

Nuclear responsibilities  
and the NPT:

# Advancing the nuclear responsibilities approach

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## Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared for a 'Nuclear Responsibilities and the NPT' workshop, hosted by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office on 10 September 2025. This paper, and the research that informs it, has been supported by an ESRC-IAA grant awarded by the ESRC and University of Stirling (ES/X00456/1).

The author would like to thank Alice Spilman for earlier comments on this paper, and to all the workshop participants for their insightful and constructive feedback during our discussions. Particular thanks also to David Chambers for facilitating the workshop.

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# Executive Summary

This paper examines nuclear responsibilities discourses within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

It presents a discourse analysis from the 2025 NPT Preparatory Committee (PrepCom); exploring how States Parties use the language of responsibility to articulate expectations, critique behaviours, and assert norms across the NPT's three pillars: nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Building on this analysis, the paper outlines *why*, *how*, *who* and *what* can be done by States Parties to advance a **nuclear responsibilities approach** —a method that promotes introspection, empathy, and dialogue to build trust and reduce polarisation —within the NPT framework.

## Key Findings

- NPT States Parties attribute **common** and **differentiated** responsibilities to various actors within the NPT framework. These include *collective responsibilities* attributed to all States Parties (e.g., upholding the NPT, advancing disarmament), *primary responsibilities* to national governments (e.g., nuclear safety and security) and *special responsibilities* to nuclear-weapon States, especially the P5, and other subgroups of States (e.g., CTBT Annex 2 states, nuclear-sharing states, supplier states).
- States Parties regularly utilise the language of responsibility across the NPT framework addressing myriad issues spanning nuclear disarmament, deterrence, non-proliferation, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and strengthening the NPT.
- Within the NPT States Parties frequently claim responsibility, justifying their own behaviours and practices, while critiquing others. This includes calling out “irresponsible” rhetoric and behaviour, particularly in relation to nuclear modernisation, deterrence, and transparency. Such language fuels polarisation and blame games, hindering constructive dialogue. Ambiguity in how responsibility is understood, and limited opportunities for meaningful exchange further compound these issues.
- Despite challenges, the widespread use of responsibility language reflects a responsibilities consciousness and culture within the NPT framework. This presents an opportunity to advance a nuclear responsibilities approach.
- A nuclear responsibilities approach moves beyond divisive debates about who is or is not being “responsible” – which are invariably subjective and contested – to instead explore what different stakeholders’ “responsibilities” actually are. The approach prioritises critical reflection, advocates active listening and pursues dialogue to build shared understandings of nuclear responsibilities among NPT States Parties.

# Advancing a Nuclear Responsibilities Approach

## The five-step strategy

To operationalise a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT, the paper outlines a five-step strategy comprising:

- 1 **critical reflection** by States Parties on their own use of responsibility language;
- 2 **establishing a community of practice** to share perspectives and build consensus;
- 3 engaging in **minilateral dialogue** to explore responsible practices in smaller, focused groups;
- 4 **multilateral reporting and engagement** to ensure transparency and inclusivity; and
- 5 **persistence** to institutionalise the approach over time.

## Leadership

Leadership in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT will be necessary. While the UK may be considered a natural leader in this space, a minilateral coalition could comprise both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States from diverse regions and positions. Such diversity is also essential to ensure legitimacy, inclusivity, and sustained progress.

## Issues targeted

Initial efforts to advance a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT could target **transparency**, **accountability**, and **risk reduction** as issues with potential for consensus and trust-building moving into the next NPT review cycle.

## Distinct pathway

A nuclear responsibilities approach offers a distinct and constructive pathway to reinvigorate multilateralism within the NPT. Rejecting claims to responsible identity, and moving beyond the language of responsibility as justification and critique, the approach shifts the focus from blame to building a shared understanding of nuclear responsibilities within the NPT framework. In so doing it can help depolarise contentious issues, foster trust, build confidence, increase transparency, reduce risks, and strengthen the Treaty's integrity and effectiveness.

# Nuclear responsibilities and the NPT:

## *The state of play*

**This section presents the results of a procedural and thematic discourse analysis of the use of responsibilities language during the 2025 NPT Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) (28 April to 9 May 2025).<sup>1</sup>**

Analysis identifies several common responsibility frames utilised by States Parties during the 2025 PrepCom, how responsibilities have been attributed by NPT States Parties, and highlights some of the key themes and issues most commonly associated with the language of responsibility within the NPT framework.

1 This research received ethical approval from the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel on 21 March 2025 (Ref: GUEP 2025 22437 16833). Data for this analysis was drawn from participant observation of proceedings during the 2025 PrepCom proceedings at the UN in New York, alongside analysis of all written statements, working papers, national reports, and verbatim verbal statements (in English using UN translation via UNTV recordings where no written statement was provided) delivered during all general and cluster debates, closing statements interventions and rights of reply. The dataset that informs this analysis collates all references to the words 'responsible', 'responsibility' 'responsibilities', and 'irresponsible' from the 2025 PrepCom. For written statements, working papers and national reports, responsibilities discourse was identified using the document navigation function, using the search term 'responsi'. Any identified sections of text referencing the words 'responsible', 'responsibility' 'responsibilities', and 'irresponsible' were then cut and pasted into the data set. The same process was applied for Spanish- and French-language documents using the search term 'respons'. The document translation function was then used to identify and translate sections utilising responsibilities language into English. Where written statements were in Arabic, or where no written statement was submitted by the State Party, responsibilities language was instead identified from verbal statements during plenary sessions; including English-translations, provided by the UN, where statements were delivered in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian or Spanish. The transcription of verbal statements was further checked against UNTV recordings of the PrepCom meetings for accuracy. In total the dataset that informs this analysis comprises 330 individual mentions of the words 'irresponsible', 'responsible', 'responsibility', and 'responsibilities'.

## Common responsibility frames within the NPT

**Spilman et al.<sup>2</sup> suggest that responsibility language in the NPT can be identified in four ways:**

- 1 *responsibility as accountability* (retrospective – backward-looking – emphasis on cause or blame);
- 2 *responsibility as obligation* (prospective – forward-looking – emphasis on duty),
- 3 *responsibility as identity* (self-identification e.g. 'responsible nuclear weapon state') and
- 4 *responsible manner* (where an action or behaviour is performed responsibly).

Responsibility is a concept understood and framed in different ways and from different perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting on the ways in which actors use these different responsibility frames is therefore helpful both to ascertain meaning in the use of language and to unpack the contention over responsibility discourse. These distinctions further reveal that more productive responsibilities frames can provide a roadmap for more effective dialogue. During the 2025 PrepCom all four responsibility frames were moreover identified.

- 2 Alice Spilman, Chiara Cervasio, Eva-Nour Repussard and Mahiri McClafferty. *The Nuclear Responsibilities Primer: Exploring Perspectives on Nuclear Responsibilities within the Non-Proliferation Regime*. BASIC. November 2024. <https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/nuclear-responsibilities-primer.pdf>
- 3 Responsibility may, for example, be claimed or conferred, 'special' or 'common', norm or practice. Responsibility frames can also then be subtle in their distinctiveness e.g. 'being responsible' compared to 'having responsibilities'.

## Responsibility as accountability

During the 2025 PrepCom responsibility as accountability frames were used with some frequency by both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States during national and group statements. By way of example, the Baltic States, in their group statement, called upon China to ‘*act responsibly and provide clarity on its nuclear expansion and doctrine*’.<sup>4</sup> Responsibility as accountability frames were also commonly utilised by the nuclear-weapon States against each other. The US, for example, stipulated that, while it was “*committed to responsible behaviour as a nuclear-weapon State under the NPT. Not all NPT nuclear-weapon States have done the same*”. The US further called on China to, “*demonstrate responsibility*” by showing transparency.<sup>5</sup> China similarly used responsibility language both to emphasise that it had upheld its responsibilities as the 2024 coordinator of the P5 Process, and to call out the United States’ recent investment in its nuclear arsenal as “*evad[ing] its responsibility for nuclear disarmament*”.<sup>6</sup> These tit-for-tat exchanges extended also to France and Russia.<sup>7</sup>

## Responsibility as obligation

Responsibility language was commonly oriented towards frames of obligation during the PrepCom, with non-nuclear-weapon States particularly highlighting the ‘special’ responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States to uphold their obligations under Article VI of the NPT as it concerns nuclear disarmament (see following sections). Several States Parties also reiterated the same common frames, such as calling for nuclear-weapon States to ‘*shoulder their responsibility*’ with reference to their obligations under the NPT, particularly with regards the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on Establishing a Middle East WMD Free Zone.<sup>8</sup>

4 Baltic States general statement. See also the Republic of Korea general statement which called on Russia to cease its cooperation with the DPRK and ‘uphold its responsibility as an NPT depository state to protect the integrity of the NPT’

5 US cluster 1 specific issues statements

6 China cluster 1 statement.

7 For example, France called “*on Russia to live up to the responsibilities that fall upon nuclear-weapon States by fully adhering, both in word and deed, to the joint statement by the P5*”. Russia meanwhile used its right of reply highlight that “*France bears responsibility for all of the looting and all of the violence that is occurring [in Ukraine]*.”

8 NAM cluster 2 specific issues statement; UAE cluster 2 specific issues statement, English translation; Jordan cluster 2 statement, English translation; Senegal cluster 3 specific issues statement, English translation

## Responsibility as identity

During previous NPT review cycles, we have observed the practice of nuclear-weapon-States Parties self-identifying as ‘responsible nuclear weapon states’ in statements, working papers and national reports to the NPT.<sup>9</sup> While this practice has diminished to some extent in more recent years, self-identification frames continue to be utilised. For example, during the 2025 PrepCom, France explicitly self-identified as a ‘*responsible nuclear weapon state*’.<sup>10</sup> China referred to itself as a ‘*responsible country*’,<sup>11</sup> while the UK made an implicit reference to itself as a ‘*responsible nuclear nation*’.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the 2025 PrepCom also saw the UK identify Russia as an ‘*irresponsible nuclear weapons state*’,<sup>13</sup> thereby utilising responsibility language both as a frame of identification and accountability.

## Responsible manner

During the 2025 PrepCom the word ‘responsible’ was commonly used as an adjective in reference to the way actions or behaviours are performed by States Parties. This was particularly commonplace framing in language associated with the peaceful uses of nuclear energy pillar. For example, States Parties frequently used the framing of responsibility to emphasise their ‘*responsible nuclear programmes*’, ‘*responsible partners*’, ‘*responsible transfers*’ and the ‘*responsible use of nuclear energy*’. During the 2025 PrepCom we also saw reference to the framing of ‘*responsible deterrence*’, e.g. “*NATO nuclear sharing arrangements provide responsible deterrence*”.<sup>14</sup>

9 Spilman et al. 2024; see also Megan Dee and Benjamin Kienzle (2023) “Between role adaptation and contestation: the UK’s status as a nuclear weapon state after Brexit”. *International Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-023-00463-7>

10 France WP.10

11 China general statement

12 UK cluster 3 statement. Specifically, the UK statement read: “The NPT is the cornerstone of the non-proliferation architecture and underpins the global civil nuclear industry, *setting out our obligations as a nuclear weapon state and responsible nuclear nation.*”

13 UK general statement

14 Croatia general statement

# The attribution of responsibilities in the NPT framework

Within the NPT framework, responsibility is attributed to myriad actors in different ways.<sup>15</sup> For example, 'common', 'collective' or 'shared' responsibilities are attributed to all NPT States Parties e.g., *'[t]he total elimination of nuclear weapons, in line with the unequivocal undertaking of the nuclear-weapon States, remains our collective responsibility'*.<sup>16</sup> 'Primary' and 'exclusive' responsibility is also attributed to national governments, e.g. *'nuclear safety and security are national responsibilities'*.<sup>17</sup> 'Special', 'unique', 'primary' or 'particular' responsibilities are further attributed to specific sub-sets of States Parties, such as the NPT's five nuclear-weapon States e.g. *'[w]e firmly believe that nuclear-armed states bear a unique responsibility: to act without delay to eliminate these arsenals that hang like a sword of Damocles over humanity'*.<sup>18</sup> The following sections unpack these *common but differentiated responsibilities*<sup>19</sup> attributed by States Parties during the 2025 PrepCom in specific terms.

