



## Advancing Nuclear Disarmament: The US Role

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### Summary<sup>1</sup>

*A year into President Obama's second term, the outlook for US leadership in advancing nuclear disarmament is bleak, especially in contrast to the promise of the "Arms Control Spring" of 2010. To be sure, the administration does not shoulder all of the blame for the slow pace in implementing the president's Prague agenda. Russian opposition to further nuclear cuts and Congressional obstructionism to anything progressive have hamstrung key presidential priorities. But the administration has also failed to capitalize on opportunities to exercise US leadership when they have presented themselves – the decision not to attend the Second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons in Nayarit, Mexico in February 2014 being the most recent. While the impediments to a more assertive US role in advancing nuclear disarmament are immense, progress could be achieved if the administration is willing to introduce adjustments to nuclear force posture and doctrine that are necessary because of pressing budgetary constraints. In addition, they can and should identify more ambitious initiatives for action within the P5 Process, while promoting disarmament and non-proliferation education and the expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Astute and bold leadership by the president will be required to revitalize the Prague agenda and to realize more fully its promise.*

<sup>1</sup> The bulk of this article was written prior to the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Although some caveats have been introduced to reference this new and unanticipated development, some of the arguments advanced below may need to be revised in light of unfolding events. The authors are grateful to Dr. Nikolai Sokov for his useful comments on an earlier version of this text.

### The Dialectics of Nuclear Disarmament in Washington

1. President Barack Obama, more than any past US president, has publicly embraced the logic of a world without nuclear weapons. He also has emphasized – most forcefully in his April 2009 Prague speech – the need to translate this vision into reality, and by early 2010 he could point to a number of specific achievements. They included the conclusion of the US–Russia New START Treaty, adoption of a new US Nuclear Posture Review that expressed reduced reliance by the United States on nuclear weapons, and US support for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference Action Plan, including 22 items related to nuclear disarmament. Subsequently, in February 2011, the US Department of Defense released a new National Military Strategy which, among other things, speaks about a reduction in the role and quantity of nuclear weapons in US strategic policy – a position consistent with the new defence strategy announced by President Obama in January 2012 entitled "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership."<sup>2</sup> Taken together, these developments represent not only a dramatic reversal in nuclear policy from the prior administration, but a unique period in US political discourse in which new political space

<sup>2</sup> *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012). President Obama also made reference to the possibility of reducing the number and role of US nuclear weapons, while maintaining "a strong and credible strategic deterrent," in his 19 June speech in Berlin. See "Transcript of Obama's Speech in Berlin," at <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2013/06/19/transcript-of-obamas-speech-in-berlin/>.

was created for a discussion about nuclear disarmament.<sup>3</sup>

2. Notwithstanding the notable headway that has been made on some disarmament fronts during the first Obama Administration and the composition of as pro-nuclear disarmament a national security team as one can imagine in the persons of Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, the outlook for a leadership role by the United States in advancing nuclear disarmament in the second Obama Administration is not uniformly positive. The role actually played by the United States is constrained by at least three major dynamics: (1) the emphasis given to negotiated multilateral and bilateral as opposed to unilateral/reciprocal initiatives; (2) the priority given to solidarity among the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council who are also the five nuclear weapon states (NWS) under the NPT, and especially to Russian interests and perspectives; and (3) the often corrosive effects of domestic bureaucratic and organizational politics (including the inter-agency negotiation process and executive-legislative branch battles).

### Alternative Forums/Processes to Pursue Disarmament

3. Both at home and abroad, the Obama Administration faces immense obstacles in advancing its nuclear arms control objectives. Domestically, Republicans on Capitol Hill have stymied the president's nuclear policy agenda throughout his time in the White House, ensuring a politically costly ratification process for New START and thwarting plans to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Thus it came as no surprise that many in Congress promised to block further nuclear cuts when the president announced in June 2013 his readiness to reduce by one-third the 1,550-warhead limit established by New START. With Republicans currently holding 45 seats in the Senate and with the 2014 mid-term elections unlikely to result in a windfall for the Demo-

crats, the Obama Administration will not be able to rally the requisite super-majority behind another bilateral arms control treaty. Indeed, it has great difficulty even gaining Senate confirmation for its leading nuclear arms negotiators.

