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BASIC

Pragmatic Leadership to Achieve Progress on Disarmament

Finding Stepping Stones in the Step-by-Step Approach

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BASIC

The British American Security Information Council (BASIC) is an independent think tank and registered charity based in Whitehall, London, promoting innovative ideas and international dialogue on nuclear disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation. Since 1987, we've been at the forefront of global efforts to build trust and cooperation on some of the world's most progressive global peace and security initiatives, advising governments in the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East and Russia. Through an approach based on active listening, understanding and empathy, the charity builds bridges across divides and lay new pathways to inclusive security.

BASIC has developed institutional expertise across a number of transatlantic issue areas, including the UK-US nuclear relationship, the UK's Trident programme, the politics of disarmament and arms control in the UK Parliament, NATO nuclear weapons in Europe, the Middle East, the evolving role of responsibility in nuclear governance, and expanding technological threats to SSBN platforms.



Introduction

On 22nd November 2018, BASIC hosted a roundtable with the support of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 16 next-generation leaders from the academic and NGO communities in Europe attended with the purpose of assessing the state of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and identifying initiatives on which progress could feasibly be made ahead of the Review Conference in 2020. The event was held under Chatham House rules.

The NPT is lacking in leadership. The current review cycle is plagued by destabilising trends, which include: the breakdown in U.S.-Russia arms control; waning prospects for a WMD Free Zone in the Middle East (WMD FZME); and enduring frustration with lack of progress towards nuclear disarmament. The lack of progress in pursuing the objectives of disarmament, as set out clearly in the 2010 NPT Review Conference 64 point action plan, has led to the creation of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, more commonly known as the Ban Treaty. Expectations may be low for NPT RevCon 2020 yet we cannot afford for the non-proliferation regime to slide into insignificance.

The step-by-step approach remains a credible pathway towards global nuclear disarmament, but requires reinvigorating. While many 'big step' solutions appear out of reach presently, stymied by the positions of key states, there remains a chance for states to identify the smaller and more manageable steps at this difficult time.

Current blockages in the NPT regime

The initial discussion focused on the tense political climate between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states, as well as the current tensions among nuclear weapon states. Participants agreed that these

interlocking tensions make it very difficult to envisage the positive and collaborative steps needed to ensure that the Review Conference 2020 could be successful. In particular, a number of key issues were identified as blockages:

1. uncertainty over the future of the Iran Deal, in which the US decision to withdraw has put it at odds with its principal allies and seriously jeopardised one of the most recent successes in non-proliferation diplomacy;
2. uncertainty over whether recent diplomatic steps with North Korea will lead to 'denuclearisation' and whether the recent de-escalatory path would continue;
3. the potential impact of the Ban Treaty and questions of how entry into force may change states' behaviour;
4. the perennial issue of the WMD/FZME which was central to securing the support of Arab States for the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, yet arguably is more out of reach due to the continued possession and use of WMDs in the region;
5. and finally, the continued modernisation of nuclear arsenals by Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) was evaluated as a further complication in achieving consensus. Particularly, the US and Russian willingness to invest in low-yield nuclear weapons and doctrines that appear to give nuclear weapons increased saliency are seen as increasing the difficulty of being able to reach consensus on disarmament. This stands in contrast with the newly-heightened awareness of the humanitarian cost of using nuclear weapons among Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS). A more transparent international conversation on the benefits and risks of nuclear deterrence and nuclear risk reduction was suggested as a way to reduce the gap between states.

Stepping stones to progress

Participants discussed a number of initiatives that could lead to progress, but two specific steps that could revive the NPT process attracted particular attention:

- States could act to bring into force the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT);
- and, states could commit to investing in public education and increasing awareness around nuclear weapons.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

The CTBT has extensive buy-in with the exception of eight key states. Yet discussions on CTBT could provide an opportunity to engage North Korea, who have shown tentative interest in joining. By doing so, North Korea could begin a rehabilitation process that enables them to show non-proliferation leadership and engender further responsible behaviour.

Public Education and Awareness

States' commitments to raising public awareness and understanding of nuclear weapons issues would strengthen democratic participation, giving citizens the tools to fully understand and participate in deterrence and disarmament debates. Similarly, it would be a way for NWS to signal their continued commitment towards disarmament, combined with other steps. It would involve funding initiatives to increase public knowledge of the issue through school curricula and public discourse.

The Next Generation Leaders roundtable was a positive first step in exploring in detail potential steps for bridge building in the NPT regime ahead of 2020.

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