**'Common', 'collective' or 'shared' responsibilities are attributed to all NPT States Parties.**

15 Attribution is here used with reference to responsibilities that were both claimed by and conferred on other, NPT States Parties. See also Sebastian Brixey-Williams, Alice Spilman and Nicholas J. Wheeler. (2022), *The Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Thinking, Talking and Writing*. BASIC. [https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BASIC\\_Nuclear-Responsibilities-Toolkit\\_2nd-Edition.pdf](https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/BASIC_Nuclear-Responsibilities-Toolkit_2nd-Edition.pdf)

16 Ireland general statement

17 Switzerland cluster 3 statement

18 Niger general statement, translation to English

19 Iran WP.19; see also Spilman et al 2024; Sebastian Brixey-Williams. Report: Common but Differentiated Nuclear Responsibilities – Perspectives from Tokyo. 28 February 2019. <https://basicint.org/report-common-but-differentiated-nuclear-responsibilities-perspectives-from-tokyo/>

# Common responsibilities within the NPT framework

## 'Common', 'collective' and 'shared' responsibilities were attributed to all NPT States Parties to:

- advance international peace and security<sup>20</sup>
- achieve nuclear disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons<sup>21</sup>
- prevent nuclear weapons use<sup>22</sup>
- address the arms race and proliferation dynamics of the contemporary security environment<sup>23</sup>
- ensure nuclear-related exports do not directly or indirectly assist in the development of nuclear weapons<sup>24</sup>
- ensure the beneficial use of nuclear technologies<sup>25</sup>
- sustain trust in peaceful uses of nuclear technologies<sup>26</sup>
- prevent nuclear accidents<sup>27</sup>
- fulfil the objectives of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East<sup>28</sup> and establish a Middle East WMD Free Zone<sup>29</sup>
- uncover Israel's nuclear programme and subject Israeli nuclear facilities and activities under the IAEA's Comprehensive Safeguards system<sup>30</sup>

- improve transparency and accountability in the implementation of NPT obligations and all commitments of the 2010 Action Plan<sup>31</sup>
- participate fully in discussions on the implementation of the NPT<sup>32</sup>
- uphold the NPT<sup>33</sup>
- improve the effectiveness of the NPT review process<sup>34</sup>
- strengthen the NPT<sup>35</sup>
- make the NPT review cycle a success<sup>36</sup>
- find common ground, and an open space for dialogue to build consensus<sup>37</sup>

## 'Primary' and 'exclusive' responsibilities were also attributed to NPT States Parties with regards to:

- the safety and security of their own nuclear installations, frameworks and fuel cycle<sup>38</sup>
- the preservation and strengthening of national nuclear installations<sup>39</sup>
- fulfilling their verification obligations within the framework of the IAEA<sup>40</sup>

20 Indonesia cluster 1 specific issues statement

21 Philippines general statement; Sweden general statement; Holy See general statement; Jamaica general statement; AFCOE general statement; Spain cluster 1 statement; Iran cluster 1 statement; Thailand cluster 1 statement; Indonesia cluster 2 statement; South Africa cluster 3 specific issues statement

22 EU general statement; EU cluster 1 statement; Colombia general statement; Senegal general statement

23 Japan WP.33

24 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15; Senegal general statement; Mexico cluster 2 statement

25 Senegal general statement

26 Lithuania cluster 3 statement

27 El Salvador cluster 3 statement

28 NAM WP.26; Iran cluster 2 statement; Saudi Arabia cluster 2 statement

29 Morocco general statement on behalf of the 6th Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East WMD Free Zone; Saudi Arabia general statement; Iran cluster 2 statement; Iran cluster 2 specific issues statement

30 Syria cluster 2 statement; Iran cluster 2 specific issues statement

31 EU general statement; Luxembourg general statement

32 France national report

33 UK national report; UK cluster 1 statement; Kenya general statement; Philippines cluster 2 statement

34 NPDI WP.30

35 Thailand cluster 2 statement

36 Slovenia general statement

37 Japan general statement; NPDI general statement; Netherlands general statement; France closing statement

38 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15; Austria national report; NAM WP.25; NAM general statement; NAM Cluster 3 statement; Switzerland cluster 3 statement; South Africa cluster 3 statement; Spain cluster 3 statement; China cluster 3 statement

39 Chile cluster 3 statement

40 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15; NAM cluster 3 statement

# Differentiated responsibilities within the NPT framework

Several sub-sets of States Parties within the NPT are also attributed specific or special responsibilities.<sup>41</sup> These sub-sets of States Parties included: (i) the P5 nuclear-weapon States, (ii) the US and Russia as the nuclear-weapon States with the largest arsenals, (iii) the US, Russia and the UK as depository states of the NPT and co-sponsors of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, (iv) the nine CTBT Annex 2 states who have yet to ratify the CTBT, (v) the nuclear-sharing states, and (vi) the nuclear supplier states.

## The P5

'special', 'special and immediate', 'special and primary', 'primary', 'particular', 'historical', and 'unique' responsibilities were attributed to the NPT nuclear-weapon States to:

- achieve nuclear disarmament<sup>42</sup>
- meet their obligations under Article VI of the NPT<sup>43</sup>
- reduce the risk of, or prevent, nuclear conflict<sup>44</sup>
- prevent nuclear weapons use<sup>45</sup>
- prevent nuclear war<sup>46</sup>
- encourage ratification of the CTBT<sup>47</sup>
- report on their nuclear disarmament activities<sup>48</sup>, including their arsenals, doctrines, and disarmament efforts in a timely, standardised and substantive manner<sup>49</sup>
- increase transparency<sup>50</sup>

41 The "attribution" of special responsibilities includes responsibilities which others (namely the NNWS) have attributed to the NWS which the NWS may or may not accept, as well as responsibilities which the NWS have claimed themselves. For more on the allocation and acceptance of special responsibilities see Bukovansky, Mlada, et al. (2012) *Special responsibilities: Global problems and American power*. Cambridge University Press.

42 Iran WP.3; Sweden general statement; Iran cluster 1 statement; Ireland general statement; Czechia general statement

43 Iran WP. 17; NPDI general statement; Brazil general statement; Senegal general statement; Italy cluster 1 statement; Norway cluster 3 specific issues statement; Egypt intervention, 17th meeting

44 multiple states WP.4.1; UK national report; Republic of Korea general statement; Philippines closing statement

45 Japan WP.33

46 Egypt intervention, 17th meeting

47 NPDI WP.14; NAC general statement; Nigeria cluster 2 statement; Iran intervention, 17th meeting

48 NPDI WP.30; Republic of Korea cluster 1 statement

49 Philippines general statement

50 UK national report; Norway general statement; South Africa cluster 1 specific issues statement

- uphold the NPT<sup>51</sup>
- comply with the NPT and outcomes of NPT review conferences<sup>52</sup>
- abide by the January 2022 P5 Joint Statement<sup>53</sup>
- pursue international cooperation, dialogue in good faith, creative diplomatic initiatives, and a strengthened dedication to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament<sup>54</sup>
- establish honest and transparent dialogue within the P5 framework<sup>55</sup>
- address harms as a result of nuclear testing<sup>56</sup>, including remediation and compensation of non-nuclear weapon states impacted by nuclear testing<sup>57</sup>

## The US and Russia

'special' and 'special and primary' responsibilities were further attributed to the US and Russia as those countries with the 'largest nuclear arsenals'. These responsibilities related particularly to:

- nuclear disarmament<sup>58</sup>
- making concrete progress towards the full implementation of Article VI, especially through the overall reduction in the global stockpile of nuclear weapons<sup>59</sup>
- making substantial reductions in their nuclear arsenals in a verifiable, irreversible, and legally binding manner, so as to create the conditions for other NWS to join the nuclear disarmament process<sup>60</sup>
- arms control<sup>61</sup> including resuming the implementation of the New START Treaty and discussion on follow-up arrangements<sup>62</sup>

51 UK national report

52 Jordan cluster 2 statement

53 Stockholm Initiative WP.42; France cluster 1 statement. The 2022 P5 Joint Statement can also be accessed at: [Joint\\_Statement\\_Of\\_the\\_Leaders\\_of\\_the\\_Five\\_Nuclear-Weapon\\_States\\_On\\_Preventing\\_Nuclear\\_War\\_and\\_Avoiding\\_Arms\\_Races.pdf](#)

54 Hungary general statement

55 Spain cluster 1 statement

56 NAM WP.23; Kiribati cluster 1 statement

57 China WP.39

58 China WP.39; Sweden general statement; Finland cluster 1 statement; CACDA civil society statement; China cluster 3 specific issues statement; France intervention 17th meeting; EU cluster 1 statement

59 EU general statement; EU cluster 1 statement; China general statement

60 China general statement

61 EU cluster 1 statement

62 China general statement; China intervention, 17th meeting

## 'Special', 'primary', or 'unique' responsibilities are attributed to specific sub-groups of States within the NPT.

### The co-sponsors

The three NPT depository states and co-sponsors to the 1995 resolution on establishing a Middle East WMD Free Zone, the US, Russia and UK, are attributed 'special' responsibility for the full implementation of the 1995 resolution<sup>63</sup> and the establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other WMD.<sup>64</sup>

### The CTBT 9

'Particular' and 'special' responsibility is attributed to the nine annex 2 states<sup>65</sup> yet to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), to ratify the Treaty.<sup>66</sup> Russia was also attributed 'special' responsibility towards the CTBT, following its decision to revoke its ratification in 2023.<sup>67</sup>

### The nuclear sharing states

Specific responsibilities were attributed to the 'nuclear-sharing countries' or 'umbrella states' to demonstrate transparency, reporting and accountability,<sup>68</sup> to 'clarify how they meet Articles 1 and 2 of the NPT',<sup>69</sup> and to reduce nuclear risks.<sup>70</sup>

### The nuclear supplier states

Nuclear supplier states were attributed specific responsibilities to, 'seek assurances that recipient States have in place NPT-related IAEA safeguards, an adequate nuclear security regime, minimum set of measures to combat illicit trafficking and rules, and regulations for appropriate export controls in case of retransfer'.<sup>71</sup> Worth noting that, for several developing States Parties, the responsibility placed on nuclear supplier states is also to ensure that they do not 'violate, deny or restrict peaceful uses of nuclear energy'<sup>72</sup>, particularly where nuclear supplier states avoid imposing 'different packages of conditions – be it from a non-proliferation perspective or for nuclear security considerations' on recipient states.<sup>73</sup> The Group of Non-Aligned States especially articulated that 'any multilateral norms, guidelines or rules in nuclear security should be pursued through the framework of the IAEA'.<sup>74</sup> Within this context, multiple States Parties acknowledged the responsibility of the IAEA as the competent authority for verification of the fulfilment of safeguard obligations assumed by NPT States Parties.<sup>75</sup>

63 Iran WP.5; NAM WP.26; Russia WP.5; Morocco general statement; UAE cluster 2 statement; UAE cluster 2 specific issues statement; NAM cluster 2 specific issues statement

64 Saudi Arabia general statement; NAM cluster 2 specific issues statement

65 The 9 states who have not ratified the CTBT include China, the DPRK, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, Russia and the USA.

