

# Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

1995 Nobel Peace Prize

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## Arms Control Revisited: Can the Regime be Rebuilt?

On 1 February 2019 Pugwash held a consultation in Washington, D.C., to assess the perspectives of the American strategic community on the prospects for arms control. The meeting gathered 20 experts and former officials from across the political spectrum, and took place immediately following a set of meetings with senior Russian officials in Moscow by a Pugwash delegation, as well as a similar consultation with the Russian strategic community in December 2018.

The stimulus was the increased pressure on bilateral strategic relations caused by the announced withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty by the United States,<sup>1</sup> the latest symptom of the steady deterioration of the global arms control architecture over the past two decades. In this context, there are growing threats to strategic stability, arms control stability, and crisis stability.

The emphasis of the Pugwash project is that the argument for arms control appears to have eroded: *greater effort is needed to re-assert that arms control is not simply about legally-binding constraints but is an instrument that allows states to pursue their national interests and their common interest in achieving a more secure environment that would reduce the risk of war.* The decline of arms control cannot be reversed so long as arms control opponents are winning many or most of the policy battles.

Participants noted that the range of possible solutions to the mutual allegations of INF violations was not fully taken up by either side in the past few years: there existed avenues of addressing the US accusations regarding the Russian missile 9M729 (and its more recent alleged deployment) contained within the Treaty but little appetite for pursuing reasonable resolution of the issue or allowing sensibly-managed and clarifying inspections and verification of compliance. It is clear that the dispute is nested within a range of political and strategic factors for both sides, including concern over other states' development of INF-range missiles, and ultimately both sides have put themselves in opposing corners without a clear way out. A number of participants were keen to point out that rhetoric of only "two sides" not only neutralizes the European theatre, where intermediate nuclear forces are likely to have the biggest impact, but ignores the wider non-proliferation and disarmament environment.

Nonetheless, given the sharp disagreement on violations, one participant noted that effort must be made to give Russia an 'off-ramp' which might permit the arms control ecosphere to not be fatally

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 February 2019, just as the Pugwash consultation was beginning, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo convened a meeting of experts (some of whom later that day participated in our meeting) on the INF treaty, following a morning press conference that confirmed the withdrawal. See Secretary Pompeo's public remarks made earlier that day, at <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2019/02/288712.htm>.

poisoned. Here, many felt it was crucial to ‘decouple’ the discussions of extension of the New START treaty from the current negative climate surrounding the INF, particularly because accusations of violations of New START have already begun. There was concern over the Administration’s attitudes toward New START – the last-remaining bilateral arms control agreement. Most believe that it is crucial to preserve and extend New START because it represents the only remaining bilateral regulatory framework constraining US and Russian nuclear forces. Hence, although it was understood that there was little urgency to address the details, the Administration should be encouraged to seek the five-year extension which would then provide a good opportunity to consider and plan for what comes next. However, given its current direction, the Administration may show little enthusiasm for preserving the Treaty, with one possibility being that the US withdraws before the formal expiration of the treaty. As such, the House of Representatives becomes a key constituency to engage and lobby to enact measures that limits the White House’s ability to take such a course of action.

Ultimately, a key question arose over what both arms control and strategic stability will look like in the future. Clearly, the multi-valent nuclear world and more fractious political climate provide strong challenges to multilateral arrangements. Equally, the complexities of new technologies – including hypersonic carriers, cyber and AI – all complicate the nuclear realm. In particular, ballistic missile defenses are a crucial point of contention for both Russia and China, and the more widespread problem of conventional cruise missiles needs to be addressed. In this context, discussion touched upon whether numbers-based limitations were likely to be part of future processes, or whether a new kind of formula – potentially involving ratios at a multilateral level or a broad set of issue-areas in a bi- or trilateral setting – could be identified to revive arms control. Some urged that there is a need to develop and promote a new model of arms control.

Nevertheless, it was pointed out that destroying the current architecture not only sends the wrong message to other states but takes the international community back down a road of unconstrained arms-racing. With the INF treaty discarded, many states will have questions regarding disarmament commitments of the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons – this development has the potential for a serious negative impact on the 2020 NPT Review Conference process.

#### **Ideas for further development:**

- **Contribute to the restoration of US-Russia dialogue.** There is a wide sense that the US-Russia relationship has broken down and that there is a need for fresh dialogue. This represents an opportunity for Pugwash to play its traditional role of promoting communication and building connections. Issues that could be addressed in such a dialogue include:
  - ❖ Missile defense. This will be a crucial issue for the future, with potential to stimulate arms racing and disrupt arms control. Perhaps create a new international panel on missile defense controls.
  - ❖ Re-examine transparency regimes coupled with commitments toward strategic restraint, in particular over the over next two years. Build on or work for a commitment by Russia to engage in verification work.

- ❖ Seek to minimize the damage from the collapse of the INF agreement. This could include, for example, a US statement that outlines there is no need for further capabilities (e.g. GLCM in Europe) and a commitment to discuss nuclear postures that keep missile systems away from Europe.
  - ❖ Demonstrate and explore the undesirability of an unregulated nuclear environment. The best interests of neither side will be advanced in such an environment, which will surely bring with it greater costs and higher risks.
- **Give sustained and serious attention to the future of arms control.** Important topics include:
    - ❖ Rebuild a persuasive case for arms control.
    - ❖ Develop an arms control agenda for 2021 and beyond: If there is a new US Administration with a more positive attitude toward arms control, what should it do? How can the architecture of restraint be reconstructed?
    - ❖ Preparation of a constituency in US Congress to push forward legislation restricting the ability of the White House to withdraw from New START unilaterally.
    - ❖ Address the issue of tactical nuclear weapons, including NATO deployments in Europe.
    - ❖ Create and socialize new models of arms control that can account for the various complexities; these may involve either a range of commitments across issue-areas or universal obligations.
    - ❖ Develop thinking about how the nuclear relationship can be managed without negotiated, treaty-based arms control. This will be necessary if, as many believe, arms control expires completely in the next several years.
    - ❖ Begin working to develop trilateral nuclear discussions among Russia, China, and the United States. At present, this is viewed as important, possibly necessary, but impossible – particularly because Beijing has no interest in such three-sided interactions. Here too, Pugwash can play its traditional role of promoting dialogue, and make a beginning of what will inevitably be a long process.
    - ❖ Recognize and emphasize the importance of preserving basic nuclear norms – non-use, no testing, nonproliferation – as key elements of the nuclear order as arms control decays.