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The P5 Nuclear Dialogue
Five Years On

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The P5 Nuclear Dialogue: Five Years On

At the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton admitted to the delegates present that ‘we know there are doubts among some about whether nuclear weapons states ... are prepared to help lead’ efforts to pursue nuclear disarmament.¹ In an attempt to quell those sceptics, the US and its nuclear-weapon state (NWS) counterparts pledged to work more closely with one another.

Their unofficial mandate for dialogue was captured in the Review Conference Final Document, specifically its sixty-four point Action Plan. This spelled out the main areas in which NWS would be collectively expected to enhance nuclear transparency and make qualitative and quantitative reductions to their nuclear arsenals. Fortunately, a forum for NWS dialogue already existed. What is now known as the ‘P5 process’ was convened in 2009 by the UK, which was eager to find a way to break through the stagnation that had crept across the disarmament landscape as the Cold War faded further from memory. The hope then, as now, was that regular, multilateral dialogue between the five recognised NWS could, over time, build the mutual trust and confidence needed to realise further disarmament and transparency. Significant steps towards implementing NPT disarmament obligations seem impossible so long as a vast trust deficit exists between NWS.

The P5 process is now five years old. As it aged, most non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS) grew more sceptical that closed, multilateral discussions could end the disarmament standstill. The P5 have learned to talk, but after five years they are still crawling. Despite the advent of the P5 process in 2009, most assessments highlight the fact that little progress has been made against the disarmament-specific actions in the Action Plan.²

Undoubtedly, representatives participating in the P5’s discussions are acutely aware of this fact, and already have one eye on the next Review Conference, due to take place in spring 2015. There, they are sure to face intense scrutiny from NNWS, which will be assessing the P5’s activity to determine whether

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there is any indication of the disarmament leadership that Secretary Clinton had promised half a decade earlier.

This paper examines the P5’s work over the past year in order to anticipate the likely shape of the discussions at the 2015 Review Conference. To do so, it draws upon previous RUSI analysis on activity in the ‘P5 process’,\(^3\) public statements, and interviews with officials from both NWS and NNWS.\(^4\) It argues that the challenge for NWS will be to convince their non-nuclear counterparts that the process’s value and significance in the long term is not merely a convenient cover for collective stagnation in the short and medium term. Outputs over the last year, as well as those expected in the coming year, could go some way to assure others that this is not the case. Alternatively, those outputs, depending upon their quality and the way they are presented, could be viewed as more symbolism than substance and could lead to heightened criticism. Finally, this paper expresses concern at the likely sour atmosphere at the Review Conference, but argues that swift action by the P5 to improve their public messaging and develop a working plan can improve prospects for agreement at that meeting.

Progress to 2013

At the time of the establishment of the P5 process, and indeed on many occasions since, NWS have stated their conviction that the value of regular, multilateral dialogue on nuclear arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation is likely to be most demonstrable in the long term. Genuine, lasting progress in these areas does indeed depend on greater trust and confidence between NWS, some of which are adversaries. Such a daunting confidence-building process will take time. Yet in order to gradually generate such trust, NWS must begin to step outside of their traditional comfort zones and pursue collaborative activity in support of arms-control goals. This was recognised by NWS,\(^5\) as was the near-term progress being loudly demanded by NWS in NPT fora. Despite their belief that the P5 process is an endeavour that demands patience to yield rewards, NWS accepted that a mere open-ended, unstructured dialogue would not be sufficient, and concrete outputs would have to be demonstrated over the course of the 2010–15 NPT review cycle.

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4. Some information included in this paper has been drawn from conversations with officials from NWS and NNWS conducted on the basis of anonymity.

In that time frame, NWS have focused the majority of their discussions on three areas: treaty verification and monitoring technologies and processes; nuclear transparency; and common nuclear terminology. Most of the P5’s activity in these areas prior to 2013 involved the comparison of national views, exploratory dialogue, and the establishment of more structured project frameworks. For instance, the P5 established a working group (the ‘Working Group on the Glossary of Key Nuclear Terms’) that would create a common glossary of nuclear terms, and began working towards the development of a common framework for transparency declarations as prescribed by the 2010 Action Plan.

Yet in laying the foundations for their future outputs, the P5 cast light on the limited scope of their portfolio of activity. By the time of the spring 2013 NPT Preparatory Committee, it was thus clear that results would only flow from the P5 process at a slow trickle. Nuclear-disarmament policy tends to be one of the slowest moving components of the security-policy spectrum. The existence of nuclear weapons in each of the five NWS is a product of the individual country’s broader security environment, and their undoing is therefore similarly dependent on other variables.

