

For a Successful Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

The Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), originally scheduled for this year, has been postponed to early next year given the current corona pandemic. The time until then must be used to work towards a successful outcome of the Conference. As former German diplomats accredited to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, we consider it of crucial importance to preserve and strengthen the Treaty that came into force 50 years ago. It remains the indispensable framework for nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The intensifying rivalry of the great powers and the fragmentation of international relations are growing dangers for European security. The threat posed by nuclear weapons is being largely ignored by the general public. The double track approach that has successfully determined international politics, especially in overcoming the Cold War and beyond – maintaining adequate defense capabilities and deterrence while at the same time being willing to engage in dialogue, détente and arms control – seems to have been forgotten with regard to its second component. President Trump's return to primarily confrontational policies has critically weakened the arms control architecture, which is crucially important for international stability. The United States unilaterally terminated the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). The Open Skies Treaty, important for military transparency, is about to expire, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has still not entered into force. The last remaining agreement limiting the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States – the New START Treaty – is acutely threatened. The latest information published by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute SIPRI demonstrates the danger of a new nuclear arms race. The United States and Russia are not only modernizing their nuclear arsenals, but are also assigning an increased role to nuclear weapons in their defense doctrines and not ruling out the first use of these weapons in a regional context. There are endeavours in the US Congress to include funds in the budget for the resumption of nuclear weapons tests. Also China is vigorously pushing forward the expansion and modernization of its nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

It is therefore imperative to restore the central place due to nuclear arms control on the international agenda. The preservation and strengthening of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is a top priority. We consider the following to be of paramount importance:

1. The United States and Russia must again serve as role models and take the lead in nuclear arms control and disarmament. Together, the two countries have more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. The new talks between the two countries, which should be conducted without preconditions, are therefore of particular importance. China's non-attendance must not become a pretext for not extending the New START Treaty and for refraining from further bilateral measures to limit and reduce the arsenals of the United States and Russia. In addition, after the end of the INF Treaty, restraint arrangements on the development and deployment of medium-range systems would constitute a major step to rebuild confidence.
2. The USA must be convinced that a conference success is in their interest and that they can make a decisive contribution towards that end through a constructive and results-oriented posture and the willingness to compromise. The USA could send out important signals by taking concrete steps such as extending the New START treaty, initiating the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran (JCPOA), thereby strengthening international and its own security.
3. The five nuclear-weapon states – the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom - should demonstrate their willingness to meet their NPT disarmament obligations. To this end, they should renew their commitment to the international arms control acquis.

China and the USA should finally ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In addition, the five states can build confidence through increased transparency regarding their potential and doctrines. It would also be important to contribute to strategic confidence-building and stability through measures that prevent miscalculations and reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons.

4. A clear political signal from the nuclear-weapon states that they remain committed to the fundamental goal of preventing a nuclear war would be of major significance. The important statement made in Geneva in 1985 by President Ronald Reagan and Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought“ should therefore be reaffirmed by all nuclear-weapon states.

5. Measures to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East are urgently needed. The affirmation of the goal to establish such a zone was an important condition for the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. All states in the region, including Israel and Iran, should take part in a conference on such a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In addition, it is time for the United States to ratify the protocols to the Nuclear-Free Zone Treaties in Africa, the South Pacific and Central Asia.

6. The States Parties to the NPT must find the way back to unity and common ground. To this end, the Geneva Conference on Disarmament must be allowed to fulfill its fundamental original responsibilities. In particular, all states possessing nuclear weapons should finally clear the way to begin negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, FMCT) which would also cover existing stocks of fissile material.

We call on the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany to become actively engaged with this in mind and undertake every effort to contribute to achieving a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference. As EU Council Presidency in the second half of 2020, Germany has a particular responsibility.

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