

2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

27 May 2022
English
Original: Russian

New York, 1–26 August 2022

Nuclear disarmament: an area of shared responsibility

Working paper submitted by the Russian Federation

The tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the next significant milestone in the advancement of the goals and objectives of this fundamental international Treaty. During the Conference, it is important to emphasize once again the continued importance of the Treaty and reaffirm the value of its three pillars – nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful development of nuclear energy – and of broad international cooperation in this area.

For the Conference to be successful, the States parties to the Treaty must combine their efforts and strive to focus on the main issues, identify and clearly emphasize the components of success, and put aside issues that may be significant but are nonetheless of secondary importance.

With regard to nuclear disarmament, it is necessary to create an atmosphere in which the broad spectrum of often diametrically opposed views and differentiated approaches do not ultimately prevent agreement on a common denominator or stand in the way of a respectful and substantive discussion in the interests of the review process and of achieving the Treaty's objectives.

Nuclear disarmament is an extremely complex process that can be implemented only in stages and in such a way as to facilitate the strengthening of peace and stability on the basis of the principle of enhancing the security of all States without exception, including, of course, States that possess nuclear weapons in accordance with the Treaty. Throughout the process, the collective contribution of all States parties to the Treaty is required; this derives directly from article VI of the Treaty.

The process cannot be seen in a vacuum, outside the context of geopolitics and without taking into account fundamental trends in international security. Building on this constant, it is necessary to consistently and meticulously tackle the relevant work.

As is well known, under the Treaty, nuclear disarmament must take place in a context of general and complete disarmament. It is an essential component of a comprehensive disarmament process. It is this understanding of the objective that should inform the approach to achieving it. Any other interpretation would be an illusion, and efforts based on a mirage are invariably doomed to failure.



Practical steps towards disarmament – and not only with regard to nuclear weapons – are impossible without an enabling international environment. Such steps will be substantive and effective only if the principle of the indivisibility of security is observed and if the pursuit of narrow national interests to the detriment of the security of other countries is rejected. This seemingly obvious axiom is, unfortunately, all too often called into question.

It is extremely important to take a comprehensive approach to disarmament in general and its nuclear component in particular. There is no alternative. Only comprehensive measures will ensure movement in the necessary direction on the basis of broad international consensus.

Many emphasize that nuclear States bear the main burden of responsibility to take steps in this area, since it is they who possess nuclear arsenals. However, it is untrue that it is for them alone to make all the effort towards nuclear disarmament, while the other members of the international community merely encourage and urge swift action by the nuclear powers and monitor the process. That is a short-sighted approach.

Non-nuclear States are no less capable than nuclear States of facilitating progress towards nuclear disarmament by contributing to an overall reduction in the level of international tension and helping to strengthen stability and establish a global disarmament agenda, primarily with regard to the implementation of article VI of the Treaty, on general and complete disarmament. They have a duty to take action as fully fledged players on the same playing field, not as opponents of the nuclear powers. The main problem seems to lie in a lack of understanding of this truth.

It seems that some countries have come to believe that their supreme historical mission is to convert the nuclear powers to the “correct”, as they see it, understanding of disarmament priorities, make them feel “guilty” before the international community, and force them to swiftly reduce their arsenals and, eventually, give them up altogether. The vast majority, if not all, of the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons are suffering as a result of this parasitism and proselytizing. Many non-governmental organizations engaged in disarmament also hold similar views. According to this logic, the members of the “nuclear club” must be kept constantly on their toes, the bar must be set excessively high for them in terms of transparency, even going as far as absolute transparency, they must be forced to reconsider their doctrinal attitudes, and Russia and the United States of America must embark on deeper reductions in nuclear weapons with no account taken of geopolitical realities. At the same time, these organizations do practically nothing themselves. They see themselves as some kind of supreme arbiter, prosecutor, mediator and overseer of a process in which others are the ones who take action.

Herein lies a profound methodological and substantive error. In today’s world, nuclear weapons, for those who possess them, are part of a mechanism for ensuring national security that is appropriate to the nature and scale of current threats and also the historical context. States that possess nuclear weapons in accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons fully recognize that nuclear war is impermissible – and they say so quite clearly and responsibly. Nuclear war can have no winners and must never be unleashed. Any nuclear conflict would be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to contain and stop. The start of such a conflict would be a direct route to self-destruction and the ruin of human civilization. This stark reality is well understood by responsible politicians and military personnel. Conventional armed conflicts do not develop into global conflicts because the nuclear powers do everything possible to avoid confrontation with each other, understanding the risks of such a turn of events. Such a conclusion may not please some and may be

contrary to their inner convictions, but mutual nuclear deterrence has for decades acted as a safety catch, protecting the world from universal catastrophe.