Nevertheless, NNWS representatives from Latin America to Europe already reported unfulfilled expectations in 2013. Others, whose expectations were low to begin with, but whose hopes were higher after the 2010 Review Conference, voiced similar displeasure with the P5’s limited work. The result has been a noticeable shift in the tone around the ‘P5 process’; it has gone from cautiously optimistic at the time of the P5’s first conference in London to largely antagonistic. Assertions that the P5 actively hinder efforts to strengthen the NPT, by behaving in an opaque ‘cartel’-like fashion, are now commonplace.

As will be outlined below, there have been developments across the three core areas of P5 work since the 2013 Preparatory Committee and a handful of concrete outputs are in the pre-Review Conference pipeline. Getting to this stage in P5 discussions has been a struggle, and the fruits of that hard labour may still contain only small glimmers of novelty. Small steps forward are not necessarily insignificant, but the P5 will have to show that they can build on them to realise the long-term value they have so often spoken of.

**Glossary**

Significant external attention has been devoted to the P5’s efforts to produce a common glossary of nuclear terms. At the very outset of the P5 process, participants acknowledged that future arms control and transparency discussions would be inhibited by a lack of a common nuclear language. Basic terms such as ‘warhead’ or ‘fissile material’ continue to be understood
in different ways by individual NWS. To reconcile these differences, the UK proposed at the 2009 London P5 conference to create a common glossary which would help to facilitate the P5’s future work. In 2012, China agreed to be the formal co-ordinator of this project, as well as its corresponding working group.

An earlier RUSI report laid out the general working plan for the glossary project, which culminates in the intended publication of the document at the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Four primary stages were initially identified by the Chinese co-ordinators: submission of national proposals for terms to be defined; creation of a feasible shortlist of terms; definition of shortlisted terms in English; and translation of those terms into French, Chinese and Russian. Approximately 200–300 terms were agreed upon as a shortlist in time for the 2013 Geneva P5 conference. A subsequent experts’ meeting of the working group was held in September the same year and laid out a more detailed timeline for completion of the initial glossary.

Since then, there has been little public discussion of the working group’s progress in NPT or other fora. However, conversations with NWS officials highlight delays in the project timeline. Initial projections from Chinese officials suggested that an English version of the glossary could be completed by early 2014, but this aspiration could not be realised. Unspecified substantive disputes over a number of terms persist, and finding agreement with Russia may again be proving difficult. This is not unprecedented, as Russia notably held up consensus on the shortlist of glossary terms in early 2013.

In the next few months, two experts’ meetings of the working group are anticipated. The first will be held in Beijing in the summer of 2014, with the second taking place elsewhere – possibly London – later in the year. It is hoped that the remaining substantive issues can be resolved in these meetings so that the final stage – the translation of definitions – can begin swiftly. At the moment, a conscious decision seems to have been taken not to begin translation of those definitions that have already been agreed.

10. Ibid.
11. Chinese officials have previously expressed their frustration that others were not willing to host experts’ meetings.
Despite the evident delays, China continues to reiterate its pledge to submit a glossary on schedule to the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Conversations with officials suggest that the final product will likely include a substantial number of definitions whose content has been borrowed from existing nuclear glossaries, such as that of the International Atomic Energy Agency. However, observers can also expect definitions that capture some significant, previously unforeseen, agreement. Careful scrutiny of the eventual document will distinguish the two, and NNWS will undoubtedly judge the glossary exercise on the latter category.

In the interim, China could be encouraged to give a formal presentation about the glossary working-group process and a general overview of some of its preliminary findings to NNWS officials. Doing so before the next Review Conference would demonstrate that the P5 are willing to improve the procedural transparency of their work. The P5’s procedural opacity has traditionally been a source of frustration for onlookers, and the group has struggled to make improvements in this area. NWS are reluctant to move in this direction, arguing that increasing procedural transparency would create a trade-off in the potential productivity of P5 discussions. A presentation by Chinese co-ordinators would avoid this dynamic if it was delivered after the working group’s substantive task is largely complete. Furthermore, such a presentation would create an opportunity for pre-emptive and positive public messaging about the glossary, setting the stage for the document’s multilingual publication at the 2015 Review Conference.