66 multiple states WP.3; NAM cluster 1 statement; Belgium intervention, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting

67 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15; see also [Putin revokes Russian ratification of global nuclear test ban treaty | Reuters](#)

68 China WP.39; China intervention, cluster 3 specific issues plenary

69 China Cluster 1 specific issues statement

70 China Plenary statement on Chair's revised draft

71 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15

72 NAM cluster 2 statement

73 Egypt cluster 3 statement, English translation

74 NAM cluster 3 statement

75 NAM cluster 2 statement; Malaysia cluster 2 statement; NAM cluster 3 statement; France national report; France WP.36

# Responsibilities across NPT pillars and issues

While not an exhaustive list of all issues discussed during the 2025 NPT PrepCom, the following section presents an overview of the responsibilities discourses associated with some of the most prominent themes within the NPT framework. These themes span the NPT's three main pillars, as well as nuclear deterrence and upholding and strengthening the NPT; both of which were prominent deliberative themes. Issues are here identified where (i) the issue forms part of the direct context of the speech act relating to responsibility as a noun, responsibilities as a plural noun or responsible as an adjective and, (ii) that issue was highlighted across multiple working papers and/or speech acts and by multiple States Parties within the context of the 2025 PrepCom.<sup>76</sup>

## Nuclear disarmament

Responsibility language associated with nuclear disarmament featured prominently in several working papers<sup>77</sup> as well as in multiple States Parties' statements and interventions during the General Debate, the Cluster 1 debate on nuclear disarmament, the Cluster 3 specific issues debate on strengthening the NPT, the plenary on the Chair's draft recommendations paper, as well as in civil society statements at the 2025 PrepCom. In most cases, references made to responsibility (*noun*) or responsibilities (*plural noun*) with regards to nuclear disarmament were prospective, centred on the duty of States Parties, and particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to fulfil their obligations under Article VI of the NPT. As responsibility framing can also be utilised as a communicative practice of critique, assigning duty and blame<sup>78</sup>, several States Parties also used their plenary statements to emphasise the '*irresponsible*' policy and practice associated with certain nuclear-weapon states' pursuit of nuclear modernisation programmes as a violation of, or being contradictory to, Article VI of the Treaty.<sup>79</sup>

76 'Multiple speech acts' means that more than one statement has referenced responsibility and the issue in the same context.

77 Iran WP:17; NPDI WP:30; China WP:39

78 Dee, M. (2025 *in press*) Justification and critique in the global nuclear order: Nuclear (ir)responsibility as practice. IN: Robinson, Todd (ed.) *Nuclear Responsibility: Defining Responsible Nuclear Behavior and Strategic Competition*. Lexington Books, Maryland.

79 China cluster 1 statement; Iran cluster 1 statement

## Risk reduction

Multiple States Parties attributed special responsibility to the nuclear-weapon States to advance nuclear disarmament by reducing the risk of nuclear conflict and nuclear weapons use,<sup>80</sup> and by advancing nuclear or strategic risk reduction efforts.<sup>81</sup> As several States Parties identified, the responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States to pursue effective risk reduction measures was of particular importance '*in light of the deteriorating international security environment*',<sup>82</sup> '*deep degradation of the global security climate*',<sup>83</sup> and the '*ongoing spread and modernisation of nuclear weapons undermin[ing] peace and security*'.<sup>84</sup>

## Transparency

During the 2025 PrepCom responsibility was associated with the issue of transparency particularly with reference to strengthening trust between states, and in efforts to progress nuclear disarmament. For example, States Parties called on '*all states to fulfil their obligations regarding notification and reporting, in a spirit of responsibility towards the international community*'.<sup>85</sup>

Transparency was specifically identified as both a collective and special responsibility within the NPT framework. Collective responsibility was attributed to all States Parties', '*improving transparency and accountability in the implementation of NPT obligations and all commitments of the 2010 Action Plan*'.<sup>86</sup> Transparency was also then attributed as a special responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States, being seen as a way to '*improve understanding and*

80 UK national report; Japan WP:33; Multiple states, WP:41; Baltic States general statement; Republic of Korea general statement; Colombia general statement, English translation; Stockholm Initiative, cluster 1 statement; China intervention, 17<sup>th</sup> meeting; Philippines on behalf of a group of states statement, 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

81 Baltic States general statement; US cluster 1 statement; China general statement

82 Stockholm Initiative cluster 1 statement

83 Cote d'Ivoire general statement, English translation

84 Thailand cluster 2 statement

85 Luxembourg general statement, English translation

86 EU general statement

trust<sup>87</sup> and for *'allying concerns and suspicions regarding the manner in which the nuclear weapon states are meeting their responsibilities under the Treaty'*.<sup>88</sup> Responsible practices were further outlined with particular reference to how nuclear-weapon States report on their nuclear disarmament activities.<sup>89</sup> For example, nuclear-weapon States were identified as *'bear[ing] a special responsibility to report on their arsenals, doctrines, and disarmament efforts in a timely, standardized, and substantive manner'*.<sup>90</sup> Transparency and reporting measures were also specifically discussed as a responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States to strengthen the NPT,<sup>91</sup> and of the nuclear-sharing countries.<sup>92</sup>

## Arms control

Arms control was another issue commonly associated with the language of responsibility.<sup>93</sup> In part, arms control is identified as a collective responsibility of all states within the NPT framework, insofar as *'all states have a responsibility to address the arms race'*.<sup>94</sup> But, as a responsible practice or behaviour, arms control is more specifically identified as a responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States, particularly the U.S. and Russia as the two countries with the largest arsenals,<sup>95</sup> and to China due to its recent nuclear modernisation and expansion efforts.<sup>96</sup> At the 2025 PrepCom, the US and China used responsibility as an accountability frame when discussing arms control. For example, the US called on China to *'act responsibly and provide clarity on its nuclear expansion and doctrine*

*and join the US and Russia in strategic risk reduction efforts and strategic arms control discussions'*,<sup>97</sup> while China emphasised the *'special and primary responsibility'* of the U.S. and Russia to *'resume implementation of the New START Treaty and discuss follow-up arrangements...so as to create the conditions for the other nuclear-weapon States to join the nuclear disarmament process'*.<sup>98</sup>

## The CTBT

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was another identified issue associated with responsibilities language during the 2025 PrepCom, albeit with various distinct themes. One prominent theme was the framing of responsibility as obligation, with multiple States Parties highlighting the *'special'* and *'unique'* responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States to advance the universalisation of the CTBT, and ensure its ratification and entry into force.<sup>99</sup> The *'particular'* responsibility of the nine remaining annex 2 states to ratify the Treaty was further related to that obligation theme.<sup>100</sup> Responsibility was also then utilised through accountability framing, with multiple States Parties emphasising the responsibility of States to encourage ratification of the CTBT in order to uphold past NPT agreements, including the 13 Practical Steps and Action 10 of the 2010 Action Plan.<sup>101</sup> Russia's decision to de-ratify the CTBT in 2023 was another associated theme, being emphasised as both an *'irresponsible action'*<sup>102</sup> and *'not the behaviour of a responsible nuclear power, rather the contrary'*.<sup>103</sup> Finally, special mention can be given here to the language of responsibility utilised specifically by France with reference to the CTBT. Both in the French national report, and in a working paper dedicated to the CTBT submitted to the 2025 PrepCom, France drew particular attention to its responsibility *'at all levels and in all forums'* to

87 UK national report. Worth noting that the UK national report states that the nuclear-weapon states have a responsibility to increase transparency 'in a way that improves understanding and trust, without creating proliferation or national security risk'. This language showcases some of the tension around the transparency discourse between nuclear- and non-nuclear weapon states with some NWS – like the UK – willing to advance transparency efforts as long as it does not undermine national security or create a proliferation risk, and some NNWS emphasising enhanced transparency as a means of holding nuclear weapon states accountable and seeing substantive progress on nuclear disarmament.

88 South Africa cluster 1 specific issues statement

89 NPDI WP.30; Norway general statement; Philippines general statement

90 Philippines general statement

91 South Africa, cluster 1 specific issues statement; Norway general statement; Norway cluster 3 specific issues statement

92 China WP.39; China cluster 3 specific issues statement, English translation

93 Baltic states general statement; Slovenia general statement; China general statement; Mozambique general statement; EU cluster 1 statement; USA cluster 1 statement

94 Japan WP.33

95 China general statement; EU cluster 1 statement

96 Baltic States general statement; USA cluster 1 statement

97 See also the Baltic States general statement which echoes the same language as the US e.g. calling on China to *'act responsibly and provide clarity on its nuclear expansion and doctrine and join the US and Russia in strategic risk reduction and strategic arms control discussions'*.

98 China general statement

99 NAM WP.23; NPDI WP.14; NAC general statement; Nigeria cluster 2 statement

100 Multiple states WP.3; Belgium reflection, Plenary on Chair's draft recommendation paper

101 NPDI WP.14; NAM WP.23; NAM reflection, Plenary on Chair's draft recommendations paper; Iran, Plenary on Chair's recommendations paper

102 Arms Control Association civil society statement

103 Finland cluster 1 statement

promote the CTBT's entry into force.<sup>104</sup> The language of responsibility was also used to show accountability by demonstrating how France had upheld its commitments towards the deployment and operation of the CTBT's International Monitoring System.<sup>105</sup> These actions were subsequently then associated with France's self-identification as not only a 'responsible nuclear weapon state' but an 'exemplary nuclear-weapon state'.<sup>106</sup>

## Nuclear justice

A related issue connected to nuclear responsibility as it concerned nuclear testing and the CTBT, was that of nuclear justice. According to the Group of Non-Aligned States Parties to the NPT, there is 'a special responsibility towards the affected people and areas, including those in the former United Nations Trust Territories who have been adversely affected as a result of the nuclear weapon tests conducted in the past. The Group of Non-Aligned States Parties to the Treaty recognizes that the responsibility for addressing the harms resulting from a detonation related to the use or testing of a nuclear weapon or any other nuclear explosive device lies, respectively, with the Member States that have done so'.<sup>107</sup> As Kiribati further emphasised, '[n]uclear justice is... centred on the issue of accepting and acknowledging responsibilities by the Nuclear-Weapon States for the harm they have caused'.<sup>108</sup> Responsibility was also attributed to the nuclear-weapon States for their historical responsibilities and obligations to remediate and compensate those states impacted by nuclear testing,<sup>109</sup> and to, 'States and international organisations with expertise in eliminating and disposing of radioactive contamination to actively consider giving appropriate assistance, upon request, to countries affected by nuclear testing'.<sup>110</sup>

## Nuclear rhetoric

While nuclear deterrence is not explicitly mentioned in the texts of the NPT, it is a prominent theme within NPT review cycle deliberations.<sup>111</sup> During the 2025 PrepCom nuclear rhetoric was particularly associated with the language of responsibility, seeing a marked increase in the number of States Parties using the adjective 'irresponsible', particularly as it concerned Russia's 'irresponsible nuclear rhetoric', posturing, signalling and threats. The framing of 'irresponsible rhetoric' to describe Russia's nuclear posturing and threats was first seen during the 2022 NPT RevCon in statements by the P3. The US, UK and France continued to use the framing 'irresponsible nuclear rhetoric' in statements to the 2023 and 2024 PrepComs and at the UN First Committee. The language has since snowballed however, with increasing numbers of non-nuclear-weapon States Parties, especially NATO allies, using the frame.<sup>112</sup> In fact, of the 34 individual mentions to the word 'irresponsible' during the 2025 PrepCom, all but a handful were in direct reference to Russia and its 'irresponsible nuclear rhetoric'. That framing is significant for several reasons.

