state dynamics

At a superficial level, there was broad consensus that the nuclear-weapon states by definition must lead the way on nuclear disarmament, notwithstanding the fact that Article VI applies to all states. One NNWS representative observed that 'in the last couple of years the message [in NPT negotiations] is that the NWS now say they acknowledge they have a greater responsibility, which is a much better point than the irritating one that we must all work equally.' Yet when pressed on the division of that responsibility amongst the NWS, diplomats offered a range of responses. A Middle Eastern NNWS official insisted that the five NWS 'are equally responsible for disarmament,' a sentiment echoed by one NWS diplomat who spoke both of a 'joint responsibility and of the need for NWS 'unity' and 'coherence'. However, another NWS representative remarked that although in principle the NWS all bear a responsibility, in practice the United States and Russia have greater experience in the field of disarmament, and should shoulder a greater burden. Others, representing NWS and NNWS, similarly called for the two largest powers to move first.

Interestingly, officials were also conscious of more subtle dynamics of leadership amongst the NWS. One Western NNWS representative, for example, suggested that China and Russia might remain behind the 'P3' (i.e. the US, UK and France) in the process of NWS confidence-building, and that 'maybe at some point the P3 have to break off this process and say "we're going to do more," because if not, it is always the US that is judged, far more than the others.' Another diplomat remarked that recalcitrant NWS can 'hide behind' the others in confronting calls for progress on disarmament. One NWS diplomat warned, however, that configurations within the five NWS can change depending on the issue in question. Perhaps mindful of these considerations, one NNWS official conceded that '[w]e understand that it is not always easy to negotiate [nuclear disarmament matters] multilaterally', and that 'if we could see that there is a plurilateral process, we would probably be quite happy.' Taking a more hard-line stance, a NAM representative challenged the notion that the NWS can only disarm multilaterally: 'Our argument is that if you are really serious about disarmament, [then] disarm!'

Non-nuclear-weapon state dynamics

Two groups within the NNWS were frequently discussed as bearing special responsibility for engagement on the linkage between non-proliferation and disarmament: non-nuclear-weapon states under extended nuclear deterrence, and the members of the Non-Aligned Movement. An official from the former group called extended deterrence 'a fact of life', but argued nevertheless that 'there are things we can do to promote nuclear disarmament', arguing that states enjoying extended deterrence could still propose concrete disarmament initiatives and promote disarmament education.

A number of Western representatives argued that non-aligned states could play a greater role in sustaining the treaty. One NWS official observed a lack of commitment to non-proliferation in NAM discourse; a NNWS representative further noted that whereas NAM states frequently criticise the United States for lack of progress on disarmament, they do not appear do the same to nucleararmed NAM members outside of the NPT. Another NWS representative expressed the hope that the NAM could foster 'constructive engagement' on non-proliferation and disarmament initiatives. However, non-aligned officials were generally not willing to concede the need for movement by the NAM: one diplomat argued that the 'only thing the NAM can do is to try to keep the nuclear-weapon states honest with their commitments, that's all.'

Non-NPT nuclear-armed states

One point of near-universal consensus was that the presence of nuclear-armed states outside the NPT poses a continuing challenge to the regime, and hinders efforts in both non-proliferation and disarmament. A number of NWS representatives argued that a failure to integrate these states into an arms control regime would ultimately impede progress on nuclear disarmament by the five nuclear powers within the NPT. A process of full nuclear disarmament without the states outside the regime would be 'unimaginable', according to one NWS official, and one NNWS diplomat conceded that 'we cannot demand from [an NPT NWS] to demolish nuclear weapons when at the same time India and Pakistan are building up stockpiles.'

However, confronting this challenge is difficult, practically and politically. 'To ignore them is a mistake', observed one NWS representative, '[w]hich is why we and others have taken steps to bring them...into the non-proliferation mainstream... [But] understandably you get criticism for that, because as others have gone further, you seem to have double standards.' Unsurprisingly, NNWS representatives highlighted the pursuit of civilian nuclear cooperation with India as a source of mistrust within the NPT regime. There was, moreover, a broad consensus that the prospects of the other nuclear-armed states signing the NPT as NNWS remain very slim, although a number of officials maintained that this should nevertheless continue to be stated as the ultimate goal.