With substantive loose ends from the defining process unlikely to be tied until autumn this year, there are two occasions which might best suit a Chinese presentation. The first is the General Assembly First Committee, which is held annually around that time. A briefing in a First Committee side event would ensure that relevant representatives from all UN member states have the opportunity to attend. The second occasion – the next P5 conference – may be deemed more suitable if the P5 encounter further delays in signing off on English glossary definitions. The 2015 P5 conference will be held in London much earlier than usual, possibly as soon as late January. Civil-service activity in the UK is widely restricted in the period preceding a general election – the next of which will take place in May 2015. Specific restrictions on government activity are decided by the Cabinet Office, but the organisation of external conferences and even conference attendance is frequently prohibited during this time. Consequently, the next P5 conference will be hosted by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office in late January, months before the 2015 Review Conference. China should be at an advanced

stage of translating the English glossary by this point, and should therefore be in a position to make a presentation at the P5 conference public event, to which NNWS representatives are generally invited.

Even once the glossary is presented to the 2015 Review Conference, the project is unlikely to end there. A RUSI report speculated in 2013 that China would prefer to continue developing subsequent versions of the text, discussing and adding terms that did not make the initial shortlist or on which no consensus could previously be found.13 The joint statement from the 2014 Beijing P5 conference implies that the five have already agreed to do just this. It reads: ‘The P5 reviewed the work carried out by the Working Group on the Glossary of Key Nuclear Terms under China’s leadership, and in this regard, noted the success of the Second Experts’ Meeting of the Working Group held on 26–27 September 2013, in Beijing, which established milestones for the completion of the first phase of the Glossary effort for the 2015 RevCon’.14 Future iterations could prove valuable so long as the working group continues to strive to find new agreement on terms relevant to arms control and disarmament. Nevertheless, the P5 may encounter difficulty in trying to convince NNWS that the glossary project should again form the backbone of the group’s work to 2020.

Verification and Monitoring
Gaining a better understanding of the processes and technology needed to verify future warhead dismantlement has been a consistent priority for the UK – the founder of the P5 process – since its 1998 Strategic Defence Review. Partly for this reason, the subject has remained part of the P5’s discussion agenda, albeit sometimes only tenuously so.

Prior to 2013, the P5’s activities in the verification field largely fell into two categories: warhead-dismantlement verification, with relevance to arms-control activity in the more distant future; and treaty-compliance monitoring, where the structures for verification are largely already in place.15 The UK and Norway had been jointly exploring warhead-dismantlement verification since 2007, much to the displeasure of some NWS, who feared the creation of an expectation that NNWS be included in sensitive processes. Relatedly, the UK hosted a meeting of P5 technical experts on verification in 2012. A meeting of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) verification experts subsequently took place in Vienna in March 2013.16

In the area of treaty implementation, Russia and the US regularly briefed their P5 colleagues on their progress, in the period 2009–13, towards implementing the New START Treaty. Furthermore, at the 2013 P5 conference in Geneva, the P5 announced that they had explored opportunities to collectively support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization’s (CTBTO) next Integrated Field Exercise in Jordan, which will take place in late 2014.

Since September 2013, there have been several developments relating to NWS work in the verification and monitoring field. The first is the revelation at a UN General Assembly First Committee side event in October 2013 of a decades-long programme of warhead-dismantlement verification research between the UK and US. It is unclear whether the joint presentation at the General Assembly was also the first occasion on which other P5 states were made aware of this activity.

Hardly surprising given the two countries’ close ties and historical co-operation on nuclear weapons, the project nevertheless provoked confusion due to its lengthy concealment and subsequently sudden disclosure. Some have suggested that the timing of the presentation was driven by a perceived need within Washington and London to have a ‘new’ success story to trumpet, particularly at a time when no fresh initiatives were emerging from the P5 process.

The roots of this specific instance of bilateral collaboration reach back to October 2000, when the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Atomic Weapons Establishment proposed a technical verification co-operation programme to their American counterparts. A series of exchanges of technical experts was outlined shortly thereafter. According to the MoD, the identified objective was then, and remains now, to ‘assist technical experts in developing, evaluating, and gaining experience with technologies, monitoring procedures, and verification in real nuclear weapons facilities’. Specifically, the two countries aim to better understand the nuclear-weapons dismantlement process. They are similarly interested in the technologies that can protect sensitive information, increase monitoring confidence in warhead dismantlement, provide chain of custody for warheads, and monitor the storage of any highly enriched uranium or plutonium removed under an arms-control agreement. Some of these goals and areas of technical focus also guide the work of the...
UK-Norway Initiative. Joint US-UK activities have thus far indicated the need for the development of new technology that can support monitored warhead dismantlement, and co-operation between the two countries is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Secondly, work on the much-touted UK-Norway Initiative has been extended to 2017. The two countries have decided that some of the areas they have identified require continued attention. In particular, they are likely to spend more time detailing and evaluating lessons learnt from previous exchanges. Both the government-to-government technical exchanges and the UK-Norway non-governmental simulation exercises for students will continue.

