

PrepCom 2002: Avoiding more missed steps

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The upcoming meeting of States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will be another opportunity for the world to focus on the strength of international security agreements in the wake of heightened concern over the availability of weapons of mass destruction.

Why Are We Having A PrepCom?

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meeting, which will begin paving the path toward the 2005 Review Conference (RevCon) of the NPT, will meet April 8-19, 2002 in New York. PrepCom meetings convene in the three years preceding the five-yearly NPT reviews to start procedural and substantive discussions. According to Strengthening the Review Process for the Treaty (Decision 1 of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference), "The purpose of the Preparatory Committee meetings would be to consider principles, objectives and ways in order to promote the full implementation of the Treaty, as well as its universality, and to make recommendations thereon to the Review Conference." Creating procedural recommendations are also a task for PrepComs.

During the 2002 PrepCom, the 189 NPT States Parties will discuss ways to move forward with the NPT's objectives, especially in light of the decisions made at the May 2000 RevCon.

What Are the Issues Being Carried Forward from the 2000 Review Conference?

The May 2000 RevCon broke new ground for global non-proliferation efforts. In the final document, all states agreed to an historic "13 steps" toward the goal of accomplishing the elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals. Steps agreed by both nuclear-weapon states and their non-nuclear allies and neighbors include:

- Achieve early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
 - Continue the moratorium on nuclear-weapon-test explosions until CTBT enactment.
- Move forward on negotiations for a verifiable treaty banning fissile material production.
- Establish a body within the U.N. Conference on Disarmament to start discussions on nuclear disarmament.
- Apply the principle of irreversibility to arms control and disarmament negotiations.
- Develop verification capabilities that will be required to provide assurance of compliance with nuclear disarmament agreements.
- Implement START II and conclude START III negotiations as soon as possible, while preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability and as a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons.
- Nuclear-weapon States will take the following steps leading to nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability:
 - Efforts to reduce their nuclear arsenals unilaterally;
 - Increased transparency on nuclear weapons capabilities and implementing agreements;
 - Further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons, both unilaterally and as a part of the arms reduction and disarmament process;
 - Concrete measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons;
 - A diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination;
 - Engagement of all the nuclear-weapon States in the process leading to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons.
- Reaffirm that the ultimate objective of the efforts of States in the disarmament process is general and complete disarmament under effective international control.
- An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament.

What Are the Expected Outcomes or Anticipated Glitches?

When the countries convene in New York next month, evaluating the level of progress on this list of commitments will be a critical component guiding the discussions. However, several changes in the international security climate since May 2000 have resulted in significant setback in the implementation of these measures.

– U.S. Withdrawal From the ABM Treaty

Recent actions and statements by the Bush administration in the United States are likely to have the greatest impact on the steps listed above. The decision in December 2001 to withdraw from the ABM Treaty, cited in May 2000 as “a cornerstone of strategic stability and as a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons” represents the most high profile action by Washington. With the cornerstone removed, and discussions on the START process stalled due to impasses between the legislatures in the United States and Russia, the stability of the non-proliferation regime has been significantly weakened. The example set by Washington in withdrawing from an international treaty also sets an unfortunate precedent that may be exploited by other countries in the future.

– Lack of Progress in Transparency, Irreversibility, and Verification

The issues of transparency, irreversibility, and verification have seen some setbacks since the May 2000 RevCon. The United States announced proposed reductions in its arsenal from 6,000 to 1,700-2,200 deployed strategic nuclear warheads over the next ten years. While those reductions are welcome, they were initially suggested by President Bush outside of a treaty framework, which would hinder international efforts to verify the reductions, and make sure that the warheads would be destroyed. Upon closer inspection, the “cuts” offered by Bush were redefined in his administration’s Nuclear Posture Review in January 2002. The warheads would instead be moved to active or inactive storage, and no announcements of warhead destruction have been made yet by the administration. Finally, transparency remains problematic among all of the nuclear weapon states. For example, China’s nuclear arsenal modernization and buildup remains a largely obscure process to other states and independent experts seeking a clearer idea of China’s holdings, development, and potential proliferation risk.

– Failure to Implement the CTBT

Another challenge confronting States Parties involves the not-yet-implemented CTBT. While all countries still abide by the voluntary moratorium pending the treaty’s entry into force, discussions on enacting the CTBT last November were not conclusive. The United States, a required ratifier to implement the CTBT, refused to attend the meeting; while India, Israel, and Pakistan, also required ratifiers, have yet to even sign the treaty. Progress has not been significant on banning nuclear testing, a key action for furthering global nuclear disarmament.

– Stalled Action on Fissban

Progress on banning fissile material production and establishing a nuclear disarmament sub-body in the U.N. Conference on Disarmament has been stalled as well. The consensus negotiating body has failed to establish a program for its work for six years, without which negotiations may not proceed.

– Non-Compliance, Universality, and Other Concerns

Other issues beyond the “13 steps” will also challenge countries at the upcoming PrepCom. The alleged nuclear activities of Iraq and North Korea, States Parties to the NPT, bring up concerns about compliance with their international obligations to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The heightened conflict in the Middle East will also drive

a wedge between states during the discussions, as some countries aim to address Israel as a nuclear-weapon state, while Israel remains outside of the treaty. And increased tension between India and Pakistan, also outside of the NPT regime, will bring forth more deliberations about how to make the NPT a universal treaty.

Avoiding More Missed 'Steps'

The forthcoming PrepCom in New York will be an opportunity for States Parties to begin discussing these concerns in the context of their commitment to and compliance with non-proliferation and disarmament measures outlined in the NPT process. While the PrepCom is tasked only to make recommendations for future negotiations, and will not produce a binding document out of its own discussions, countries should start toward the 2005 RevCon with measures to build upon the May 2000 steps. Changes in international priorities, and particularly in U.S. government policy, will force some of the commitments made in 2000 to be extensively reevaluated. The challenge will be to ensure that the remaining steps listed above stay intact and are strengthened and implemented as much as possible.

The current international climate, while still troubling and unsettled in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, increased tension in South Asia, and heightened violence in the Middle East, must not override States Parties' existing commitment to ensuring "nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability, based on the principle of undiminished security for all."