Most diplomats believed that the route to progress on this issue would be to bring the nucleararmed outliers into the arms control framework by gaining their acceptance of measures outside of the NPT. In the words of one NNWS official, they 'have to abide by...the international community's efforts in disarmament and non-proliferation.' Proposals along these lines included an India-Pakistan fissile material production moratorium; regional confidence-building measures; and continued pursuit of an FMCT.

HOW STATES MEASURE COMMITMENT TO NON-PROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

Officials in the BPG study were asked to identify key issues by which the commitment of other states to implement non-proliferation and disarmament could be judged. Their responses to this question are organised here into five broad categories:

- issues regarding the IAEA Additional Protocol;
- non-compliance;
- nuclear reductions;
- nuclear policies; and
- creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament.

The Additional Protocol

States fell into three reasonably distinct categories in their views on the additional protocol (AP). Firstly, there were active promoters of the AP, who identified it as a clear indicator of commitment to non-proliferation. This view was expressed mainly by representatives of Western states, including those who considered a comprehensive safeguards agreement plus an AP to be the new verification standard. A Western NNWS official argued that holdouts to the AP should sign it as 'a down-payment on trust', intended to demonstrate confidence in the regime and instil similar confidence in others.

A second group of states, including Western and non-Western NNWS, tended to accept the legitimacy of the AP as a 'useful tool' and a necessary improvement to the safeguards regime, but showed less enthusiasm about the need for promoting its implementation, in part because of sympathy with the position that the NWS should act first in pursuing further disarmament measures.

Lastly, a small group of states rejected the notion that the AP should be considered a marker for commitment to non-proliferation. The responses of officials from two Latin American states are representative here. One argued that 'the additional protocol implies a second phase of the deal [offered by the NPT]. If the first phase is not fulfilled, then you cannot move to a second phase.' A second simply remarked, 'We don't see the additional protocol as part of the broader assessment of this regime... We are happy with what we have now.'

Explanations for the motivations of AP holdouts varied. The familiar argument was heard that non-nuclear-weapon states refuse to sign an AP because 'they have done what the treaty requires and the NWS have not done what the treaty requires', and as such the onus in making progress falls on the nuclear weapon states. However, there were a number of other explanations offered without reference to a linkage with disarmament. A number of NNWS diplomats referred to the level of effort, financial resources and expertise necessary to implement an AP. Others noted that it is an intrusive measure, raising issues of national sovereignty.

Two nuclear weapon state representatives went further, suggesting that holdouts to the AP might be hedging their bets: in the words of one diplomat, 'it does not mean that they have a clear intention to do anything, but they do not want to move further because...[t]hey want to wait and see if they see newcomers, if they see proliferating countries.' Another NWS representative observed that the example set by inaction on the AP by larger NNWS could encourage other, smaller powers to refrain from signing.

Non-compliance

Several states, including those critical of the NWS for lack of progress on disarmament, expressed strong concern about non-compliance challenges to the NPT, particularly in the case of Iran. In the words of one East Asian NNWS official, 'if we fail to deal with these problems quickly the whole NPT regime will be in danger of collapse.' A Middle Eastern diplomat, whilst agreeing that a regional proliferation 'cascade' would destroy the treaty, was also keen to emphasise the central importance of the treaty's universality, as well as compliance by existing signatories. Some officials also referred to a linkage with disarmament: without movement on the Middle East, one European NNWS diplomat argued, the NWS will not 'get serious' about decreasing their nuclear arsenals; and another European representative asserted that 'states like Iran, Syria, and North Korea have a direct responsibility for some of the excuses for the NWS not to disarm.' This was echoed by NWS officials who argued that progress on disarmament would be unlikely without an assurance that Iran and DPRK would 'play by the rules.'