Thirdly, the UK announced at a side event for the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee that it plans to explore possibilities for a similar, but perhaps more limited, programme of verification research with China. Bilateral discussions with Chinese officials and technical specialists about opportunities for collaborative projects in this field are likely to ramp up in summer 2014. Indeed, warhead-dismantlement verification is a subject in which both countries share an interest. The UK’s is well documented; but Chinese officials, for their part, have more quietly acknowledged the ten-plus years of work on this issue by their nuclear laboratories.

Though no more specific information on the P5’s collective plans for the CTBTO Integrated Field Exercise in late 2014 have been announced, the group reiterated its intention to make a ‘significant’ and tangible technical contribution. Some NWS have disclosed their planned individual assistance to the exercise. China, for instance, has said that it will provide rapid measurement and detection equipment. By the time of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the Integrated Field Exercise will have been completed. The P5’s role in this event can thus be expected to feature in forthcoming individual or collective statements by the NWS.

As the above portfolio of verification and monitoring work demonstrates, nearly all of the relevant activities by NWS were unilateral (involving only one recognised NWS) or bilateral (involving two). Whether these can be

19. Ibid.
classed as ‘P5’ activities therefore remains open to debate. In some cases the distinction is difficult, especially as briefings on such activities take place at P5 meetings and are referenced in group statements. This is not necessarily a counterproductive trend. NWS gatherings can play a useful role in co-ordinating bilateral or unilateral initiatives, identifying common goals and objectives, and promoting the expansion or replication of project models. Should UK–China co-operation on verification come to fruition, for example, it will likely have been helped rather than hindered by interaction with the P5 process. That said, in order to assign credit appropriately, it is equally important to distinguish whether specific activities are a product of P5 meetings or are conducted parallel to them.

**Nuclear Transparency and Common Reporting**

Like disarmament itself, transparency regarding national nuclear arsenals and the policies that govern them is a slow-moving affair. NWS remain concerned that increased transparency could undermine the deterrence potential of their arsenals, although each differs in its view of the point at which the trade-off takes place. For this reason, the state of nuclear transparency varies widely within the P5. The US and UK openly declare total stockpile numbers and numbers of strategically deployed warheads, amongst other things. China, for its part, argues that it is particularly forthcoming in its nuclear posture, as demonstrated by its ‘no-first-use’ policy.

For well over a decade, NNWS have argued that they require more of this transparency in order to assess whether their NWS counterparts are making progress in implementing their Article VI commitments. The 2010 NPT Review Conference Action Plan clearly identified nuclear transparency as a priority and laid out concrete measures for NWS. Three specific action items committed the P5 to transparency measures or requested them.

First, Action 5 states that NWS should make progress in a number of disarmament-relevant areas, one of which is ‘further enhancing transparency’.23 The same action item committed the P5 to report on their undertakings in this area to the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting. The national reports submitted as part of this obligation will be considered in greater detail below.

Secondly, Action 20 says: ‘States parties should submit regular reports, within the framework of the strengthened review process for the Treaty, on the implementation of the present action plan’.24 This request for voluntary action applied to all NPT members, not merely those with the bomb.

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Finally, Action 21 included a suggestion for confidence-building by NWS. It encouraged them ‘to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information without prejudice to national security’. In preparation for this, the UN Secretary-General was invited to create a publicly available repository for any information submitted. In short, from amongst these three action items, NWS were only formally committed to reporting on their disarmament-related progress under Action 5. Transparency in other areas was merely voluntary.

From early on in the post-Review Conference period, it was clear that the P5 had acknowledged that additional transparency was expected of them, and in short order. The joint statement issued by the P5 in 2012 stated that the group ‘considered proposals for a standard reporting form’. One year later, it was announced that France would lead the P5’s efforts in the area of nuclear transparency, although it was previously unclear whether this discussion related only to Action 5. By early 2014, the group had allegedly reached consensus on a common reporting framework, though China is said to have made the process of agreeing it painful. As shown in Annex 1, the common headings that were agreed were remarkably general and put little pressure on the more opaque NWS to step out of their comfort zones. Their wording avoided directing states to submit quantitative information, which would have been disagreeable to a majority of the P5.