First, multiple States Parties utilised 'irresponsible nuclear rhetoric' as an accountability frame to explicitly critique the actions of the Russian Federation with regards to its 'escalatory nuclear rhetoric, threats and signalling'<sup>113</sup>, 'coercive nuclear signalling in its illegal invasion of Ukraine',<sup>114</sup> 'threatening nuclear rhetoric as well as its posture of strategic intimidation',<sup>115</sup> and its 'threats to use nuclear force in the course of its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine'.<sup>116</sup> In a similar accountability vein, the US also emphasised the 'irresponsible and bellicose rhetoric'<sup>117</sup> of the DPRK, although this was not replicated by other States

104 France draft national report (pt.36)

105 France draft national report (pt.36); France WP.10 (pt.6)

106 France WP.10

107 NAM WP.23 (pt.12)

108 Kiribati cluster 1 statement

109 China WP.39

110 China WP.39

111 As Giles suggests, deterrence not only 'lies at the heart' of the NPT, but has always been symbiotic with the NPT. See Giles, G. F. (2020). Deterrence and the NPT: Compatible and Reinforcing. *Survival*, 62(4), 135–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1792125>

112 UK draft national report; multiple states WP.3; Republic of Korea general statement; Baltic States general statement; UK general statement; Ukraine on behalf of a group of states general statement; Czechia general statement; USA general statement; Denmark general statement; Slovenia general statement; Arms Control Association civil society statement; EU cluster 1 statement; Stockholm Initiative cluster 1 statement; Bulgaria cluster 1 statement; Spain cluster 1 statement, English translation; Turkey cluster 1 statement.

113 Baltic States general statement

114 UK general statement

115 Ukraine on behalf of a group of states general statement

116 Bulgaria cluster 1 statement; see also EU cluster 1 statement

117 USA cluster 2 specific issues statement

Parties.<sup>118</sup> Second, the framing of ‘irresponsible nuclear rhetoric’ tends to suggest that nuclear rhetoric is itself something that is actioned either responsibly or irresponsibly. Nuclear rhetoric then is understood as an explicit behaviour performed by the nuclear-weapon States, with responsibilities associated with it. What constitutes responsible relative to irresponsible nuclear rhetoric is nevertheless subjective and, arguably, context specific. During the 2025 PrepCom the majority of States Parties using the language of ‘irresponsible nuclear rhetoric’ appeared to do so within the context of the nuclear taboo.<sup>119</sup> The assumption then followed that nuclear ‘threats’, ‘signalling’, ‘posturing’ or ‘intimidation’ were deemed irresponsible. Yet, nuclear rhetoric is also a means by which nuclear-weapon States warn, threaten and deter.<sup>120</sup> As Russia highlighted during one right of reply at the 2025 PrepCom, ‘[o]ur warning signals against the West about the determination of Russia to protect its security interest – which they are trying to present as threats – are, in reality, fully in line with the logic of deterrence.’<sup>121</sup> Worth noting that the increasing popularisation of the ‘irresponsible nuclear rhetoric frame’ did also give rise to Russia using one right of reply to state that such claims were ‘absolutely unfounded allegations by Western states...[and] a blatant campaign to demonise Russia’.<sup>122</sup>

## Nuclear sharing

Another deterrence-related issue associated with the language of responsibility during the 2025 PrepCom was nuclear sharing and extended deterrence arrangements. Several states used responsibilities language as a frame to hold states with nuclear sharing and extended deterrence arrangements accountable. For example, Iran, Russia and China called NATO’s nuclear-sharing arrangements into question, implying that the arrangements were *irresponsible* practice e.g., Russia highlighting the ‘irresponsible policy’ of ‘States that allow forward deployment of foreign nuclear weapons in their territory, provide military infrastructure for the use of such weapons and take part in nuclear sharing and joint nuclear planning.’<sup>123</sup> The association of transparency and responsibility around nuclear sharing arrangements was moreover raised by South Africa, who stated that ‘the NPT process can...benefit from reporting by non-nuclear-weapon States, especially those that are part of alliances that rely on these weapons... To know what practical steps these States that rely on nuclear weapons for their security have taken to promote nuclear disarmament’.<sup>124</sup>

NATO allies by contrast defended their nuclear sharing arrangements as being compliant with the NPT;<sup>125</sup> identifying the arrangements as ‘a necessity and a stabilizing factor in European and global security, particularly in the context of Russia’s dangerous and irresponsible behaviour and nuclear rhetoric’.<sup>126</sup> As one NATO ally particularly specified, ‘NATO nuclear sharing arrangements provide responsible deterrence, but also reassurance – a belief that international commitments and alliances matter. Responsible participation in collective defense can be and is consistent with respect for sovereignty, peace, and international law’.<sup>127</sup> Ukraine and multiple other states, further called out Russia’s intended nuclear sharing arrangements with Belarus, stating ‘[w]e condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia’s irresponsible and threatening nuclear rhetoric as well as its posture of strategic intimidation, including its announced deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus’.<sup>128</sup>

118 Though it is noted that the Republic of Korea and UK both used their general statements to highlight the irresponsibility of Russia and the DPRK who have taken recent steps towards nuclear cooperation. For example, the Republic of Korea called on Russia to “immediately cease such actions and uphold its responsibility as an NPT depository state to protect the integrity of the NPT”. The UK general statement meanwhile identified Russia as an “irresponsible nuclear weapon state” both for its “irresponsible nuclear rhetoric” and nuclear signalling in its invasion of Ukraine, but also for “seeking to normalise Pyongyang’s nuclear adventurism”.

119 Nina Tannenwald (2007) *The nuclear taboo: the United States and the non-use of nuclear weapons since 1945*. Cambridge University Press

120 As the UK draft national report states, Russia’s ‘irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and coercive nuclear signalling...are designed to intimidate and deter us. They will not.’

121 Russia right of reply, Cluster 1 plenary 1st May 2025

122 Russia right of reply, Cluster 1 plenary 1st May 2025. Iran also associated the ‘violation of non-proliferation obligations through NATO’s nuclear-weapon sharing arrangements’ with the ‘irresponsible doctrines of first-use of nuclear weapons’ in its Cluster 3 specific issues statement. China meanwhile emphasised that ‘there is no so-called acquiescence to the legitimacy of nuclear sharing arrangements’, and emphasised that nuclear-sharing countries must be transparent in order to ‘showcase their image as responsible non-nuclear weapon states’ in its Cluster 3 right of reply and again in its Cluster 3 specific issues statement.

123 Russia general statement

124 South Africa cluster 3 specific issues statement

125 Poland cluster 2 right of reply

126 Baltic countries general statement

127 Croatia general statement

128 Ukraine on behalf of a group of states, general statement

## Nuclear doctrine

During the 2025 PrepCom the necessity for transparency or clarity around nuclear doctrine was also identified as a *special responsibility* of the nuclear-weapon States.<sup>129</sup> In several plenary statements, States Parties called upon nuclear-weapon States to act responsibly, by *'reporting on their arsenals [and] doctrines'*<sup>130</sup>, *'providing clarity on... nuclear expansion and doctrine'*<sup>131</sup>, and engaging in transparency measures as *'the key to strengthening trust between states, both in terms of doctrine and capabilities'*.<sup>132</sup> Doctrine was also a point of debate during the Cluster 1 specific issues segment focused on negative security assurances. During this segment, China emphasised its own no-first use doctrine as essential in providing negative security assurances to states.<sup>133</sup> Other states similarly highlighted their need for a legally binding instrument of no first use<sup>134</sup>, including Iran who urged nuclear weapon states to *'renounce their dangerous and irresponsible nuclear-first use policy and adopt the positive example set by China'*.<sup>135</sup>

## The Middle East WMD Free Zone

During the 2025 PrepCom another prominent issue associated with responsibility discourses was the Middle East WMD Free Zone. The perceived failure to establish a Middle East WMD Free Zone was highlighted as a point of blame and accusation by several non-nuclear weapon States, particularly by those in the region and by the Group of Non-Aligned States. Common framing utilised in 2025 was for the 'co-sponsor states' to *"bear special responsibility"*<sup>136</sup> or *"shoulder their responsibility"*<sup>137</sup> in implementing the 1995 resolution. While States Parties identified that it was the 'collective' responsibility of all States Parties to fulfil the objectives of the 1995

resolution,<sup>138</sup> including to *"reaffirm the 1995 resolution and 2010 Action Plan and demand Israel's accession to the NPT, along with the placement of its nuclear activities under IAEA safeguards"*,<sup>139</sup> it was the 'special' responsibility of the NPT depository states, and co-sponsors of the Middle East resolution, that were most frequently identified,<sup>140</sup> and criticised.<sup>141</sup> For example, as UAE stated, *"some States Parties did not shoulder their responsibilities... they did not put any pressure on Israel"*<sup>142</sup>.

## Nuclear safety and security

Overlapping the non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars, analysis shows that responsibilities language was utilised by multiple States Parties with particular reference to nuclear safety and security during the 2025 PrepCom,<sup>143</sup> albeit in distinct ways. For nuclear-weapon States, the onus of responsibility language was placed on ensuring that others upheld the highest standards of safety and security in developing nuclear energy programmes. For example, both the US and France emphasised that the right to peaceful uses must be *"leveraged responsibly"*<sup>144</sup> with *"major responsibilities based on compliance with the highest standards of safety, nuclear security guidelines and non-proliferation"*.<sup>145</sup> For non-nuclear-weapon States, responsibility language was used more as a means of showcasing their compliance with Article IV obligations. For example, *"we take our responsibility seriously to ensure that all matters related to nuclear energy are handled with the highest standards of safety, security, and transparency, in full alignment with international standards"*,<sup>146</sup> or *"we support the responsible and safe use of nuclear technology"*.<sup>147</sup> Nigeria particularly

129 Philippines general statement, US general statement, Luxembourg general statement

130 Philippines general statement

131 US general statement

132 Luxembourg general statement, English translation

133 China cluster 1 specific issues statement

134 Egypt cluster 1 specific issues statement

135 Iran cluster 1 specific issues statement

136 NAM cluster 2 specific issues statement

137 UAE cluster 2 specific issues statement, English translation; Jordan cluster 2 statement, English translation; Interestingly, this same framing is adopted by Senegal but with reference to the NP and peaceful uses pillars e.g., *'NWS need to shoulder their responsibility under the pillars of non-proliferation and peaceful use of nuclear energy, under the mediation of the IAEA'* (Senegal cluster 3 specific issues statement, English translation)

138 Saudi Arabia cluster 2 specific issues statement; Iran cluster 2 specific issues statement; Syria cluster 2 specific issues statement.

139 Iran cluster 2 statement; see also Jordan cluster 2 statement, English translation; Iran cluster 2 specific issues statement.