However, some representatives were reluctant to agree to a sense of urgency about noncompliance issues. One NWS representative, for example, argued that no state is currently going nuclear, and questioned whether the case of Iran was in fact serious. A Latin American diplomat, moreover, argued that 'it is not a matter [of] being or not being worried. Of course the whole world is worried. It is a matter of how... business is conducted [and the] standards that are applied in each case.' Perhaps with such considerations in mind, one NWS official observed that addressing noncompliance is 'not only a matter of the architecture', but rather 'the effective behaviour of states... It is not a matter of the regime.'

Nuclear reductions

A comment often heard from nuclear-weapon state representatives was that they would like recognition from the NNWS of disarmament steps already taken, and in particular, the reductions in nuclear arsenals since the peak of the Cold War – in the words of one official, the 'direction of travel.' However, the manner in which several NNWS diplomats spoke of such reductions suggests that there is a gap in perceptions of their worth between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states.

A Western NNWS official argued that the NWS are 'judged not on what they are doing but on the basis of what the NAM and others want. So they are not judged on "are they actually contributing to disarmament, how many weapons have they actually disarmed, what new things have they put into place, are they meeting the action plan?" They are judged more on "have they agreed to eliminate nuclear weapons completely in a timeframe as defined by the NAM, ideally 2025, with a nuclear weapons convention." None of which [targets] they are going to meet.'

Examples of these sorts of judgment were certainly heard, albeit in more moderate forms. In the first place the extent of disarmament to date was criticised on grounds of scale. As one Latin American representative put it, a treaty like New START is 'a very important bilateral initiative, but we remind those countries involved...that they have thousands of nuclear warheads. They are way beyond the power to destroy the whole planet.' Secondly, the manner in which arsenals have been reduced was alleged not to be 'real' – in the words of one NAM official, New START 'has nothing to do with warhead reduction; it has nothing to do with disarmament, really. It is about the number of operationally deployed strategic warheads.' A Middle Eastern diplomat argued that for disarmament to be 'real', it must put warheads 'beyond use'; and both these officials called for international verification of bilateral and unilateral disarmament steps.

Nuclear policies

Another frequent explanation for scepticism about nuclear-weapon states' seriousness about disarmament was the presence of continued investment in modernization of warheads and delivery systems. This complaint was heard from NNWS officials across regional groupings. One European diplomat suggested, for example, that modernization programmes in the NWS 'underline their desire...to stay with nuclear weapons for 20, 40, maybe 50 or even more years.' Another Western NNWS representative conceded that 'maybe you cannot turn back modernization', but argued that if modernization is to take place, the NWS must seek appropriate language in which to frame it, 'and some kind of rationale for why it is not a qualitative improvement.'

Aside from opposition to modernization, several NNWS officials identified qualitative disarmament steps as potential indicators of seriousness on the part of the NWS, with a particular focus on nuclear doctrines, and the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategies. A Latin American diplomat commented that 'we cannot understand how those countries are seeking disarmament if they still have a very prominent role for nuclear weapons in their doctrines.' Again, this was a complaint heard across regional groupings, and one that was often linked to the prospects for success in non-proliferation: as one NNWS representative put it, '[T]he best way to promote nonproliferation is to make it look like the nuclear haves do not see themselves as...a permanent club, and some of the language [used by the NWS] is not helpful for that.'

Creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament

By contrast, the steps identified by representatives of nuclear-weapon states as demonstrating seriousness of purpose related mainly to creating the conditions in which nuclear disarmament can be pursued. This was again partly a matter of the linkage between non-proliferation and disarmament: one official emphasised the need to create a security environment which decreased the 'proliferation incentive', making the path to disarmament easier.' However, a much broader range of issues were also brought up, including the need to maintain strategic stability at lower numbers of nuclear weapons; the need for a 'new security concept' which could lower the perceived risks of disarmament; the need to confront emerging non-nuclear threats in the emerging disarmament process; and a continued need for work on the 'building blocks' of disarmament like the UK-Norway initiative on verifying warhead dismantlement. The lack of trust in the NPT regime as a whole was evident here, however: representatives of non-nuclear-weapon states tended to reject such concerns as manufactured rationales for non-fulfilment of disarmament obligations.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR BUILDING CONSENSUS TOWARDS 2015

Despite the differing perceptions of the regime outlined above, it was possible to identify a number of issues which merit attention as priority areas for action in the run-up to the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Officials' responses to the BPG study in this respect can be divided into five main areas:

- Monitoring progress on Action Plan commitments;
- Lobbying for the universalization of the Additional Protocol;
- Pursuing CTBT entry-into-force, negotiations on an FMCT, and implementation of nuclear-weapon-free zones
- Reconciling the various roadmaps to nuclear disarmament that have been outlined in multilateral fora; and
- Implementation of key points in Action 5 of the 2010 Final Document.

Monitoring

Many representatives commented that the review conference process (and its preparatory committees) does not encourage creative thinking or trust-building, but instead is reliant on familiar rhetoric and national statements rather than interactive debate. It must be said, however, that this is hardly a novel complaint, nor, given the divergent perceptions of the treaty outlined above, is it surprising; and, to a certain extent, these dynamics are an inevitable product of the nature of the review process itself.

However, one common theme in officials' discussions was the need in the current review cycle for an agreed approach to monitoring progress on past commitments, and particularly those in the 2010 Action Plan. A number of diplomats, for example, emphasised the importance of the call for the nuclear-weapon states to report to the 2014 PrepCom on their progress in implementing Action 5. Indeed, one argued that, 'they cannot wait until 2014 to report. If they wait until 2014 to report and they don't report as much as others expect them to, they're going to set up a very bad dynamic going into 2015.' More broadly, it was noted that as 2015 draws closer, there will be broader interest in carrying out the kind of monitoring of progress that was conducted by NGOs before the 2012 PrepCom. However, there is still no consensus on the appropriate manner in which to do this, nor on what status the 2010 Action Plan should hold. One NWS official, for example, said of the 2012 PrepCom that their 'concern is that there has not been as much focus on the action plan in terms of national statements and group statements as we had hoped there would be.'

Lobbying for the Additional Protocol

Unsurprisingly, a broad spectrum of states parties to the NPT regard the full implementation of safeguards as being crucial to the treaty's health, and, as explored above, many states view universalization of the additional protocol as a crucial element of this process. As noted by one Western diplomat, there was evidence at the 2012 PrepCom that even though some states are 'resolutely opposed' to the AP, Western states parties appeared 'quite united...in their desire to see a move towards universal adherence.'

However, no evidence was gathered by this study to suggest that a firm consensus is likely to emerge on universalizing the AP. There is certainly work that could be done to address some concerns about the nature of the AP obligation itself, and indeed this work is already taking place. It was noted, for example, that states with advanced nuclear industries and more experience in safeguards implementation could provide assistance to smaller and less experienced states. If the AP could be made more attractive along these lines, as one European official observed, it might in some cases make the task of lobbying for it more productive.

However, the attitudes of a few key states towards the additional protocol are at their root a matter of politics, both regional and global, rather than any technical objection to the AP. Moreover, they go beyond the linkage of non-proliferation and disarmament in the NPT. Demands for progress on regional issues, or on disarmament by the NWS, are no doubt sincerely made in their own right. Yet they also reflect a desire not to give up an apparent source of leverage at a time of fundamental uncertainty about the non-proliferation regime – and these demands would also provide helpful political cover for a strategy of keeping one's options open, were states to choose such a strategy. These are issues beyond the ability of the NPT review process to resolve, in the absence of a much higher level of political engagement.