4. In the broader multilateral context, the Obama Administration has spoken about its general commitment to meeting its disarmament obligations under the 2010 NPT Action Plan, while remaining wary of undertaking a number of the specific steps called for by its non-NWS critics. At the same time, it often is under pressure to "go slow" from its P5 partners, a tension discussed in more detail below. The United States, for example, finds it easiest to demonstrate its commitment to Action Plan items related to verifiability and transparency, warhead dismantlement, reductions in nuclear delivery systems, the diminished role of nuclear weapons in doctrines, and the start of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) of a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). In 2012, the United States also – for the first time – joined in sponsoring the UN General Assembly Resolution on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education.<sup>4</sup> It has more difficulty, however, in responding to critics who cite its failure to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in military alliances and reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons, to ratify the CTBT, and to agree on a standard reporting form to be used by all NWS.

5. According to one major study monitoring implementation of the disarmament items in the Action Plan, "overall progress since 2010 has been very limited and even appears to have slowed down since the 2012 PrepCom."<sup>5</sup> This general assessment also would appear to apply to the United States, which has tempered suggestions that it might implement new reductions in its nuclear arsenal by reaffirming the need to modernize its land, sea and air-based nuclear delivery systems. While Washington deserves credit for making modest progress since the adoption of the 2010 Action Plan –

<sup>3</sup> Major credit for this political space to discuss both the vision of and concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament should be attributed to the series of articles in *The Wall Street Journal* by George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn: "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," 4 January 2007; "Toward a Nuclear Free World," 15 January 2008; "How to Protect Our Nuclear Deterrent," 19 January 2010; "Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Proliferation," 7 March 2011; and "Next Steps in Reducing Nuclear Risks," 5 March 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, *Implementation of the Conclusions and Recommendations for Follow-on Actions at the 2010 NPT Review Conference Disarmament Actions 1-22: Monitoring Report* (Monterey: CNS, April 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Mukhatzhanova, *2010 NPT Review Conference Disarmament Actions*, p. 3. For similar assessments, see Beatrice Fihn, ed., *The 2010 NPT Action Plan Monitoring Report* (Geneva: Reaching Critical Will, March 2013) and Ramesh Thakur and Gareth Evans, eds., *Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play* (Canberra: Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, 2013).

especially with respect to the issuance of a new nuclear employment guidance policy reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US defence strategy – US officials have been unable to leverage their action to gain similar commitments from other key NWS, most notably Russia and China.

6. Traditionally, the United States has viewed progress towards nuclear disarmament through the lens of US–Russian bilateral arms reductions. Yet Moscow has shown no interest in further nuclear reductions, conditioning another round of cuts on US steps to address factors it perceives as undermining strategic stability, namely the forward deployment of missile defence and what it refers to as “non-nuclear strategic weapons” (long range, high precision conventional arms).<sup>6</sup> To date, US efforts to address these concerns have not satisfied Moscow, and the March 2014 crisis surrounding Russian military intervention in the Ukraine can only dim further any prospects for bilateral negotiated nuclear arms control.

7. Moreover, the Russian Federation has been unsympathetic to the Obama Administration’s efforts (and a demand of many in Congress) to address the issue of Russia’s large and opaque stockpile of non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons. Moscow has long stated that any discussion of non-strategic nuclear arms must be preceded by the withdrawal of all US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, action that is unlikely to transpire as long as NATO remains divided on the subject.