140 Iran cluster 2 statement; Jordan cluster 2 statement; Syria cluster 2 specific issues statement

141 UAE cluster 2 specific issues statement, English translation

142 UAE cluster 2 specific issues statement, English translation

143 Lithuania cluster 3 statement; U.S. cluster 3 statement; Canada cluster 3 statement; Iran cluster 3 statement; Bangladesh cluster 3 statement; Ecuador cluster 3 statement; Republic of Korea cluster 3 statement; Nigeria cluster 3 specific issues statement; NAM cluster 3 statement; Switzerland cluster 3 statement; South Africa cluster 3 statement; Spain cluster 3 statement; China cluster 3 statement; Chile cluster 3 statement, English translation; Denmark general statement; Bangladesh cluster 3 statement

144 U.S. cluster 3 statement

145 France national report

146 Lithuania cluster 3 statement

147 Malta general statement

highlighted that, “we the non-nuclear weapon states have fitfully fulfilled our responsibility under non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars, with our safeguards verified through the IAEA”.<sup>148</sup> Iran also utilised responsibility language to both justify its own national responsibility to maintain, “effective safety measures at its nuclear installations consistent with international standards”,<sup>149</sup> and to critique “baseless claims regarding the safety of the Bushehr power plant, labelling the politicization of nuclear safety issues as irresponsible”.<sup>150</sup>

## Export controls

Further overlapping the non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars, responsibility language was commonly used with reference to export controls and State adherence to the guidance and stipulations set out by various multilateral export control regimes. For example, during the 2025 PrepCom, States Parties emphasised that multilateral export control regimes, “are key to ensuring that non-proliferation goals are met while enabling responsible international collaboration on peaceful nuclear applications”,<sup>151</sup> “are necessary enablers for the responsible international exchange of nuclear technology for peaceful uses”,<sup>152</sup> play “a positive role...in providing guidance, norms and standards for responsible and peaceful trade and use of strategic goods and technology, helping countries to uphold their nonproliferation and UN Security Council obligations”,<sup>153</sup> and “contribute to the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and promote transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of dual-use goods and technologies, ultimately facilitating these transfers for peaceful uses”.<sup>154</sup>

Responsibility was also directly attributed to all States Parties, “to ensure nuclear-related exports do not directly or indirectly assist in the development of nuclear weapons”,<sup>155</sup> but also specifically to supplier states, “to seek assurances that recipient States have in place NPT-related IAEA safeguards, an adequate

nuclear security regime, minimum set of measures to combat illicit trafficking and rules and regulations for appropriate export controls in case of retransfer”.<sup>156</sup> Responsibility language is further used by individual supplier states, to showcase their safe and responsible export of nuclear materials, equipment, and technologies, and the sharing of knowledge with ‘responsible partners’.<sup>157</sup> For example, Canada highlighted that, “[w]e do this responsibly and confidently with partner countries in a manner reflecting shared commitments to nuclear safety, security and non-proliferation”.<sup>158</sup>

## Upholding and strengthening the NPT

A final prominent theme associated with the language of responsibility during the 2025 PrepCom was upholding and strengthening the NPT itself. The necessity to uphold the NPT and ensure its continued credibility has become a pressing theme, and point of concern, for States Parties approaching the 2026 RevCon. With the last two Review Conferences ending with no consensus outcome document, States Parties are now increasingly amplifying the messaging that all States Parties have a responsibility to participate fully in discussions on the implementation of the Treaty, and to uphold the NPT.<sup>159</sup> States Parties further stressed that all States Parties needed to approach the forthcoming 2026 RevCon ‘with heightened urgency and responsibility to reinvigorate the NPT’<sup>160</sup> and that ‘we must all take responsibility for making this Review Cycle a success’.<sup>161</sup> In a similar vein, several States Parties emphasised that it was the collective responsibility of all States Parties to search for common ground and consensus,<sup>162</sup> and to pursue international cooperation and dialogue in good faith within the NPT review cycle.<sup>163</sup>

During the 2025 PrepCom the language of responsibility was further utilised as a frame of obligation, manner, and accountability with specific

148 Nigeria cluster 3 specific issues statement

149 Iran cluster 3 statement

150 Iran cluster 3 statement

151 Portugal cluster 2 statement

152 U.S. cluster 3 statement

153 Australia cluster 2 statement

154 EU cluster 3 statement

155 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15

156 Vienna Group of Ten WP.15

157 Canada cluster 3 statement; U.S. cluster 3 statement

158 Canada cluster 3 statement.

159 UK national report; UK cluster 1 statement; Philippines cluster 2 statement

160 Mozambique general statement, English translation.

161 Slovenia general statement

162 Netherlands general statement; Czechia general statement; Japan general statement.

163 Hungary general statement

## The language of responsibility is increasingly associated with blame games and political polarisation within the NPT.

reference to strengthening the NPT review process, particularly as it related to proposals to enhance the reporting mechanisms associated with NPT review cycles. For example, as an obligation, improving the effectiveness of the NPT review process was framed as an *'ongoing responsibility of all States Parties'*.<sup>164</sup> For others, strengthening the review process is itself a process *'to explore in a serious and responsible manner'*.<sup>165</sup> For several other States Parties meanwhile, strengthening the review process, particularly in terms of enhancing NPT examination processes, and providing space for interactive dialogue, particularly over nuclear-weapon States' national reports, is considered both necessary for institutionalising transparency and accountability within the NPT, and desirable in ensuring that nuclear-weapon States uphold their special responsibilities under the NPT.<sup>166</sup> The examination of nuclear-weapon State national reports was moreover presented as a way for nuclear-weapon States to *'advance nuclear disarmament in a responsible, transparent and irreversible manner'*<sup>167</sup> and to enable all States Parties to *'move towards a more substantive, interactive, and responsible examination that reflects not only the concerns of all States Parties, but also the urgency of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime as a whole'*.<sup>168</sup>

164 NPDI WP30

165 China cluster 3 specific issues statement, English translation.

166 Republic of Korea cluster 1 statement; Norway cluster 3 specific issues statement; Peru cluster 3 specific issues statement

167 Peru cluster 3 specific issues statement

168 Mexico cluster 3 specific issues statement

## Challenges and opportunities

From this analysis several challenges, but also opportunities relating to the use of responsibilities language in the NPT framework can be identified.

### Challenges

First, analysis has shown that the language of responsibility continues to be widely used as a frame of accountability, obligation, identification and manner within the NPT framework. While the NPT review cycle naturally serves as a forum to hold NPT States Parties accountable, and to reaffirm their obligations under the Treaty, it is also a forum for tit-for-tat exchanges between States Parties using responsibility and irresponsibility language as a way of justifying their own behaviours while critiquing others for not upholding their obligations or engaging in behaviours explicitly identified as *'irresponsible'*.<sup>169</sup> As one NPT diplomat has stated: *"why the need to condemn? Why name and shame? We want to work on the issues, but they spend all their time on blame games"*.<sup>170</sup> For another, *"nuclear responsibilities are our greatest bugbear. The use of these words just compounds division"*.<sup>171</sup> The language of responsibility is thus increasingly associated with blame games and political polarisation within the NPT. This in turn fuels division, shuts down dialogue, and exacerbates multilateral stalemate.

Second, analysis shows that while States Parties frequently utilise the language of responsibility across myriad themes and issues within the NPT framework, this is rarely supported with clarification or elaboration of how that State or Group of States understands responsibility or responsible practice in specific terms. As responsibility is a heavily contested and subjective concept, this invariably leads to ambiguity and risks misunderstanding.

169 See also Dee (2025 in press) Justification and critique in the global nuclear order: Nuclear (ir)responsibility as practice. IN: Robinson, Todd (ed.) *Nuclear Responsibility: Defining Responsible Nuclear Behavior and Strategic Competition*. Lexington Books, Maryland.

170 Author interview, 26 July 2024.

171 Author interview, 24 July 2024

Third, NPT Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences are highly performative, with limited opportunity for meaningful interaction or dialogic exchange among States Parties on key issues. States Parties use their allocated speaking time to either highlight their 'responsible' actions or policies in meeting their obligations under the NPT and/or call out the 'irresponsible' behaviour of other States Parties. The only exchange on those statements is then limited to rights of reply at the conclusion of each business day, which typically amplifies rather than mitigates polarisation. No opportunity is currently presented for States Parties to engage in meaningful dialogue on what constitutes responsible behaviour or practices within the NPT review framework, particularly where responsibilities may be observed differently by States Parties, or where the attribution of responsibility is differentiated across different sub-sets of NPT States Parties.

## Opportunities

First, analysis has shown that both common and differentiated responsibilities are widely acknowledged by States Parties within the NPT framework. The frequency of references to the 'collective' responsibilities of all States Parties was as commonplace as references to the 'special' responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States during the 2025 PrepCom. As responsibilities are not always clearly articulated or explained by States Parties within the NPT framework however, there is opportunity here for States Parties to actively reflect on (1) their understanding of collective and special responsibilities within the NPT, (2) what constitutes 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' behaviour or practice (and how understandings on this may differ), (3) how and why collective and special responsibilities are attributed, and (4) how to utilise responsibility and irresponsibility language when communicating with other States Parties in NPT Preparatory Committees and Review Conferences.

Second, the frequency of reference to 'responsible' 'irresponsible' 'responsibility' and 'responsibilities' by States Parties, commonplace across national reports, working papers, statements, and rights of reply during the 2025 NPT PrepCom, highlights the deep embeddedness of a responsibilities consciousness and culture among States Parties within the NPT framework. Responsibility language pervades the NPT's three pillars and cuts across multiple NPT issues and themes. While that discourse has become increasingly polarised with responsibilities language used to cast blame or criticise, particularly between the nuclear-weapon States, as well as by the non-nuclear weapon States against the nuclear-weapon States, the very commonality of responsibilities discourse in NPT practice also has the potential to connect and unify States Parties. States who have shown willingness to reflect on their own understanding of nuclear responsibilities – such as the UK,<sup>172</sup> who have demonstrated particular interest in or use of responsibilities language within the NPT, and/or who seek innovative approaches for the advancement of multilateral dialogue, deliberation and coordination in efforts to uphold the NPT, would be particularly well-placed to advance dialogue in this space.

Finally, analysis shows an ever-deepening concern among NPT States Parties about multilateral stagnation and the need to reinvigorate dialogue and international cooperation within the NPT to ensure its integrity. This further coincides with the ongoing push, initiated in 2022, to strengthen the NPT review process. This too presents opportunity for States Parties to consider new approaches to multilateral coordination, especially approaches which create space for meaningful dialogue among States Parties. A **nuclear responsibilities approach** is here suggested as one such method to encourage intergovernmental reflection, dialogue and deliberation on NPT issues.

<sup>172</sup> Chiara Cervasio. "Report: Exploring the United Kingdom's Nuclear Responsibilities" BASIC. 20 May 2022. <https://basicint.org/exploring-the-uk-nuclear-responsibilities/>

# Advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT

## In 2020 BASIC launched the report 'Nuclear Responsibilities: A new approach for thinking and talking about nuclear responsibilities'.

In that report, Brixey-Williams and Wheeler define a Nuclear Responsibilities Approach as “[a]n approach to nuclear weapons policies and practices which foregrounds the perceptions of responsibility that underpin them and promotes respectful dialogue to develop shared normative understandings”.<sup>173</sup> As the report articulated, a nuclear responsibilities approach “transforms the chronic culture of blame into a sustained culture of responsibility, by shifting the focus away from who is or is not being responsible, towards a shared exploration of responsibilities that is more naturally conducive to mistrust and distrust reducing forms of cooperation”.<sup>174</sup> The nuclear responsibilities approach emphasises a two-staged method, in which stakeholders first engage in critical introspection of their own perceptions of nuclear responsibilities. A second stage follows where parties come together for constructive and meaningful conversation built around empathic and intersubjective dialogue. The Nuclear Responsibilities programme at BASIC has further undertaken numerous national roundtables, including with government representatives of the UK, India, Pakistan, the Netherlands, Japan, Malaysia and Brazil, bilateral dialogues between India and Pakistan, and a regional dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region. The approach is

further offered as a “collective guiding principle”<sup>175</sup> at the international level. The time is now ripe for a nuclear responsibilities approach to be advanced within the NPT framework. This section considers how this may be achieved, with sections detailing **why, how, who** and **what** to consider in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach explicitly tailored to the NPT.