Yet despite eventual consensus on a reporting framework, misinterpretations by some NWS over their disarmament-relevant reporting commitments persisted until only weeks before the 2014 Preparatory Committee. The Beijing P5 conference statement masks this disharmony. At the meeting, the P5 ‘introduced to each other their national reports consistent with [the] reporting framework’, it said. In fact, this introduction did not include the presentation of actual reports by all members. Only one country presented its completed national report, while at least one other was reportedly still unaware that it was expected to do anything except make a statement at the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the formal report of the latter country was amongst the last to be tabled in New York.

The reports that eventually materialised at the NPT Preparatory Committee in April 2014 were a hybrid of the commitments and requests captured in the aforementioned sections of the Action Plan. Indeed, the cover page of each

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27. US Department of State, ‘Joint Statement on the Beijing P5 Conference’. 
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report attests to the fact that they were designed to be submitted ‘pursuant to Actions 5, 20, and 21’.28

Their presentation at the Preparatory Committee speaks to the deadline in Action 5, as does the ordering of the contents of the documents, with disarmament-relevant progress treated first. The inclusion of content on other pillars of the NPT, however, relates directly to the request spelled out in Action 20. Furthermore, the ‘standard reporting’ aspect – with commonly agreed section headings – acts as a confidence-building measure along the lines of that called for in Action 21. Unfortunately, with the ‘standardised’ framework consisting only of vague headings, it is difficult to envision how the information provided can be usefully entered into any UN-managed information repository.

The decision to submit reports relating to all three action items was likely as much a measure of good will as it was one of practicality. In particular, the chosen scope of the reporting project had obvious attractions. First, it established a fairly comprehensive baseline understanding of each NWS’s national approach to the three NPT pillars. For a first report, this makes sense. Secondly, defining the tasks in this way gave everyone something to talk about. Should reports have been drafted pursuant to Action 5 only, the scope of the documents would have been inherently limited to progress on disarmament since the 2010 Review Conference Action Plan. Not all NWS would have had much to present. By broadening the scope, all five countries were able to produce at least fifteen pages of content. In addition, each report contained at least some information on new, concrete efforts – albeit often on the non-proliferation or peaceful uses of nuclear energy pillars. Structuring the reports in this way may have moderated the level of criticism that might otherwise have come their way. As will be discussed below, however, both of these aforementioned attractions apply only in the short term. Any future repetition of the exercise will constitute a more substantive and a much greater public-relations challenge for the P5.

Before turning to the current debate over the P5’s recent work, including expectations for additional nuclear transparency, it is worth analysing each of the national reports submitted to the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee. What follows is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of their contents, but rather a brief overview of some of this author’s reflections, primarily on the documents’ disarmament sections.

People’s Republic of China

Section one of the common reporting framework covers ‘national measures relating to disarmament’.29 Yet its first sub-section invites much broader
content on national-security and nuclear-weapons policies, even if not directly relevant to disarmament. China availed itself of this opportunity. It outlined its general national-security approach, including just-war theory and strategic culture. Unlike the other reports, the Chinese one refrained from mentioning the current shape or composition of its nuclear forces, even in general terms. Instead, on the whole, the disarmament-focused section of the report was a long-winded repetition of well-known Chinese declaratory policy on national defence and nuclear weapons, with few references to actions relevant to Article VI taken since the last Review Conference. The explanation for this is simple: there have been hardly any Chinese developments in this area.

A number of NNWS representatives commented in particular on the report’s inclusion of quotations from Chinese military strategists such as Sun Tzu. From their perspective, it signified that China – with its paper-thin record on disarmament – was merely trying to fill space and avoid acknowledging that it is presently uninterested in further practical steps towards disarmament. In fact, the international community sees China moving in the opposite direction. Beijing appears to be increasing its arsenal, engaging in modernisation efforts (though it is not the only NWS currently doing so), and introducing a third, sea-based leg to its existing nuclear forces.

One helpful component of the Chinese national report was the discussion of co-operation with the CTBTO. The report provides a useful update on the state of China’s eleven monitoring stations and its radionuclide laboratory. It discloses the planned provision of certain rapid measurement and detection equipment to the CTBTO’s Integrated Field Exercise in 2014. It also references recent technical training courses and workshops held in China in support of the CTBTO’s work.