8. Against this backdrop of stagnation in bilateral arms control negotiations, Russian nuclear modernization plans are moving forward rapidly, including major investments in the development of a new liquid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with greater throw-weight than existing systems and, possibly, nuclear-capable, long-range submarine launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), further blur-

ring the line between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup>

9. In short, at present there are major impediments to advancing legally binding and verifiable disarmament measures in the aforementioned bilateral and multilateral fora, and prospects may well diminish further before they improve. As such, it may be opportune to re-evaluate the merits – and liabilities – of unilateral and/or reciprocal voluntary initiatives such as those pursued to great effect by the United States and the Soviet Union (and Russia) in the early 1990s. These parallel, unilateral initiatives, known as Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (or PNIs), had the great virtue of avoiding long drawn-out negotiations and legislative ratification, and were particularly attractive as a means to deal quickly with risks associated with problematic control by Moscow over wide-flung deployments of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Although the PNIs achieved more nuclear disarmament than had been accomplished in preceding negotiated arms control treaties, their non-legally binding status and lack of verification measures also meant that they could be disavowed at any time by either party – a situation that now appears to prevail as far as the Russian side is concerned. The absence of verification measures also has contributed to uncertainty regarding the number of weapons and their deployment locations.

10. Taking note of the virtues and liabilities of voluntary measures of both a unilateral and possibly reciprocal nature, the time may be ripe for the United States to explore seriously new disarmament approaches that do not require either formal negotiations with the Russian Federation or ratification by the US Senate. Several alternatives are discussed below in the section on “Recommendations.” In addition, it is conceivable that fiscal pressures in Moscow and Washington might partially accomplish what negotiated arms control cannot obtain. With Moscow facing a stagnant economy and

<sup>6</sup> “Lavrov: Talks on further nuke cuts have to involve not only Russia and U.S. but also other countries,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines* (22 June 2013), [http://rbth.ru/news/2013/06/22/lavrov\\_talks\\_on\\_further\\_nuke\\_cuts\\_have\\_to\\_involve\\_not\\_only\\_russia\\_and\\_us\\_27372.html](http://rbth.ru/news/2013/06/22/lavrov_talks_on_further_nuke_cuts_have_to_involve_not_only_russia_and_us_27372.html); See also Alexei Arbatov, “Strategic Dialogue: A Change of Priorities,” Carnegie Moscow Center, 10 December 2013, <http://carnegie.ru/2013/12/10/strategic-dialogue-change-of-priorities/h1ht#>.

<sup>7</sup> Jerry Davydov and Bryan Lee, “Russia’s Nuclear Rearmament: Policy Shift or Business as Usual,” Nuclear Threat Initiative, 18 December 2013, [http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/russias\\_nuclear\\_rearmament\\_policy\\_shift\\_or\\_business\\_as\\_usual/](http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/russias_nuclear_rearmament_policy_shift_or_business_as_usual/); Chris Schneidmiller, “Russia Might Still Use Sea-Fired Nuclear Cruise Missiles,” *Global Security Newswire*, 14 January 2013, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/russia-might-still-deploy-sub-launched-nuclear-cruise-missiles/>; “Project 955 submarines to carry long-range cruise missiles,” Project on Russian Nuclear Forces, 11 January 2013 [http://russianforces.org/blog/2013/01/project\\_955\\_submarines\\_to\\_carr.shtml](http://russianforces.org/blog/2013/01/project_955_submarines_to_carr.shtml).

growing budget deficit and Washington encountering a declining defence budget, each party may discover utility in curtailing the enormous expense of their modernization programs, estimated at roughly \$70 billion and \$1 trillion, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

11. Another approach that merits attention is nuclear-weapons-free zones (NWFZs), even though they are not usually associated with negotiating forums at which one can promote nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, with the increase in the number of zonal treaties in force and the new trend to convene meetings of NWFZ treaty adherents on the margins of NPT PrepComs and Review Conferences, it is appropriate to consider NWFZs as a potential new negotiating forum at which to promote nuclear disarmament. This focus is especially merited as NWFZs are among the few disarmament and non-proliferation approaches that have shown considerable success in recent years. Indeed, much of the world is covered by NWFZs and well over 100 countries are NWFZ treaty adherents. Although usually viewed as a mechanism by which non-NWS can contribute directly to disarmament by ensuring that their regions remain free of nuclear weapons, protocols to NWFZ treaties also afford a means by which NWS can offer legally binding negative security assurances to non-NWS treaty parties.<sup>9</sup>