Pursuing CTBT entry-into-force, FMCT negotiations, and nuclear-weapon-free zones

As has been the case since the time of the NPT's negotiation, the appetite of non-nuclear-weapon states for a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) and a fissile material (cut-off) treaty remains very high. Emphasis on the need for an FMCT was particularly evident in officials' responses to this study, including those representing nuclear-weapon states. In this area states parties are essentially united, with the main active opposition to a treaty coming from a non-signatory to the NPT. Although hardly a surprising revelation, the evidence gathered here suggests that any movement on the FMCT issue would be of great benefit to the cause of consensus within the NPT – not least because that a fissile material cut-off would potentially address both sides of the non-proliferation and disarmament coin.

The central importance of debates about a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction (MEWMDFZ) to the current review cycle is well known to all NPT observers. Leaving aside for a moment the monumental challenges associated with the Middle East, it is worth observing that the concept of nuclear-weapon-free zones remains relatively untainted by debates about nonproliferation and disarmament 'linkages'. One NWS representative highlighted the Central Asian NWFZ as a priority area for action in this cycle; and the NWS have made progress since 2010 towards signature and ratification of the protocols to other zones. Indeed, the goal of creating and implementing nuclear-weapon free zones was one of the few measures identified by nuclear- and nonnuclear- weapon state officials in this study as a priority in demonstrating commitment to both nonproliferation and disarmament.

Reconciling roadmaps to nuclear disarmament

The cumulative legacy of successive NPT review conferences and other NPT-related processes is a collection of commitments, plans, and approaches to disarmament which sometimes overlap, sometimes conflict, and which seem now to compete for states' attention. These include lists of commitments and actions (the 1995 Principles and Objectives for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, the 13 practical steps towards nuclear disarmament identified in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference, and points 1-22 of the 2010 Action Plan); a choice between incrementalism and the absolutism of a Nuclear Weapons Convention and time-bound frameworks; unilateral, bilateral, 'plurilateral' and multilateral disarmament forums; and new processes outside of, but associated with, the NPT, such as the NWS Conferences and discussions of the 'humanitarian dimension' of nuclear disarmament.

This diverse array of disarmament initiatives can be read as one response to the lack of specificity in Article VI. However, these approaches to disarmament do not always interact helpfully. It was notable that despite several officials' predominant focus on disarmament in interviews for this study, only one mentioned the 13 practical steps agreed in 2000. It may be that this reflects a desire by states to adapt to changed circumstances; however, if commitments made at Review Conferences are perceived as short-term promises rather than long-term responsibilities, this may begin to erode the credibility of the process. There is still a very wide gap, moreover, between the advocates of a nuclear weapons convention (NWC) under time-bound frameworks, and those committed to a step-by-step approach. Nuclear-weapon-state representatives reiterated strong opposition to the NWC approach: one called it 'not serious', another argued that this was the proposal you make 'when you want nothing to happen.'

Lastly, the attitudes to disarmament implied by two new initiatives – the NWS conferences, and dialogues on the 'humanitarian dimension' – seem to be divergent, and hard to reconcile. The logic of the NWS Conferences is that multilateral disarmament can only take place once greater trust is built among the NWS, including through the pursuit of confidence-building measures, which would suggest that there are immovable security concerns which must be addressed before progress on disarmament can take place. The purpose of current initiatives on the 'humanitarian dimension', by contrast, is to bring political pressure to bear on the nuclear-weapon states by casting nuclear weapons as fundamentally illegitimate. This appears to stem from a belief that nuclear disarmament can be advanced simply by applying a higher level of political will.