## Why advance a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT framework

As the previous section detailed, current communicative practices surrounding nuclear responsibilities within the NPT framework, particularly as it concerns the attribution of blame, markedly amplifies polarisation and division among NPT States Parties, and contributes to multilateral stagnation and frustration. States Parties are moreover ambiguous when utilising the language of responsibility and irresponsibility within the NPT. There are then few opportunities within the NPT framework for those States Parties to actively reflect on that use of language, or to listen to the meanings behind, and attributed to, responsibilities by different States Parties.

<sup>173</sup> Sebastian Brixey Williams and Nicholas Wheeler. “Nuclear Responsibilities: A New Approach for Thinking and Talking about Nuclear Weapons” BASIC-ICCS. November 2020. <https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Brixey-Williams-and-Wheeler-Nuclear-Responsibilities-A-New-Approach-for-Thinking-and-Talking-about-Nuclear-Weapons-2020.pdf> p. 8

<sup>174</sup> Ibid pg. 15

<sup>175</sup> [Nuclear Responsibilities – BASIC](#)

**The embeddedness of a responsibilities consciousness and culture within the NPT, the frequency with which States Parties highlight responsibilities in their speech acts in the NPT review process, along with current efforts to uphold the NPT and strengthen the NPT review process, all serve as opportunities to advance a nuclear responsibilities approach that could:**

- 1** engage all NPT States Parties;
- 2** encourage national and intergovernmental reflection on nuclear policy and practice,
- 3** advocate dialogue, active listening, and empathy within the NPT,
- 4** provide a dialogic mechanism for advancing particular issues within and across the NPT pillars,
- 5** enhance trust and build confidence, and
- 6** contribute to depoliticising and depolarising some of the more contentious issues within the NPT by reorienting dialogue from blame to mutual understanding.

## **How to advance a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT framework**

Advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework requires a reflective and phased approach aimed at building a community of practice among NPT States Parties, alongside dialogic and deliberative mechanisms to facilitate international cooperation and coordination. One suggested strategy for advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT is as follows:

### **Step 1: Critical reflection**

As Brixey-Williams and Wheeler have highlighted, a nuclear responsibilities approach must start with critical reflection.<sup>176</sup> In an NPT context, critical reflection requires that one or more NPT States Parties reflect on their own perceptions of nuclear responsibilities within the context of the NPT, to consider the use of responsibilities language in their own NPT working papers and statements, and to contemplate the merits and demerits of working with other NPT States Parties to reflectively and carefully engage in dialogue and deliberation on NPT core issues through a nuclear responsibilities lens. This first step moreover requires that the interested NPT States Party or Parties commit to utilise a nuclear responsibilities approach that is reflective of their own perceptions of nuclear responsibilities across the issues and themes addressed within the NPT framework (see previous sections), how others may interpret this, and which further commits to avoid the language of responsibility as a practice of justification and critique within the NPT.

### **Step 2: Establish a community of practice**

A next step in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT framework is to establish a community of practice among other interested NPT States Parties. Communities of practice are here understood as, *"like-minded groups of practitioners who are bound, both informally and contextually, by a shared interest in learning and applying a common practice"*.<sup>177</sup> Stakeholder engagement will be critical to establishing a community of practice in this space.<sup>178</sup> This may be achieved through various mechanisms, including hosting a side event during the NPT 2026 Review Conference or future NPT Preparatory Committees to set out the approach and

<sup>176</sup> Sebastian Brixey Williams and Nicholas Wheeler. "Nuclear Responsibilities: A New Approach for Thinking and Talking about Nuclear Weapons" BASIC-ICCS. November 2020. <https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Brixey-Williams-and-Wheeler-Nuclear-Responsibilities-A-New-Approach-for-Thinking-and-Talking-about-Nuclear-Weapons-2020.pdf>

<sup>177</sup> Adler, E (2008). "The Spread of Security Communities: Communities of Practice, Self-Restraint and NATO's Post-Cold War Transformation". *European Journal of International Relations*. 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/135406610808924>

<sup>178</sup> Dee (2025 in press) Justification and critique in the global nuclear order: Nuclear (ir)responsibility as practice

initiate a call to interested parties,<sup>179</sup> through bilaterals with States Parties or with various of the NPT's existing formal and informal political and regional groupings. The aims of establishing a community of practice around nuclear responsibilities are two-fold. *First*, to encourage active reflection and gauge interest among interested States Parties in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach further. And *second*, to reflect on specific issues where a nuclear responsibilities approach may be considered particularly beneficial in advancing multilateral progress within the NPT.

Important to note is that a community of practice in this space need only be 'like-minded' insofar as States Parties share interest in engaging in critical reflection and dialogue concerning nuclear responsibilities as it relates to the NPT. Particularly important to this process will be ensuring that a diversity of views is considered in reflection of both common and differentiated responsibilities within the NPT.

### Step 3: Minilateral dialogue

Once a community of practice starts to emerge, a next step could be the establishment of a minilateral grouping of states explicitly oriented towards advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT. This grouping may be thematic, e.g. focused on advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach to drive progress on specific pillars or themes within the NPT, or it may have a broader and more generalised focus on advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach to support, uphold and strengthen the NPT. Minilateralism entails smaller sub-groups of decision-makers, typically including the most willing and relevant states within a given issue area, who come together either through ad hoc arrangements or more formalised institutions to

address transnational governance problems.<sup>180</sup> Minilateralism can serve as a flexible and pragmatic solution to help reinvigorate multilateralism,<sup>181</sup> an efficient governance mechanism,<sup>182</sup> and an approach that can minimise divisions and contracting costs, while reducing the chance of 'spoilers' hindering multilateral progress.<sup>183</sup> Minilateralism, was moreover recently highlighted by the UN-backed High Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism as a flexible means of facilitating effective multilateralism.<sup>184</sup> It can also serve as an important mechanism for advancing intergovernmental dialogue.

Because of their more exclusive and informal nature, often entailing ad hoc arrangements among a small number of participant states, minilateral groupings are especially well equipped at bypassing the more performative aspects of the NPT to facilitate more meaningful and constructive intergovernmental dialogues. Through minilateral coordination and dialogue, members of minilateral groupings are also better able to move beyond national positions, to engage in active listening and empathy, to build shared understandings of the problem they have come together to address, and to problem-solve in identifying common solutions.

179 BASIC has already started this process through side events hosted on the Nuclear Responsibilities framework during the last NPT review cycle, including at the NPT 2019 PrepCom and 2022 RevCon, see <https://basicint.org/nuclear-responsibilities-at-the-npt-preparatory-committee-2019/> and <https://basicint.org/nr-npt-22/>.

180 Dee, M. (2024). "Minilateralism and effective multilateralism in the global nuclear order" *Contemporary Security Policy* 45(3), 494-524 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2024.2373658>. Worth noting that within the NPT and wider nuclear non-proliferation regime, minilateralism is already commonplace among States Parties who work with others to advance collective action on specified issues e.g. the New Agenda Coalition (NAC), the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPD), the Stockholm Initiative etc.

181 Naím, M. (2009, June 21). Minilateralism: The magic number to get real international action. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism>; Patrick, S. (2015). The new "new multilateralism": Minilateral cooperation, but at what cost? *Global Summitry*, 1(2), 115-134. <https://doi.org/10.1093/global/quv008>

182 Haass, R. (2010, January 5). The case for messy multilateralism *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/18d8f8b6-fa2f-11d0-beed-00144feab49a>

183 Matchett, L. (2021). Minilateralism and backlash in the nuclear security summit: The consequences of nuclear governance outside the IAEA. *Security Studies*, 30(5), 823-859. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2021.2019827>

184 High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism. (2023). A breakthrough for people and planet: Effective and inclusive global governance for today and the future. [https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough/pdf/highleveladvisoryboard\\_breakthrough\\_fullreport.pdf](https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough/pdf/highleveladvisoryboard_breakthrough_fullreport.pdf). While minilateralism is not directly referenced in the report, it draws focus to the merits of 'sub-groupings of states' who come together to 'explore, innovate and implement new approaches to global problems for broader deliberation and adoption'

**In advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach therefore, minilateralism – pursued in a tailored and targeted way – could serve as a fruitful mechanism for advancing the type of empathic intergovernmental dialogue proposed by Brixey-Williams and Wheeler. Minilateral dialogue should particularly be oriented to address questions such as:**

- 1 How do we understand common and differentiated responsibilities within the NPT framework?
- 2 What constitutes ‘responsible’ and ‘irresponsible’ behaviour or practices and how do we communicate this to one another and to others?
- 3 How can a nuclear responsibilities approach facilitate meaningful and constructive dialogue within the NPT review process?
- 4 On what specific issues can we utilise a nuclear responsibilities approach to advance multilateral progress and strengthen the NPT?

#### **Step 4: Multilateral reporting and engagement**

Building upon the minilateral dialogue phase, a next step is multilateral reporting and engagement. To advance a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT will invariably require some form of multilateral deliberation which moves the approach from the national, and minilateral level to the wider multilateral level. As Patrick reflects, “*minilateralism is wonderful if your country is in the [...] room, but less so when it is on the outside peering in*”.<sup>185</sup> Multilateral reporting and engagement within the NPT framework is therefore a critical step in showcasing transparency and inclusivity of the minilateral format, and to enhance its perceived legitimacy among NPT States Parties who were not directly involved.<sup>186</sup> Reporting of the minilateral process can be achieved through standard NPT processes, e.g. submitting a group working paper and/or delivering a group statement in the general plenary session. Engagement can also be fostered using the same

approach outlined in Step 2, specifically, hosting a further side event to foster interaction and dialogue on the issues advanced in a working paper and/or through bilaterals, particularly where this involves other groupings, so that information and key issues can be more widely shared and dialogue further advanced. Other innovations may also include hosting a series of regional dialogues with NPT States Parties approaching a NPT RevCon.<sup>187</sup> Such steps will also be necessary to foster confidence-building and trust among a wider community of NPT States Parties, and to further grow a community of practice surrounding the nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT.

#### **Step 5: Persist**

Persistence has become a vital quality for all NPT States Parties wishing to see genuine multilateral progress and to enact meaningful and constructive change within the NPT review process. So too will persistence be necessary in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework. Change rarely comes quickly within the NPT. New or changed ideas take time to establish. New or changed practices must moreover be generated through a process of innovation and political selection, where new ideas are communicated, diffused and, eventually, institutionalised.<sup>188</sup> A nuclear responsibilities approach constitutes a new approach to tackling issues and engaging in dialogue within the NPT, as well as a changed approach for States Parties’ communicative practices within the NPT. Persistence is therefore essential, both in advancing the approach and in seeing it bear fruit. Important also to highlight is that groups who are persistent in submitting working papers or presenting statements on their given issues to successive NPT PrepComs and RevCons, are also those ‘looked to’ by NPT Presiding Officers, the UNODA Secretariat, and other States Parties for ideas and working language when it comes to

<sup>187</sup> The EU successfully utilised this approach, working with the UNODA, first in the run up to the 2022 RevCon, and again in preparation for the 2026 RevCon. See [Decision - EU - 2025/646 - EN - EUR-Lex](#). Also, Dee, M. (2023). EU orchestration in the Nuclear Weapons Regime Complex. *Politics and Governance*, 11(2) <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v11i2.6323>

<sup>188</sup> Dee (2025 *in press*) Justification and critique in the global nuclear order: Nuclear (ir)responsibility as practice; Adler, E., and V. Pouliot. (2011). “International Practices”, *International Theory*, 3(1): 1–36. doi:10.1017/S175297191000031X; Adler, E. (1991). “Cognitive Evolution: A Dynamics Approach for the Study of International Relations and Their Progress” In: *Progress in Postwar International Relations*. Columbia University Press.