12. Historically, NWS have endorsed the principle of NWFZs, as embodied in Article 7 of the NPT, but in practice they usually have found it difficult to find NWFZs they liked. In recent years, however, the United States has expressed greater readiness to conclude protocols to NWFZ treaties and the administration has submitted protocols to the South Pacific (Rarotonga) and African (Pelindaba) treaties to the US Senate for ratification.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in fall 2013, it also has indicated its readiness to conclude a protocol to the Central Asian NWFZ Treaty, an event likely to take place on

the margins of the 2014 NPT PrepCom in New York.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the prospects for near-term ratification of all three of these protocols is dim, given the disinterest, if not outright opposition, to the measures by many members of the Republican opposition, and the Democratic leadership has yet to decide when to move forward with the ratification process. Still, NWFZs represent one of the very few nuclear disarmament issues on which NWS and non-NWS may find considerable common ground and, as discussed below, it is an area in which the United States may be able to exert greater leadership.

### Collaboration among NWS, or between Them and the Non-NWS?

13. Among the more significant nuclear disarmament developments during the past five years have been the emergence of two very distinctive initiatives. The first was the initiation in 2009 of a process of multilateral consultations on nuclear-related issues involving the five NPT-recognized NWS – known as the P5 Process. The second was the emergence at the 2010 NPT Review Conference of an initiative to highlight the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use. Both of these initiatives have taken on a momentum that probably was not anticipated by their architects, who could hardly have foreseen how closely their trajectories would converge and ultimately collide.

14. In the case of the P5 Process, launched at the instigation of the United Kingdom and with a particular eye to promoting greater transparency, verification and confidence-building measures, it not only facilitated adoption of a significant NPT Action Plan, but it morphed into a now routinized series of P5 activities related to disarmament verification, nuclear weapons transparency, and preparation of a common nuclear glossary.<sup>12</sup> Although P5 consultations and coordination on nuclear matters

<sup>8</sup> Jon B. Wolfsthal, Jeffrey Lewis and Marc Quint, *The Trillion Dollar Nuclear Triad* (Monterey CA: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, January 2014), and “Russia to spend \$70 billion on strategic forces by 2020,” Russian Nuclear Forces Project (24 February 2011) at: [http://russianforces.org/blog/2011/02/russia\\_to\\_spend\\_70\\_billion\\_on.shtml](http://russianforces.org/blog/2011/02/russia_to_spend_70_billion_on.shtml).

<sup>9</sup> Negative security assurances entail a pledge by NWS not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against a non-NWS.

<sup>10</sup> Hillary Clinton announced the US decision to seek ratification of the protocols to the two zonal treaties in her address at the opening session of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews by one of the authors with representatives from several P5 states in December 2013. It remains to be seen how the evolving crisis in Ukraine, and especially Russia’s disregard for the December 1994 Budapest Memorandum, will affect readiness by the United States, France and the United Kingdom to conclude a protocol to the Central Asian NWFZ Treaty.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Berger and Malcolm Chalmers, “Great Expectations: The P5 Process and the Non-Proliferation Treaty,” Whitehall Report 3-13, Royal United Services Institute, London (August 2013). See also Nick Ritchie, “Pathways and Purposes for P-5 Nuclear Dialogue,” European Leadership Network *Policy Brief* (November 2013).



had existed prior to 2009, especially in the context of the NPT review process, the more recent and formalized set of consultations has led to a growing sense of solidarity among NWS on a variety of disarmament issues, and to a wariness of breaking ranks should one or more of the P5 members feel strongly about a disarmament matter.