This glint of useful arms-control-relevant information in a sea of worn content highlights a wider, forthcoming tension within NPT discussions. On the one hand, NPT members may wish to applaud China for producing information as part of a transparency exercise, however unimpressive most of it may have been. It is worth remembering that the submission of such a report by China is unprecedented. Most, if not all NNWS, will want to see China repeat this practice, thereby establishing a more robust precedent for transparency from the most opaque NWS. On the other hand, NWS also recognise the need to continue to pressure China and be critical of its aforementioned advancements in the nuclear-weapons sphere, which run counter to international disarmament goals. NNWS are likely to struggle

31. Ibid., p. 9.
with these competing pressures in the lead-up to, and especially beyond, the next Review Conference.

**France**

France is generally seen by NNWS as one of the more opaque nuclear-weapons holders. Like all of the other reports, the bulk of the material offered at the Preparatory Committee was a reiteration of previous statements. However, there were commendable aspects of France’s submission that received little attention. Unlike China’s contribution, the first section of the French report made an effort to outline the status quo of the country’s nuclear-force composition, rather than merely the high-level policies that concern those forces.32 The French report also contained a new declaration about the airborne leg of the national deterrent and current stockpile numbers. In 2008, then-President Nicholas Sarkozy announced: ‘with respect to the airborne component, the number of nuclear weapons, missiles and aircraft will be reduced by one-third... I can also tell you that... our arsenal will include fewer than 300 nuclear warheads’.33 The document submitted to the 2014 Preparatory Committee confirmed that the country has now successfully reduced its airborne leg and total stockpile numbers as promised.34

This declaration partially counteracts the recent criticisms levelled against the French report, and France’s nuclear transparency record more generally. A number of NNWS representatives at the Preparatory Committee noted that the disarmament section of the French report primarily contained information announced prior to 2010. That chapter, they said, could therefore not be considered pertinent to the implementation of the 2010 Review Conference Action Plan. France’s update on the implementation of its previous stockpile declaration, however, can indeed be considered new. In fact, this is something that the UK – spoken of as being more transparent in the nuclear field – did not do.

**Russia**

The Russian report leaves the impression that Moscow is uninterested in further nuclear disarmament and arms-control measures. Russia offered exactly one sentence of information under the ‘Transparency and Confidence-

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Building Measures’ heading. Furthermore, one-quarter of the word count of its first section – intended to outline efforts to implement Russia’s NPT disarmament commitments – was devoted to an explanation of why Moscow does not see further disarmament steps as presently possible. The report affirms that Russian co-operation in any additional arms control is contingent on, amongst other things: countries forswearing the accumulation of non-nuclear strategic offensive arms; the abandonment of strategic anti-ballistic missile systems; the elimination of ‘quantitative and qualitative imbalances in conventional arms’; and the ‘settlement of regional conflicts’.35

Numbers of deployed warheads and strategic delivery vehicles – declared and publicly available in line with the requirements of the New START Treaty – were excluded from the Russian report (as in the US report). In Moscow’s case, this is likely because it prefers not to acknowledge that it is increasing its number of warheads and delivery vehicles under New START categories. According to fact sheets released by the US State Department, in the period between 1 September 2013 and 1 March 2014, for instance, the number of Russian warheads on treaty-accountable strategic delivery vehicles increased from 1,400 to 1,512.36 While this remains within New START limits, and below US levels, it is not a fact that Moscow will want to advertise to an NPT audience.

The first section of Russia’s report does contain a relatively comprehensive summary of its nuclear-disarmament history since 1987. However, in any subsequent reports, NWS, including Russia, will face pressure to focus on recent developments – namely those since the last Review Conference.

The UK

In large part, the UK’s first chapter reiterated disarmament declarations made in 2010 (regarding projections for the national stockpile and strategically deployed warheads) or shortly thereafter (regarding numbers of warheads and missiles on individual submarines). It did not provide new updates on the implementation of these declarations in the way that the US and France did. In terms of the the country’s general level of nuclear-weapons transparency


– which is admittedly consistently higher than that of other NWS – this report does not change the status quo.

The UK’s report distinguished itself from others in two ways, both a product of the UK’s general approach to nuclear transparency: the volume of quantitative data, and the inclusion of projections for nuclear-force composition. For the last fifteen years, London has periodically released quantitative information on its deployed and stockpiled warheads. The report submitted at the Preparatory Committee reiterated the most recent figures from the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Indeed, the SDSR also highlighted the UK’s tendency towards spelling out medium-term disarmament timelines. It states that the country will reduce its warhead stockpile to no more than 180 by the mid-2020s.