<sup>185</sup> Patrick 2015 p.129

<sup>186</sup> Dee, M. (2024) “Minilateralism and effective multilateralism in the global nuclear order”

drafting outcome documents.<sup>189</sup> Time and repetition will therefore be important considerations in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework.

## Who should advance a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT

Initiating a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework will require leadership from one or more NPT States Parties. New initiatives led by NPT nuclear-weapon states are typically more likely to gain traction within the NPT. Until now however unilateral efforts led by the nuclear-weapon States have been established apart from the NPT and then treated as ‘bolt-ons’ e.g. the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), or the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). US-led unilateral efforts to explicitly reinvigorate multilateral dialogue on core NPT issues, such as the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) Initiative, have also struggled to gain traction within the wider NPT community due, in part, to the group’s lack of transparency.<sup>190</sup> CEND’s large membership, including also non-NPT States Parties, also limited its efficiency and effectiveness.

Advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework will therefore require a unilateral format that is:

- representative of the respective political positions and common and differentiated responsibilities of States Parties within the NPT,
- exclusive insofar as membership remains small enough to facilitate dialogue and effective deliberation,
- inclusive, transparent and accountable insofar as activities remain integrated within NPT review cycles through regular reporting,

- and dialogue-focused with a view to enhancing wider multilateral deliberations, building confidence, and strengthening the NPT.<sup>191</sup>

Support from at least one nuclear-weapon State will be crucial to the advancement of a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT. That nuclear-weapon State must acknowledge and exemplify the differentiated responsibilities of a nuclear-weapon State, while also being willing to work with others to build mutual understanding and trust concerning nuclear responsibilities, particularly as they relate to the NPT framework.

The UK could be considered a natural leader in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach for several reasons, but particularly because: (1) The UK Government sponsors the BASIC Nuclear Responsibilities Programme, and has itself undergone critical reflection on the use of its own nuclear responsibilities language, (2) the UK is broadly recognised as a pragmatic diplomatic power,<sup>192</sup> and an advocate of efforts to strengthen the NPT, (3) it led the charge in advancing the Responsible Behaviours in Space UN resolution, further highlighting its responsibilities credentials, and (4) the UK Government has experience of leading a technical unilateral initiative associated with the NPT – specifically, the Quad Disarmament Verification Partnership.

Advancing a wider community of practice among non-nuclear-weapon States Parties will also require the involvement of States Parties who (1) acknowledge that there are common and differentiated responsibilities among States Parties within the NPT, (2) are willing to engage in critical reflection and dialogue with others on nuclear responsibilities, (3) seek to uphold and strengthen the NPT and (4) are representative of different positions and geographical regions.

189 Dee, M. (2017) Group interplay and dynamics in UN Disarmament Forums: In Search of Consensus. *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 12 (2-3), pp. 158-177 <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-12341364>; Author interviews

190 The CEND Initiative, which was launched by the US in 2019 was also negatively impacted by Covid-19 which led to meetings being postponed or moved into the online space.

191 See also Dee, M. (2025) ‘Unilateralism and the Third Nuclear Age: In Pursuit of Dialogue’ BASIC. 17 April. <https://basicint.org/unilateralism-and-the-third-nuclear-age/>

192 Dee and Kienzle. (2023) ‘Between role adaptation and contestation: the UK’s status as a nuclear weapon state after Brexit’.

By way of example, such States Parties might include:

## Africa

A State Party representative for Africa might include Nigeria and/or Senegal.<sup>193</sup> During the 2025 PrepCom, Nigeria<sup>194</sup> utilised responsibilities language with specific reference to non-nuclear-weapons States fulfilling their responsibilities under the non-proliferation and peaceful uses pillars,<sup>195</sup> and to highlight the special responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States to support the universalisation of the CTBT.<sup>196</sup> Senegal is here also mentioned courtesy of its constructive reflections concerning rights, obligations and responsibilities during the 2025 PrepCom where it emphasised the “*constant balance between rights and obligations, powers and responsibilities, prescriptions and proscriptions, which, when combined, underpin the responsibility of States in their individual and collective behaviours regarding nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the beneficial use of nuclear technologies*”.<sup>197</sup>

## East Asia

A State Party representative for East Asia might include Japan and/or the Republic of Korea, each as ‘umbrella states’ that form part of the US’s extended deterrence arrangements.<sup>198</sup> Japan has already engaged in a nuclear responsibilities roundtable with BASIC thereby showing willingness to engage in critical reflection and dialogue on nuclear responsibilities. The Republic of Korea was also noticeably active in its use of responsibilities language during the 2025 PrepCom, including in reference to irresponsible rhetoric and holding Russia accountable,<sup>199</sup> in emphasising the special

responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States with regards transparency and accountability,<sup>200</sup> and in risk reduction,<sup>201</sup> in highlighting the need to exercise responsibility over the peaceful uses of nuclear energy,<sup>202</sup> and with reference to the need to engage with AI in an effective and responsible manner.<sup>203</sup>

## Europe

A State Party representative for Europe might include the Netherlands and/or Italy, both representing non-nuclear weapon States that host U.S. nuclear weapons which bring their own differentiated responsibilities.<sup>204</sup> The Netherlands has already engaged in a nuclear responsibilities roundtable with BASIC and has therefore shown willingness to engage in critical reflection and dialogue on nuclear responsibilities. During the 2025 PrepCom the Netherlands also utilised the language of responsibility to highlight that “*there rests a heavy responsibility on our shoulders*” to carry forward the work of the NPT.<sup>205</sup> The Netherlands was also one of a handful of States Parties who highlighted the “*collective responsibility*” of NPT States Parties to “*search for common ground*”.<sup>206</sup> Italy, similarly was proactive and constructive in its use of responsibilities language at the PrepCom; for example with reference to the need for “*a progressive, realistic, pragmatic and responsible approach*” to nuclear disarmament based on a verifiable and irreversible process,<sup>207</sup> highlighting the “*fundamental responsibilities*” of the nuclear-weapon States to implement Article VI, particularly those with the largest arsenals,<sup>208</sup> identifying its own “*reliable and responsible*” nuclear supply chain,<sup>209</sup> and calling for the universalisation of the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation as a “*transparency and confidence building measure to encourage responsible behaviour*”.<sup>210</sup>

193 Both states are members of the African Group, and signatories of the Treaty of Pelindaba

194 Nigeria is moreover a member of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPD), and the De-alerting Group, and took part in the CEND Initiative. Nigeria was also an active member of the G16 or ‘core group’ that advocated the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and is a ratified State Party of the TPNW.

195 Nigeria cluster 3 specific issues statement

196 Nigeria cluster 2 statement

197 Senegal general statement, English translation. Worth also noting that Senegal does not feature in any other unilateral groupings, yet it stands out as an NPT State Party that voted in favour of adopting the TPNW – but is not currently party to the TPNW.

198 Both Japan and the Republic of Korea are members of the Stockholm Initiative and Broadly Like-minded group. Japan is also a member of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPD). Both countries were involved in the CEND Initiative and are Participating Governments of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

199 Republic of Korea general statement; Republic of Korea cluster 1 statement; Republic of Korea cluster 2 statement

200 Republic of Korea cluster 1 statement

201 Republic of Korea general statement

202 Republic of Korea cluster 3 statement

203 Republic of Korea cluster 3 statement

204 Both the Netherlands and Italy are NATO, EU, NPD and Stockholm Initiative members and took part in the CEND Initiative. Both countries are also participants of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The Netherlands is also a member of the Broadly like-minded group and the Vienna Group of Ten.

205 Netherlands general statement

206 Netherlands general statement

207 Italy general statement

208 Italy cluster 1 statement

209 Italy cluster 2 statement

210 Italy cluster 2 statement

## Latin America

A State Party representative for Latin America might include Brazil and/or Mexico.<sup>211</sup> Brazil has already engaged in a nuclear responsibilities roundtable with BASIC and has therefore shown willingness to engage in critical reflection and dialogue on nuclear responsibilities. In addition, Brazil is developing an indigenous SSN programme which brings with it differentiated responsibilities relating to safeguards. At the 2025 PrepCom Brazil did also utilise the language of responsibility, both in its national capacity, and as Chair of the NAC, to emphasise the 'special responsibilities' of the nuclear-weapon States in fulfilling their obligations under Article VI of the NPT. The NAC did also explicitly state that the Group, "rejects any attempts to establish a distinction between "responsible" and "irresponsible" nuclear-weapon States",<sup>212</sup> which could signal willingness by some of its members to engage in dialogue where self-identification terms are explicitly rejected. Mexico also has a long history of constructive engagement in the NPT. It is also the only member of the NAC also member to the NPDI showcasing its capacity to work constructively with both anti-nuclear states and nuclear-sharing states to build consensus. Mexico also regularly utilises responsibilities language in the NPT.<sup>213</sup>

## Middle East

A State Party representative for the Middle East might include United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and/or Morocco. Each State is a vocal supporter of a Middle East WMD Free Zone. Each state has also been involved in other unilateral groupings within the NPT framework.<sup>214</sup> During the 2025 PrepCom these states also utilised responsibilities language in a constructive way across a variety of themes and issues. For example, Jordan specified "*the importance for States Parties, especially the NWS, to*

*shoulder their responsibilities through full compliance with the Treaty and outcomes of the review conferences*".<sup>215</sup> The UAE meanwhile highlighted the important role of the IAEA in providing "*critical support and oversight to Member States pursuing nuclear programs*".<sup>216</sup> Morocco meanwhile emphasised "the responsibility of the three co-sponsors of the resolution on the Middle East" while also stressing that "the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East transcends regional concern – it stands as a shared global responsibility".<sup>217</sup>

## Oceania

A State Party representative for Oceania might include Australia. Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS pact with the US and UK brings with it its own differentiated responsibilities relating to international non-proliferation obligations and safeguards. During the 2025 PrepCom Australia moreover acknowledged that they were "*deeply conscious that this comes with a responsibility to set the highest non-proliferation standard*".<sup>218</sup> Australia also emphasised the positive role of multilateral export control regimes in "*providing guidance, norms, and standards for responsible and peaceful trade and use of strategic goods and technology*".<sup>219</sup> Australia is a party to the Treaty or Roratonga as well as being a member of the NPDI and Broadly like-minded group within the NPT. Australia is also a participating government in the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

## Southeast Asia

A State Party representative for southeast Asia might include Malaysia, Indonesia and/or the Philippines.<sup>220</sup> Malaysia took part in a BASIC roundtable on nuclear responsibilities, thereby showcasing its willingness to engage in critical reflection and dialogue concerning nuclear

211 Both states are signatory to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, are members of the New Agenda Coalition, and formed part of the G16 or 'core group' that advocated from the TPNW. Both states are also ratified States Parties of the TPNW. Both states were also part of the CEND Initiative. Both Brazil and Mexico are also participants of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

212 NAC cluster 1 statement

213 Mexico cluster 2 statement; Mexico cluster 3 specific issues statement

214 All three states were involved in the CEND initiative. Jordan was also a member of the Stepping Stones initiative and Stockholm Initiative. The UAE is a member of the NPDI. Morocco also holds the Presidency of the Conference on Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

215 Jordan cluster 2 statement, English translation

216 UAE cluster 3 statement

217 Morocco on behalf of the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East WMD Free Zone, general statement

218 Australia cluster 2 statement

219 Australia cluster 2 statement

220 All three States Parties are signatory to the Treaty of Bangkok, members of the Group of Non-Aligned States, and took part in the CEND Initiative.

responsibilities.<sup>221</sup> As Chair of the NAM, and in its own national capacity, Indonesia<sup>222</sup> made frequent use of responsibilities language at the 2025 PrepCom, particularly in reference to the collective responsibilities of all States to uphold international peace and security,<sup>223</sup> and to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in all territories,<sup>224</sup> the special responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States concerning the Middle East WMD Free Zone,<sup>225</sup> the implementation of Article VI of the NPT,<sup>226</sup> the entry into force of the CTBT,<sup>227</sup> to address harms resulting from nuclear testing,<sup>228</sup> and to highlight that the responsibility for nuclear safety and security rests with each individual state.<sup>229</sup> During the 2025 PrepCom, the Philippines was also active in its use of responsibilities language, both in its national capacity and on behalf of a group of states.<sup>230</sup>

## What to consider in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT

In advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework, there are several aspects that States Parties will want to consider. First, what issues should States Parties focus on when utilising a nuclear responsibilities approach in the NPT for the first time? Second, what will they need to adjust in their communicative practices within the NPT? And finally, what are the areas of tension and possible risk involved in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT?