Attempts to separate nuclear disarmament from the overall strategic security context are by definition counterproductive. To advocate treating the elimination of nuclear weapons as a separate and independent process is to ignore strategic realities and reject the very logic of the current peacekeeping system, without offering an effective and proven alternative in its place. The price of empirical experimentation in this highly sensitive area could be extremely high. It is equally naive to try to solve the problem through permanent pressure on the nuclear powers aimed at forcing them to renounce the principle of ensuring their own security and the security of their allies and partners in favour of abstract humanitarian notions of disarmament, such as references to the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

Progress in nuclear disarmament requires the prior establishment of a system of specific international arrangements relating to security, strategic stability and arms control, with a robust and effective verification regime. Without practical agreements, there is little point in any kind of “transparency” per se on the part of the nuclear powers.

Furthermore, it is important, finally, to accept as a given that effective measures for the further reduction of nuclear arsenals – and not only those of Russia and the United States of America – are possible only if account is taken, in particular, of the missile defence factor and its impact on strategic stability. In a context of unilateral and unrestricted build-up of strategic missile defence capabilities, a transition to lower levels of strategic offensive weapons will be unattainable. Long-range high-precision non-nuclear weapons capable of achieving strategic objectives also require close attention.

The norm that nuclear weapons cannot be located outside national territories must take root and become axiomatic in the minds of the international community in the context of the emerging new global security system. The presence of United States nuclear weapons in non-nuclear European countries in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the alliance’s practice of “joint nuclear missions” act as a brake on nuclear disarmament.

In general, sound initial or enabling conditions are needed for effective efforts in the nuclear field, namely:

- Strategic stability as a basic prerequisite for practical dialogue, including on nuclear matters;
- An absence of international armed conflicts in which countries with military nuclear capabilities may be involved directly or indirectly;
- The launch of negotiation rather than discussion formats on key aspects of the disarmament issue in existing multilateral forums (the Conference on Disarmament), on a regional and bilateral basis;
- Significant progress on other “related” disarmament tracks, where negotiations or the achievement of a final outcome have been stalled for years (the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the establishment of a verification mechanism under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction);
- Careful steps to implement new initiatives that are already being discussed and that are promising in terms of strengthening international security (a treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space; an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism).

Non-nuclear powers can and must take part in a discussion of the pressing issues set out above and contribute to achieving understanding and progress in the areas mentioned. Every effort is needed; even small contributions have value. Countries that do not possess military nuclear capabilities must help to establish the most favourable environment for nuclear disarmament, not with words but with deeds. They must be active on all fronts: in deconfliction, in launching conventional disarmament initiatives, in shaping a unifying general disarmament agenda, in risk reduction, and so on. Moreover, they must finally stop limiting themselves to issuing calls to nuclear States with various demands and recommendations regarding their actions. Of course, this is important, but it is not the main point.

Lastly, any attempts by non-nuclear powers to signal their nuclear ambitions in one way or another must be regarded as absolutely intolerable. The rejection of such moves should in principle be immediately followed by a collective tough and unambiguous response from the international community, should such attempts take place. In this regard, what is most deeply regrettable is the almost silent reaction – except on the part of Russia – to the public statements by the President of Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, at the last Munich Security Conference.

Non-nuclear countries should take their due share of responsibility for the disarmament process and begin to make a practical everyday contribution to addressing the challenges of strengthening international security and strategic stability, and also general and complete disarmament. Only by advancing in this area on a broad international front will a world without any kinds of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, become an achievable goal.

So far, none of this has happened. At present, an engaged and unbiased political perspective on strategic stability, arms control and global disarmament is palpably lacking. There is a clear deadlock in this area. Only occasionally are fragmented actions taken, emotional rather than rational, and characterized, moreover, by inconsistency. As a result, the existing international norms are being eroded before our very eyes, the architecture of international security that has been built over decades is being destroyed in the name of someone's ambitions, and the doctrine of building a new world order not on the basis of international law but on the basis of rivalry and some contrived "rules" that are convenient for someone, is being elevated as an absolute. The sanctions policy, which circumvents the universally recognized mechanisms of the United Nations and is, in fact, one of the most dangerous forms of coercion and strong-arm tactics towards political opponents, is taken as a matter of course. It poisons and destroys international relations. It has become everyday practice to apply the principle of political allegiance to parties involved in armed conflicts. And against this background, no loud voices are heard calling for an end to these destructive trends, fraught with the risk of falling into the abyss.

Together, these factors have the most negative impact on nuclear disarmament, corroding its very foundation like rust on metal. This should finally be recognized and reflected upon so that we can decide how to proceed: turn a blind eye to what is happening, engage in endless populist rhetoric, or work to achieve results with an awareness of realities. It is time to stop building castles on the sand and start working in earnest on the practical tasks of reviving the arms control and disarmament process as an existential challenge of planetary dimensions.

The international community needs a comprehensive and realistic approach to establishing a global disarmament environment, without which a world free of nuclear weapons is impossible. We hope that such an approach will ultimately prevail. Russia stands ready to continue to make a systematic and consistent contribution to achieving that goal.