While the UK provides disarmament timelines, it does not offer real-time or near-real-time figures. As mentioned above, this was demonstrated by its report to the Preparatory Committee. In the future, the UK could consider stating whether its process of warhead dismantlement is on track and could even give an approximate percentage completion rate.

Submissions to future NPT meetings could similarly include reference to the Cabinet Office-led Trident Alternatives Review completed in mid-2013, which explored alternative nuclear systems and postures for the UK. Though this detailed study was a manifestation of coalition politics, it nevertheless demonstrates that the UK has explored cost-saving alternatives for a minimum deterrent in the context of existing international norms and the country’s NPT commitments.

The US

The US report’s disarmament section contained a comparatively large volume of quantitative data. Most of the US statistics are historical, although compared to the other reports there is a relatively robust collection of quantitative information from the post-2010 period. Importantly, the document contained a rare instance of new information released specifically ‘for’ the 2014 Preparatory Committee. Washington declared that as of 30 September 2013, its stockpile totalled 4,804 nuclear warheads, excluding those retired and awaiting dismantlement. Additionally, 1,204 of those

excluded warheads had been dismantled between September 2009 and September 2013. The only other occasion on which the US has declared a total stockpile number was at the 2010 Review Conference.\textsuperscript{41} Having now updated those initial figures – again for an NPT audience – the US will be expected to do so regularly in future.

There are some publicly available figures that the US did not declare. Like Russia, it did not provide the latest numbers of New START strategic delivery vehicles, or the current numbers of warheads on them.

With regards to nuclear-force projections, the timeline for New START Treaty implementation necessitates US advance planning of force composition. When the US signed New START it was above the ceilings for each category of treaty-accountable delivery vehicles or warheads. It has therefore had to devise plans for a reduced force structure. As a consequence, on 8 April 2014, the US Department of Defense released a report outlining its planned deterrent structure for 2018 – specifically, the number of strategic delivery vehicles that the US will maintain in each leg of the triad.\textsuperscript{42} These figures were reiterated in the US submission to the 2014 Preparatory Committee.

\textbf{All Eyes on the Review Conference}

Limited movement in the P5 process over the past year has followed predictable but still positive trajectories.\textsuperscript{43} The five NWS continued to brief each other on bilateral verification efforts – a fact which highlights the possibility that bilateral projects and activities could fill gaps where multilateralism proves impossible. The P5 also forged ahead with their collective work to create a common glossary of terms. Finally, as they had committed in the 2010 Action Plan, the P5 tabled national reports with a common framework. While they contained only sparse instances of novel information, the exercise serves as a solid foundation for future reporting iterations.

A glance ahead serves as a reminder that additional outputs – namely a first version of the glossary – are expected in time for the Review Conference. Three variables concerning the P5’s core activities will partially determine the atmosphere at that meeting. The first is the content of the glossary that is eventually produced. If the document does indeed include definitions that capture new agreement between the five NWS, and could potentially

\textsuperscript{41} Berger and Chalmers, ‘Great Expectations’, p. 20.


\textsuperscript{43} See Berger and Chalmers, ‘Great Expectations’ for a summary of these predictions.
be useful in negotiating future arms-control agreements, then NNWS may deem that the project has been worthwhile. A positive ruling on this case could temporarily reduce some of the existing antagonism around the P5 process; however, on its own, it is unlikely to spark a lasting restoration of hope in NWS ability to collectively change the pace of disarmament.

The second variable is the shape of the discussion over the future of NWS transparency. Conversations after the publication of national reports at the 2014 Preparatory Committee give some indication of the likely trajectory of this issue. There were varying levels of satisfaction with the results amongst NNWS, and most recognised the disparity in the quality of the reports. Yet even some representatives from the more vocal European nations, who remain frustrated by the lack of new developments on disarmament, were quietly pleased and saw the reports as a ‘good first step’. Many NNWS credited the unprecedented submission of this type of transparency declaration to the inclusion of a deadline in the 2010 Review Conference Action Plan. Not only should the exercise be repeated, they claim, but the assignment of homework and deadlines for NWS should also continue to be a feature of Review Conference Final Documents.