<sup>221</sup> Malaysia was also a member of the G16 or 'core group' and is not a ratified State Party of the TPNW.

<sup>222</sup> Indonesia is also a member of the Stockholm Initiative.

<sup>223</sup> Indonesia cluster 1 specific issues statement

<sup>224</sup> Indonesia cluster 2 specific issues statement

<sup>225</sup> NAM cluster 2 specific issues statement

<sup>226</sup> NAM cluster 1 statement; NAM statement, Chair's draft, 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the PrepCom

<sup>227</sup> NAM intervention, Chair's draft, 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the PrepCom

<sup>228</sup> NAM WP.23

<sup>229</sup> NAM WP.25; NAM general statement; NAM cluster 2 statement; NAM cluster 3 statement

<sup>230</sup> Specifically, the Philippines highlighted both the common and special responsibilities attributed to NPT States Parties, and particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to reduce the risks of nuclear conflict, to uphold the credibility of the NPT, and to "rise above narrow interests...to rid the world of nuclear weapons". The Philippines further emphasised the special responsibility of nuclear-weapon States to report on their arsenals, doctrines and disarmament efforts, further contributing to the discourse around transparency and accountability within the NPT. The Philippines is also a member of the Stockholm Initiative and the NPDI

## What issues should States Parties focus on

Arguably a nuclear responsibilities approach could be utilised to facilitate dialogue across most, if not all, issues addressed within the NPT framework. Nevertheless, in the first instance a nuclear responsibilities approach may be most fruitful as a dialogic tool to facilitate progress on a specific issue or issues within the NPT framework. Which States Parties are then involved in any unilateral dialogues could then also be determined by their relevance and positionality on the issue or issues themselves.<sup>231</sup>

As one suggestive starting point, the current NPT review cycle (2023-2026) has witnessed a growing interest among States Parties in issues of transparency and accountability, particularly as this relates to strengthening the NPT review process through more rigorous reporting and dialogue mechanisms. In a multilateral context where substantive progress on NPT 'core' issues such as nuclear disarmament or establishing a Middle East WMD Free Zone remain not only stagnant but politically charged, transparency may be one low-hanging fruit that could garner tentative multilateral progress and consensus.

### A nuclear responsibilities approach could then facilitate dialogue and progress on transparency measures within the NPT by:

- 1 initiating dialogue among NPT States Parties with common and differentiated responsibilities as it relates to their respective reporting practices,
- 2 facilitating space for nuclear-weapon States to outline their reporting practices, both in terms of explaining their stockpiles, disarmament steps, force readiness and doctrine, but also in detailing where there is deliberate ambiguity in what they do not report and why, and
- 3 serving as a confidence-building and trust-building mechanism between States Parties.

<sup>231</sup> In this way interested States Parties might see the approach as a process and series of unilateralisms, rather than a singular unilateral process.

Likewise, a nuclear responsibilities approach could be harnessed to engage States Parties in dialogue surrounding arms control and risk reduction. Specifically, States Parties could build upon parts of the P3 working paper submitted to the NPT 2022 RevCon on “Principles and responsible practices for Nuclear Weapon States” in which the P3 not only outlined the practices they associated with responsible and irresponsible behaviour in these issue areas, but further called for a “broad coalition” and “inclusive dialogues...to identify areas of common concern and interest”.<sup>232</sup> This working paper could serve as a starting point for dialogue and active reflection. The practice also of submitting a working paper to explicitly outline responsible practices and behaviours within the NPT context could also be replicated, whether by the P3 or other States Parties as a means of information sharing and overcoming ambiguity around nuclear responsibilities discourse, to reinforce a responsibilities culture, and to facilitate a community of practice around nuclear responsibilities within the NPT framework.

### What adjustments to communicative practice are necessary

States Parties seeking to advance dialogue and facilitate constructive engagement on nuclear responsibilities within an NPT framework should be critically reflective of their own communication practices within the NPT and their use of responsibilities language, particularly in their written outputs (e.g. working paper, national reports, prepared statements) and speech acts (e.g. delivery of prepared statements, as well as in ad hoc interventions and rights of reply). States Parties might particularly consider adjustments such as avoiding the language of ‘responsible’ and ‘irresponsible’ to justify their own behaviour while criticising the behaviour of others. As the earlier sections highlight, NPT States Parties regularly use the language of responsibility to emphasise their own behaviours while holding others accountable when they have failed to meet those same standards. Nevertheless, the meaning of responsibility in these contexts remains subjective, contested and oftentimes ambiguous, and can serve

only to exacerbate blame games, and shut-down dialogue rather than create the space for the meaningful and constructive exchanges of views.

States Parties may instead look to lead by example by using their written outputs and speech acts to showcase how they uphold their NPT obligations, the specific practices or actions they have adopted, and the steps they are taking to advance their obligations under the NPT, without the loaded framing of claiming their own ‘responsibility’. In a similar vein, nuclear-weapon States may particularly consider avoiding making references to themselves as a “responsible nation”, “responsible country”, or “responsible nuclear weapon State”. This can amplify polarisation within the NPT, being seen by non-nuclear-weapon States as a means of legitimising their policies and approaches, while “mollifying demands for disarmament”.<sup>233</sup>

Another subtle adjustment in communicative practice would be to shift any references to “common *but* differentiated responsibilities” to “common *and* differentiated responsibilities” as an effort to further depolarise contentions around responsibilities within the NPT framework. The word ‘and’ here denotes a more inclusive approach towards responsibilities, which, while differentiated, still emphasises the common/collective responsibilities placed on all NPT States Parties without amplifying polarisation. Arguably, the word ‘but’ places the emphasis on differentiated responsibilities as being distinctly apart, amplifying the exclusivity of those responsibilities and arguably reinforcing polarisation. This simple, if subtle, change would also serve to facilitate State Party reflection on the language itself.

232 P3 (2022) ‘Principles and responsible practices for Nuclear Weapon States.’ <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/documents/WP70.pdf>

233 See Wheeler and Brixey-Williams 2020. P.23

## What possible risks or tensions should be considered

A possible risk of advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework is that other States Parties may conflate the nuclear responsibilities approach with the polarising discourse of States Parties who claim responsibility as a status and identify that they are being 'responsible', while critiquing others as 'irresponsible'. States Parties may even perceive the approach as a means of blame-avoidance, particularly by the nuclear-weapon States as it concerns meeting their obligations under Article VI. For some anti-nuclear non-nuclear weapon States Parties any reference to responsibilities is a "bugbear" to be avoided.<sup>234</sup> Civil society actors have also emphasised that "*any attempt to...repackage the threat of mass destruction as 'responsible behaviour' must be rejected under all circumstances*".<sup>235</sup> This risk of misperception is particularly high for any initiative that is dominated by one or more nuclear-weapon State. The risk could be lowered, however, where a nuclear responsibilities approach is explicitly and deliberately inclusive of States Parties with common and differentiated responsibilities, shows transparency of process, and which persists past initial criticisms to show its utility as a dialogic mechanism that builds confidence and trust and facilitates meaningful and constructive exchange between NPT States Parties.

Another tension that States Parties may face in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT framework, is the challenge of holding other States accountable while explicitly avoiding the language of 'responsibility' and 'irresponsibility' that has come to be associated with blame games. During this current NPT review cycle there has been a high number of references by NPT States Parties to the 'irresponsible' behaviour of Russia particularly,

*States Parties may make the strategic choice to explicitly avoid the use of responsible and irresponsible claims to hold others accountable.*

but which has also been used to call out the behaviours of the DPRK, Iran, China, the US, France, and the nuclear-sharing states to name a few. These claims are intended to signal displeasure to those States Parties that they have not behaved according to the standards and legal obligations expected of them. Yet these expected standards and obligations also remain subjective and oftentimes ambiguous, such that claims of another States' irresponsibility serve mainly to confront and contest rather than engage. Moreover, when used by nuclear-weapon States against each other, such frames of irresponsibility only amplify fears of nuclear disorder, and draw attention to the subjective and contested logics of deterrence.

How different States Parties address this tension will require careful consideration. In the longer term, a nuclear responsibilities approach could be fostered to provide a reflective method for States Parties to consider the attribution of common and differentiated responsibilities within the NPT, and how individual States Parties both uphold their responsibilities and evidence this to others in the interests of transparency and accountability. In the shorter-term however, States Parties may make the strategic choice to explicitly avoid the use of responsible and irresponsible claims to hold others accountable, and to prioritise more neutral language that speaks to the facts while clarifying their respective concerns and interests as it relates to other States' behaviours.

<sup>234</sup> Author interview 24 July 2024; NAC general statement

<sup>235</sup> ICAN civil society statement

# Conclusion

**This paper has explored the discourse of nuclear responsibilities within the NPT, drawing on discourse analysis of the 2025 Preparatory Committee. It has shown how States Parties attribute and use the language of responsibility—framed as accountability, obligation, identity, and manner—across a wide range of NPT themes associated with nuclear disarmament, deterrence, non-proliferation, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and strengthening the NPT.**

While this language reflects a common responsibilities consciousness and culture within the NPT, analysis also reveals how responsibilities language is frequently used to assign blame and justify national positions, often exacerbating division and undermining constructive dialogue. The paper further highlights the challenges of ambiguity, performative diplomacy, and limited opportunities for meaningful exchange, which hinder progress within the NPT framework.

Despite these challenges, it has been argued that the widespread use of responsibility language presents a unique opportunity to advance a more constructive and inclusive approach within the NPT framework. A **nuclear responsibilities approach**—grounded in introspection, empathy, and dialogue—offers a practical method to depolarise debates, build trust, and reinvigorate multilateralism. Presenting a five-step strategy to operationalise this approach, this paper outlines the importance of critical reflection, establishing a community of practice, minilateral dialogue, multilateral reporting and engagement, and persistence in advancing a nuclear responsibilities approach within the NPT.

It also identifies a diverse and representative group of States Parties—led potentially by the UK alongside actors from Africa, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Oceania and Southeast Asia—who would be well-positioned to champion this initiative.

As the NPT approaches its 2026 Review Conference, the need for action is urgent. The Treaty faces growing frustration over stagnation, deepening geopolitical tensions, and a widening trust deficit among States Parties. A nuclear responsibilities approach provides a timely and pragmatic pathway to address these challenges. It can help shift the focus from blame to shared understanding, foster inclusive dialogue on contentious issues such as disarmament and transparency, and strengthen the NPT's credibility and effectiveness.

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