15. In the case of the humanitarian consequences initiative, the 2010 NPT Review Conference Final Document includes language acceptable to the P5 about “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons” and “the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.” That consensus, however, soon began to erode as the initiative assumed a life of its own, generating great enthusiasm and support from civil society and enlisting an increasing number of state sponsors (including some NATO members) for a broader set of measures. The first indication of this trend was the joint statement introduced by Switzerland on behalf of 16 states at the spring 2012 NPT PrepCom in Vienna.<sup>13</sup> While welcoming the focus of the 2010 NPT Review Conference on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament, it went further than the 2010 Action Plan in expressing the “utmost importance that these weapons never be used again, *under any circumstances*,” and calling on all States to “intensify their efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons” (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

16. The P5 appeared to be surprised by the buzz produced by the statement in Vienna, as well as a similar statement at the UN General Assembly in October 2012 involving 35 co-sponsors, but did not react overtly to the developments. Their public stance, however, changed following Norway’s attempt to gain their involvement in a March 2013 conference in Oslo devoted to the issue of humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. The United Kingdom reportedly was initially favourably

disposed to the idea of sending representatives to the meeting,<sup>15</sup> and the United States probably was of a mixed mind about whether or not to attend. Russia and France, however, were adamantly opposed to participation and ultimately succeeded in obtaining a P5 boycott of the Oslo Conference, which attracted 127 national delegations. The P5 explanation offered for the collective decision not to attend was a concern that the Oslo Conference would “divert discussion away from practical steps to create conditions for further nuclear weapons reductions.”<sup>16</sup>

17. Subsequently, a number of P5 diplomats also suggested that a focus on humanitarian consequences was a distraction from the more important mandate of implementing the 2010 Action Plan – a view strongly disputed by many non-NWS diplomats.<sup>17</sup> In off-the-record discussions, some diplomats also confided that their governments had major concerns that the initiative would inevitably lead to increased efforts to outlaw nuclear weapons, perhaps including by means of a nuclear weapons convention that was negotiated outside the traditional negotiating forums in which rules of consensus prevail.

18. These concerns were reinforced at the 2013 NPT PrepCom when 80 states co-sponsored a statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war, which reiterated the view: “It is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.”<sup>18</sup> The enthusiasm for this initiative on the part of a large majority of states at the PrepCom was apparent from the loud and spontaneous applause generated in the conference hall when South African diplomat Abdul Minty read the list of co-sponsors. An even larger number of

<sup>13</sup> The 16 states were Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Holy See, Egypt, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, and Switzerland.

<sup>14</sup> “Joint Statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament,” First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, (Vienna: 2 May 2012). [http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom12/statements/2May\\_IHL.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom12/statements/2May_IHL.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Berger and Chalmers, “Great Expectations,” p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> See the P5 Statement at Reaching Critical Will, “P5 Announcement Not to Attend the Oslo Conference,” <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/document/Diarmaemnt-fora/oslo-2013/P5>, cited by Berger and Chalmers, “Great Expectations,” p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> This debate took place on the margins of the 2013 NPT PrepCom, including the P5 meeting hosted by the Russian Federation in Geneva immediately prior to the 2013 NPT PrepCom.

<sup>18</sup> “Joint Statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons,” Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Geneva: 24 May 2013), [http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom13/statements/24April\\_SouthAfrica.pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom13/statements/24April_SouthAfrica.pdf).

states – 125 – joined a similar statement at the UN General Assembly First Committee in October 2013, and another 17 states co-sponsored a related statement on the subject of humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons but without reference to the phrase “under any circumstances.” This latter statement, introduced by Australia, was notable for the fact that all but one of the co-sponsors were US allies, and most were NATO members.<sup>19</sup>

19. In addition to boycotting the Oslo Conference in 2013, the P5 also chose collectively not to attend the meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament, a series of UN General Assembly mandated meetings in Geneva during spring and summer 2013 for the purpose of developing proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. Although the rationale for the boycott of the Open-Ended Working Group was slightly different than for that of the Oslo Conference, the dual actions underscored the increased importance that members of the P5 attached to the appearance of unity among the NWS. The disarmament rationale underlying this view was clearly expressed by a senior US official in a not-for-attribution meeting in late 2013, in which he explicitly stated that if nuclear disarmament is to be achieved it will be accomplished due to intra-P5 deliberations, and not through deliberations between the P5 and non-NWS. In other words, P5 solidarity is likely to trump the possible benefits of joining an overwhelming coalition of non-NWS on issues such as international humanitarian consequences.