At least one NWS is almost certain to object strongly to the idea that deadlines have a place in the NPT cycle and that NWS should be expected to regularly submit national reports: Russian representatives made this apparent in a closed meeting on the margins of the 2014 Preparatory Committee. They stated firmly that, at next year’s conference, they will not countenance anything but a straightforward reaffirmation of the pillars of the NPT and a roll-over of the 2010 Action Plan. The implication was that Moscow will not consider additional measures at the present time, as was clarified thoroughly in the first section of Russia’s national report.

This is an issue that is likely to divide the P5 and could sour relations with NNWS. Depending on the format and frequency of the transparency exercise requested of the NWS, the US and UK may be inclined to acquiesce. Annual submissions would be an unreasonable request, but a report once in every review cycle could be palatable to those two countries. In terms of format, NNWS are unlikely to encourage a process of continual additions to the already lengthy national papers. Instead, they may henceforth prefer reports that explicitly limit their scope to measures taken since the preceding Review Conference. It is improbable that this would be accepted even by the most transparent NWS, unless they could add details of measures taken to implement other NPT pillars. Focusing the scope of the exercise solely on disarmament commitments, where developments are sparse, could make NWS averse to national reporting generally.
The third variable is how the P5 communicate the work they have been doing in core areas and how they intend to take it forward. As suggested above, more detailed and regular messaging by the P5 about their work could help erode the impression of their cartel-like, secretive behaviour. A joint statement at the 2015 Review Conference would help in this regard, as would presentations on P5 projects such as the glossary. Though the P5 ordinarily make statements at NPT meetings, regrettably they failed to do so in 2014, likely because of national divides over its potential content.

Furthermore, a robust communication strategy, especially one that spells out a forward-looking plan for P5 activity, would demonstrate that the P5 are in fact prepared to lead, as Secretary Clinton once pledged. Without a clear and well thought-out working plan going forward, doing so will be difficult, and the P5 risk stumbling through the next NPT review cycle. They may be tempted to undertake small, ad-hoc projects that are not a clear progression from work previously done, or whose added value is questionable. Or they may be tempted to badge other bilateral inter-NWS activities as ‘P5 work’ in order to pad the group’s public portfolio. The P5 should therefore begin formulating a general working plan for P5 activities post-2015 that they can present and discuss next year in New York. It may be helpful for them to consider how the projects they are currently undertaking can serve as stepping stones to more ambitious trust-building activities.

If the P5 acknowledge the variables mentioned above and work actively to mitigate the risks associated with them, there is still a chance that the negative tone surrounding the P5 process and threatening the forthcoming Review Conference might be eroded. Above all, NWS must convince their non-nuclear counterparts that the process’s value and significance in the long term is not a shield for total, collective stagnation in the short and medium term. How they communicate the process and results of their first tranche of projects, and whether they agree to build on that activity, will serve as an indicator of their determination to do so. Should the P5 process reach the ten-year milestone without having a deeper body of work to show for the passage of time, the rest of the NPT community is unlikely to throw a birthday party to celebrate.

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Annex 1: The P5’s Common Reporting Framework

National Report Pursuant to Actions 5, 20, and 21 of the NPT Review Conference Final Document

As provided in the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference Action Plan, the Governments of the five NPT nuclear-weapon States, or ‘P5’, are working to implement Action 5 to ‘further enhance transparency and increase mutual confidence’ and to make national reports on our Action 5 and other undertakings to the 2014 NPT Preparatory Committee under a common framework, consistent with Actions 20 and 21.

Action 21 states ‘As a confidence-building measure, all the nuclear-weapon States are encouraged to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information without prejudice to national security.’ The framework we use for our national reports includes common categories of topics under which relevant information is reported, and it addresses all three pillars of the NPT: disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

We encourage all States Parties, consistent with Action 20, to make similar reports.

Section I: Reporting on National Measures Relating to Disarmament

i. National Security Policies, Doctrine, and Activities Associated with Nuclear Weapons
ii. Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Arms Control (including Nuclear Disarmament) and Verification
iii. Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures
iv. Other Related Issues

Section II: Reporting on National Measures Relating to Non-proliferation

i. Safeguards
ii. Export Controls
iii. Nuclear Security
iv. Nuclear Weapon Free Zones
v. Compliance and Other Related Issues/Concerns
vi. Other contributions to Nuclear Weapons Non-proliferation
Section III: Reporting on National Measures Relating to the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy

i. Promoting Peaceful Uses
ii. Technical Assistance through the IAEA to its Member States
iii. Nuclear Safety and Civil Nuclear Liability
iv. Other Related Issues

Section IV: Any Other Actions Taken to Implement and/or Strengthen the NPT
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