

GLOBAL ENTERPRISE TO STRENGTHEN NONPROLIFERATION AND DISARMAMENT

DISCUSSION PAPER: SUCCESS AT THE 10TH NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE: RAISING OUR LEVEL OF AMBITION February 2021

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Background

Both formal preparations for the 10th Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference (NPT RevCon) and the less formal Global Enterprise meetings have reflected pessimism about what can be achieved at the RevCon. By contrast, new factors call for the Parties to take a more ambitious approach.

Those factors include: the new Biden administration; extension of the New START treaty and anticipated U.S.-Russian strategic stability discussions; a strengthened P5 process as COVID restrictions ease; the prospect of bilateral engagement between the United States and China on nuclear and related strategic issues; entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); and the shifting of the Middle East diplomatic landscape, including recognition of Israel by additional Arab countries, U.S. readiness to engage with Iran to restore the Joint Comprehensive Program of Action (JCPOA), and the start of a continuing UN process on a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (MEWMDFZ). These factors are nested, moreover, in the continued affirmation by the NPT's Parties of their support for the Treaty and of its importance to nuclear nonproliferation, global peace and security, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

With that backdrop, the RevCon should be viewed not as a train-wreck to be averted but as an opportunity for successful action to strengthen the Treaty and energize sustained pursuit of its goals. Building on past discussions within the Global Enterprise, what would be a successful 10th RevCon?

Dimensions of Success at the 10th NPT Review Conference

A reaffirmation by the Parties of their support for the NPT, its critical global role, and their commitment to reinvigorated pursuit of all of its goals would be one dimension of success. National and group statements (including by the P5), interventions in debate, and including such a reaffirmation in a more comprehensive final declaration all are means to show that support.

Though time is short, efforts could also be made to issue a ***short declaration of support by the Heads of State or Government of all NPT Parties*** to introduce the RevCon opening Plenary. The required diplomatic effort to achieve that statement could be undertaken by the three NPT

Depositaries – the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States – working together and in concert with non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS).

The RevCon also offers an opportunity to forge agreement among the P5 (perhaps then endorsed by all Parties) **to jointly affirm the Reagan-Gorbachev principle** that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. Doing so is especially important now given concerns about the rising risk of use of nuclear weapons. It also would be timely given that the 10th RevCon marks the 75th anniversary of the use of nuclear weapons.

A robust dialogue at the RevCon on the NPT's implementation over the preceding five years would be another definition of success. In addition, this traditional backward-looking review could be complemented with a more focused dialogue on one or two critical challenges facing the NPT. The risk of use of nuclear weapons, the consequences of such use, and risk reduction strategies is one example. Another would be how to define more precise pathways toward the NPT's goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Adding such focused dialogue would help highlight shared interests among NPT Parties and rebuild habits of cooperation.

Shifting from words toward deeds, another dimension of success would be **actions by the Parties that would advance both the vision of the NPT's Preamble of a world free of the threat of nuclear weapons and the Treaty's specific goals**. Many possible actions stand out from across the discussions of the Global Enterprise. (In any of the dimensions of success identified below, readers may have other examples or priorities.)

Directly linked to the Preamble's recognition of the "need to make every effort to avert the danger of [nuclear]war," **announcement by the P5 of a Joint Voluntary Commitment to intensify their engagement to reduce the risk of use of nuclear weapons** by creating a dedicated working group would be one such action. Its credibility and impact, moreover, would be heightened by an accompanying P5 commitment to report throughout the five-yearly review process on the results of their deliberations. (This action also would gain momentum by the affirmation of the Reagan-Gorbachev principle and conversely would add credibility to that affirmation.)

Building on past commitments, another dimension of success would be agreement among the Parties on **two or three top priority objectives to be realized by the time of the 2025 RevCon**. Without prejudicing pursuit of other objectives or necessarily trying to strike a balance across all of the NPT's three goals, the purpose of that agreement would be to energize actions in a few critical areas. Three examples are negotiation of follow-on arms control agreements to New START, initiation of negotiations on a fissile material treaty, and nuclear weapon state parties' (NWS) ratification of the outstanding Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) protocols as well as conclusion of the Southeast Asian NWFZ.

Use of the 10th NPT Review Conference as a means **to focus attention on selected issues, start a process to address them, and pave the way for additional or later actions whose time may not be fully ripe** would be another dimension of success. Doing so is often the purpose of working papers and interventions of groups of NPT Parties. Joint Voluntary Commitments also are a means for groups of

like-minded countries to be pathfinders. Examples of such actions would be heightened transparency (including on stockpiles of nuclear weapons), strengthened implementation of international standards for fissile material security, and steps toward reduced reliance on nuclear weapons (including doctrinal changes such as a shift by the five NPT NWS to agreement that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons should be the deterrence of use of nuclear weapons).

Closely related, the 10th RevCon also offers an opportunity **to make clear Parties' support for diplomatic efforts to address key nonproliferation challenges**. Support for restoration of the JCPOA and reinvigorated pursuit of the denuclearization of North Korea stand out.

Agreement **to put in place new review process procedures to facilitate and enhance interactive dialogue** among all NPT Parties would be another dimension of success. Three such procedures would be to call for NWS to provide for prior discussion with NNWS of their reports on NPT implementation, to set aside dedicated time during the preparatory process for the 2025 RevCon for interaction based on agreed NPT-related topics, and to make more use of the precedent of requiring reports from the NWS on selected topics during the preparatory process.

Taken together, the preceding actions point to an additional dimension of success: **demonstrating the ability of the Parties once again to work together** to advance the NPT goals. Doing so is especially important because rebuilding habits of cooperation as well as restoring trust and confidence among the NPT's Parties is essential to its continuing legitimacy and effectiveness.

Success also will require that the NPT Parties find **mutually-acceptable ways to navigate their differences on three specific politically-controversial issues**: the call being made for a blanket reaffirmation of previous commitments made at past NPT RevCons; how to avoid a confrontation between supporters and opponents of the TPNW, including how to refer to it in any final declaration; and how to address the MEWMDfZ. There are possible ways forward on each that would combine recognition of underlying concerns, an emphasis on progress toward broadly shared goals, and a focus on more specific actions forward.

There is one closing dimension of success at the 10th RevCon. Regardless of well-used talking points that declare otherwise, the ability of the Parties **to reach agreement on a consensus final document or declaration** that sets out their collective vision for implementation of the NPT will be seen both by Parties themselves and by outsiders as a symbol of success. Nonetheless, as suggested above, there also are ways to complement such a final document with other stand-alone voluntary commitments by groups of states. Both elements should be part of a more ambitious approach to the upcoming 10th RevCon that looks beyond the conference itself to actions that strengthen the NPT's continuing contribution to global peace and security.