Implementing Action 5 of the 2010 Final Document

Despite these divergences, responses heard in this study from NNWS representatives suggested the beginnings of consensus on three priority areas within Action 5 of the 2010 final document. In keeping with the findings outlined above, a number of states emphasised action (c), reducing the role of nuclear weapons. As one official put it, movement in this area would be important 'not just in itself, but in the signal it sends – that you are not relying indefinitely on [nuclear weapons], and that you are into encouraging non-proliferation.' However, nuclear-weapon state representatives maintained that discussions of the role of nuclear weapons

must be linked to a broader dialogue about the international security conditions necessary for reductions to take place. Secondly, there were several references, from nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states, to action (g), on enhancing transparency and increasing mutual confidence. Transparency was discussed both in quantitative and qualitative terms, referring not only to stockpile numbers and delivery systems, but also to doctrine. A number of states suggested that progress on NWS reporting was an instrument to encourage this kind of transparency. Lastly, even from officials who had expressed the opinion that arms control initiatives like New START did not constitute 'real' disarmament progress, there was still significant attention paid to action (a): in the words of one NAM diplomat, 'the numbers game is still very, very important.'

A role for the United Kingdom?

The evidence gathered for this study suggests that steps by the United Kingdom which implied a circumscribed role for nuclear weapons would be welcomed by non-nuclear-weapon states, and it was hypothesised by some officials that this might help sustain broader support for non-proliferation. Some criticisms were heard of the UK's reference at the 2012 PrepCom to the need for a credible nuclear capability as the ultimate guarantee of national security. Nevertheless, to the extent that NNWS representatives attempted to distinguish between the various nuclear-weapon states, the UK appeared to enjoy a reputation as being relatively progressive and transparent. One official suggested that the relevance of a step down in the UK's deterrent posture would not lie in the significance of the step itself, but rather in the way it 'would give an important signal that there is a process towards disarmament.'

However, with the 'main gate' decision on like-for-like replacement of the UK's submarines postponed until 2016, and with alternatives to the current deterrent platform being a matter of acute political sensitivity in the governing coalition, the prospects for further unilateral disarmament steps by the United Kingdom in this review cycle appear relatively slim. Instead, the UK's most productive area of engagement may lie instead in encouraging dialogue on practical issues related to the disarmament process. This has a dual meaning: on the one hand, as a relatively forward-leaning member of the NWS, the UK can push for progress on confidence-building measures between the nuclear-weapon states. On the other hand, there is also a need for a more constructive dialogue between NWS and NNWS on the practicalities and political implications of disarmament, and the UK could use whatever credibility it has gained through progress on transparency, and ventures such as the UK-Norway Initiative, to lead such a dialogue. To take a current example, the task of the United Kingdom may be not only to encourage progress within the NWS process on reaching shared understandings of nuclear terminology, but also to communicate effectively to non-nuclear-weapon states why such progress matters for disarmament.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this study, there can be no doubt that non-proliferation and disarmament are inextricably linked in the politics of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, the precise nature of that linkage is rarely defined, and references to a shared belief in the treaty's 'three pillars', or the two sides of a non-proliferation and disarmament 'coin', barely serve to mask states' divergent perceptions of the way in which these two concepts interact. The perception of 'balance' in implementing non-proliferation and disarmament provisions remains central to states' support for the NPT, but the meaning of such a balance is similarly contested.

Such a divergence has been a common theme throughout the four and a half decades of the treaty's existence, and finds its roots partly in the treaty's text, in which non-proliferation obligations are given far more concrete expression than those relating to nuclear disarmament. However, in current debates about the NPT it is also important to note a fundamental lack of consensus about the sources of leadership and the nature of agency in the non-proliferation and disarmament regime. The NWS appear to have accepted a special responsibility for nuclear disarmament, which in some senses they appear to bear equally – however, the five recognised nuclear-weapon states are seen to have distinct roles in the disarmament process, different starting points, and different levels of enthusiasm for disarmament itself. There is a danger that a 'NWS' group acting in unison may revert to a lowest-common-denominator position on disarmament, less active than the sum of its most progressive parts.

At the same time, the nuclear-weapon states claim that external agency is necessary to create enabling conditions for nuclear disarmament, including measures by non-nuclear-weapon states to strengthen the non-proliferation regime and to implement its provisions. Yet these measures are themselves considered by the NNWS to be conditional on further progress on disarmament. The situation is further complicated by the presence of nuclear-armed states outside of the NPT. Indeed, one of the strongest areas of consensus

identified in this study was the belief of NPT states that those outliers must be brought into a broader arms control framework. However, NPT Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences hardly constitute the forum for such initiatives to take root, given that targets of the measures in question are not present.