20. Notwithstanding this principle of P5 unity, there was some hope – if not expectation – that the United States and the United Kingdom might choose to send representatives to the Second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by Mexico in Nayarit on 13–14 February 2014. This possibility was fuelled by signs of an internal debate within the US government over the relative costs and benefits of attending the conference, hosted by an important ally, as well as the absence of any clear sign that a decision had been taken on the matter as late as one week from the conference date. The diminished prospect

in 2014 of a follow-on nuclear negotiation with Russia also might have reduced the influence of that country’s strong views opposing the humanitarian consequences initiative on the US decision.

21. Ultimately, however, the United States decided not to attend, apparently for a variety of reasons including P5 solidarity, concerns about what “next steps” might be raised at the Nayarit meeting, as well as disappointment that Mexico reportedly was unwilling to accept one conference agenda item proposed by Washington. As a consequence of this decision, US influence over the nuclear disarmament debate at the 2014 NPT PrepCom almost certainly will be eroded and it will find itself very much on the defensive, along with its P5 friends.<sup>20</sup> As discussed above, this isolation will represent a major missed opportunity, as the issue of humanitarian consequences is likely to dominate the disarmament agenda at both the next PrepCom and Review Conference.<sup>21</sup>

## The Constraints of Domestic and Bureaucratic Politics

22. Regrettably, the deleterious effects of domestic and bureaucratic politics do not stop at the water’s edge and, if anything, often take the most irrational form on matters involving defence spending and nuclear policy. Almost without exception, inter-agency battles and executive–legislative branch tugs of war have an uncanny ability to stymie and emasculate policy innovation, usually producing a lowest common denominator outcome that exasperates proponents of major policy change. This was the case when there was a large Democratic majority in the House and Senate; it is

<sup>19</sup> The statement was co-sponsored by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. Japan was notable for co-sponsoring both statements on the subject at the First Committee.

<sup>20</sup> 146 countries attended the Nayarit meeting at which Austria announced its plan to convene a Third Conference in Vienna in late 2014. At this moment, it remains unclear if the momentum leading up to the Nayarit meeting will be sustained. A number of government participants from US allies indicated that the very strong statement issued at the conclusion of the meeting by the conference chair, including reference to the need for a “legally-binding instrument” and a “specific timeframe” for nuclear disarmament, would make it difficult for their countries to continue to participate in such meetings. (Interviews by one of the authors in Nayarit immediately following the meeting, 15 February 2014.)

<sup>21</sup> The United States, more than its P5 partners, appears to be aware of this potential and has made some surprisingly strong statements about humanitarian consequences subsequent to the Nayarit Conference. See in particular the powerful remarks by Acting Under-Secretary Rose Gottemoeller at the Marshall Islands Nuclear Remembrance Day on 1 March 2014, available at <http://www.state.gov/t/us/2014/222790.htm>.

even more apparent today when the White House faces an uphill struggle to promote even modest policy initiatives related to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Indeed, even if one discounts party politics and focuses only on the administration, it is hard to imagine anything resembling the clarity and clarion call for action in the Prague speech surviving an extended inter-agency drafting process today. Such a speech could only emerge if its author were the president himself.