When officials were asked to identify measures that might demonstrate shared commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament, these differences in opinion about the conceptual roots of the linkage were translated into divergent policy priorities. The additional protocol enjoys widespread support as a legitimate and necessary part of the non-proliferation regime, yet key states refrain from supporting its universalization. Non-compliance with non-proliferation obligations is held in theory to threaten the integrity of the NPT itself, yet there is no shared sense of urgency about addressing specific cases in which compliance is disputed. Nuclear-weapon states would like credit for reductions in nuclear arsenals, and support for creating the conditions for further nuclear disarmament, yet non-nuclear-weapon states are more preoccupied with the perceived role of nuclear weapons in doctrines and strategy, and the implication of strategic modernization programmes.

It seems unlikely, therefore, that a new consensus on the relationship between nonproliferation and disarmament, leading to a fundamental revitalization of the regime, is within the reach of NPT states parties. However, as long as the continued existence of the NPT serves the interests of its states parties, an entirely new consensus may not be needed. Instead, a sincere effort to understand the sources of the divergent perceptions outlined above, and to identify those measures considered by states parties to be most valuable in demonstrating political commitment to the treaty, may well prove enough to sustain the regime, assuming that external events do not cause its downfall.

Throughout the study, those interviewed communicated a common interest in the ensuring longevity of the treaty, strengthening the regime as a whole, furthering nuclear disarmament, and preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional states.

In that regard, for the current review cycle, the evidence gathered by this study suggests a modest list of priority measures. These include:

Developing an agreed mechanism for monitoring states parties' progress towards implementing their commitments, in particular those made in the 2010 Action Plan;

The continued pursuit of universalization of the Additional Protocol, including offers of technical and financial assistance to potential signatories, but with the recognition that the positions of certain key holdouts depend on factors unrelated to the nature of the additional protocol itself, which will require high-level political engagement to resolve;

A collective effort to pursue CTBT ratification and negotiations on an FMCT; and to promote and implement the provisions of nuclear-weapon-free zones, including but not limited to ongoing work towards convening a conference on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

Reconciling the current diverse array of proposed roadmaps for nuclear disarmament, including commitments made in 1995, 2000 and 2010; incrementalist approaches and a time-bound nuclear-weapons-convention campaign; the NWS Conferences and dialogues on the 'humanitarian dimension' of disarmament; and a recognition that many states place strong emphasis on certain key points of Action 5 of the 2010 Action Plan, in particular those relating to transparency and confidence building; reducing the role of nuclear weapons; and reductions in the global stockpile of nuclear weapons.

A factor common to discussions both of non-proliferation and disarmament issues in this study was the need for high-level political investment in the non-proliferation regime, of the sort most recently seen in President Obama's nuclear agenda following his speech in Prague in April 2009. Certain problems – including, for example the final drive for universalization of the Additional Protocol – are likely to remain beyond the ability of the NPT review process to solve without a renewed investment of political capital.

This situation is exacerbated by the prevailing situation of a perceived lack of trust between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states parties. Sometimes this is more a symptom of irreconcilable interests than a causal factor in confrontations within the regime. However, the evidence gathered in this study suggests that one contributor to this lack of trust is the different ways in which nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states perceive the challenges involved in nuclear disarmament. These differences lead to accusations of a lack of seriousness on both sides: the NWS are perceived not to be serious in their intent to disarm, while the demands of the NNWS for accelerated progress are seen as unrealistic, and as a result are themselves not taken seriously. Any consensus that states parties are living up to their obligation to pursue negotiations 'in good faith' towards nuclear disarmament will rely on this gap being bridged – and it is here that the United Kingdom might play its most important role.

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