23. What then, if anything, can one realistically expect by way of new US initiatives in the nuclear disarmament sphere? Ironically, if there is change, much of it is likely to be driven by projected budget deficits that even defence hawks will find difficult to ignore. In this silver lining scenario for disarmament – a kind of crisis-driven model of innovation – the future of the US nuclear deterrent should be on trial, including the current triad of strategic delivery systems and the activities related to their ongoing development, procurement, operation and maintenance. As noted above, one recent study projects that over the next 30 years the United States plans to spend approximately \$1 trillion to maintain the current arsenal, buying replacement systems and upgrading existing nuclear bombs and warheads.<sup>22</sup> But little attention appears to have been given about how to maintain a credible deterrent in an increasingly constrained budget environment. Although in February 2014 Secretary of Defense Hagel pledged to retain all three legs of the nuclear triad despite new Pentagon budget cuts, formerly sacrosanct elements of the defence budget are now on the chopping board, and one can imagine spending cuts driving a greater US interest in nuclear arms reductions as well as doctrinal changes that de-emphasize a reliance on nuclear weapons.<sup>23</sup>

## Recommendations

24. As discussed above, the most severe impediments to a more assertive US role in advancing nuclear disarmament stem directly from bureaucratic and organizational politics in Washington, and will require very astute and bold leadership by President Obama if they are to be overcome. Regrettably, deterioration in the US–Russian political relationship will em-

bolden critics of nuclear disarmament and make it far more difficult to accomplish further reductions in and diminished reliance on nuclear forces, notwithstanding major pressures to cut the defence budget. In light of these obstacles, what realistically might be a best case scenario for the remainder of the Obama Administration?

25. One approach that may be viable involves additional unilateral changes in nuclear doctrine and posture that make sense strategically and financially regardless of reciprocity by other NWS, and especially Russia. In its more extreme form, this could entail elimination of the land-based leg of the strategic triad or, more realistically in the short term, further reductions in the role and quantity of nuclear weapons in US force planning and employment policy. One also could imagine delays in introducing/modernizing certain elements of US strategic forces of particular concern to Russia in exchange for reciprocal action by Moscow in delaying development and introduction of certain systems the United States finds most worrisome. For example, Washington could delay procurement of 2-4 of the 12 planned ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), or extend the service life of only 150-300 of the 400-420 Minuteman III ICBMs that the Air Force will field under New START, in exchange for Moscow delaying introduction of a new liquid-fuelled silo-based ICBM (the “Sarmat”) with the capacity to carry as many as ten warheads.<sup>24</sup> Although it will be difficult to orchestrate any form of parallel unilateral actions, were it possible to fashion such reciprocal steps, it could provide the time and political space for the two sides to resolve some of the more difficult issues, which currently render further negotiated reductions nearly impossible. It also might create an opportunity to explore a number of confidence-building measures, including data exchanges on non-strategic nuclear weapons and missile defence, lab-to-lab programs on warhead-level reductions, and extended dialogue on strategic stability.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See Wolfsthal, Lewis and Quint, *The Trillion Dollar Nuclear Triad*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Elaine M. Grossman, “Nuclear Triad to Survive Hagel Cuts in Pentagon Spending,” *Global Security Newswire*, 24 February 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See Wolfsthal, Lewis and Quint, *The Trillion Dollar Nuclear Triad*, pp. 14 and 21; and Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Russian Nuclear Forces, 2014,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 70:2 (2014), p. 76. For rationales driving the Sarmat, see Alexei Arbatov, *Gambit or Endgame? The New State of Arms Control* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, March 2011), p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> For several proposals on confidence-building measures designed to facilitate future arms control negotiations, see James M. Action, ed., *Beyond Treaties: Immediate Steps to Reduce Nuclear Dangers* (Washington, DC: Carnegie En-

26. It remains to be seen how P5 solidarity in the NPT context will withstand the shock of rapidly plummeting US–Russian political relations. In this regard, however, it is worthwhile to recall that even during some of the most frigid moments of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union continued to consult routinely on nuclear non-proliferation matters and to coordinate their policies in many respects, including at NPT, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and London Club/Nuclear Suppliers Group meetings.<sup>26</sup> It is not out of the question, therefore, to imagine the P5 Process assuming a more ambitious agenda than the current focus on developing a common nuclear lexicon.

27. One potentially fruitful and practical disarmament initiative for it to pursue would be to revisit the long forgotten but still relevant draft treaty negotiated by the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1970s on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of radiological weapons. This treaty was submitted to the Committee on Disarmament (the predecessor to the CD) in 1979, but foundered there due to disagreements by other CD members over the scope of the draft treaty, definitional issues and the relatively low priority attached to the subject by most delegations.<sup>27</sup> Although the CD remains deadlocked over a number of issues,<sup>28</sup> P5 members are likely to share similar views on radiological warfare, and it is possible that the subject already may have received some attention in the Chinese-led working group dealing with the development of a common nuclear glossary. While renunciation by the NWS of radiological weapons would be a poor substitute for a legally binding, multilateral treaty, an agreement by the P5 would still constitute a useful step to strengthen the norm against one form of nuclear terrorism, and

would help to discourage a renewed interest by states in radiological warfare.<sup>29</sup>

28. As already discussed, one of the most fertile areas in which the United States could distinguish itself in the disarmament realm, while simultaneously advancing its non-proliferation agenda, involves the promotion of NWFZs. One aspect of this approach would entail support for conclusion of protocols to existing NWFZs to which the United States and other NWS have yet to offer negative security assurances. This action should prove relatively easy with respect to the Central Asian NWFZ (unless there is further Russian military intervention in Ukraine), and also should be within the realm of the possible with respect to the Southeast Asian NWFZ (Bangkok Treaty). In addition to taking a leadership role in a process that should be appreciated by many non-NWS, the United States would do well to elevate the attention it gave to the non-proliferation dimension of NWFZs, and in particular the need for parties to existing zones to fully implement their obligations to those zones. As several studies monitoring the implementation of the 2010 NPT Action Plan have noted, some parties to existing zones in the South Pacific, Africa and Central Asia have acted in a fashion that can be interpreted as noncompliant with treaty prohibitions against exporting nuclear material and equipment to NPT defined non-NWS lacking comprehensive safeguards.<sup>30</sup>

29. Perhaps the easiest and potentially most effective step the United States could take to demonstrate leadership on nuclear disarmament would be to embrace an approach for which it has much to offer but until recently has been reluctant to acknowledge – promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education. In 2002, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the implementation of 34 recommendations of the UN Experts Group Study on Disarmament and Non-proliferation, and Action 22 of the 2010 NPT Action Plan encourages all states to implement these recommendations in order to advance the goals of the NPT in support of achieving a

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dowment for International Peace, October 2012), [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/beyond\\_treaties.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/beyond_treaties.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> See William Potter, "Nuclear Proliferation: U.S.-Soviet Cooperation," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 1985), pp. 141–54.

<sup>27</sup> A particularly contentious issue was whether or not the scope of the treaty should extend to attacks on nuclear power plants or other facilities that would release radioactivity – an issue highlighted by the Israeli attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981.

<sup>28</sup> See John Page, "Bringing the UN Disarmament Machinery Back to Life," APLN/CNND *Policy Brief* No. 6 (Canberra: Asia-Pacific Leadership Network and Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, October 2013).

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<sup>29</sup> There are indications that North Korea may be interested in the development of "dirty bombs" as military weapons. For a discussion of this issue and an elaboration of the proposal to dust off the 1979 US–Soviet draft treaty, see William C. Potter and Jeffrey Lewis, "Cheap and Dirty Bombs," *Foreign Policy* (17 February 2014), available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/17/cheap\\_and\\_dirty\\_bombs](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/17/cheap_and_dirty_bombs).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Mukhatzhanova, *2010 NPT Review Conference Disarmament Actions*, p. 50.



world without nuclear weapons. Although inter-agency bickering long prevented the United States from co-sponsoring statements and resolutions related to disarmament and non-proliferation education, that roadblock has now been removed, and Washington has the opportunity to commit the modest resources necessary to become the leader internationally in training the next generation of disarmament and non-proliferation specialists at home and abroad.

## Conclusion

30. There is good reason to be disappointed by the lack of headway on nuclear disarmament in the five years since President Obama's clarion call in Prague for nuclear disarmament. Although senior US government officials can point to a number of accomplishments of which they can be proud, almost certainly President Obama himself would be the first to acknowledge the difficulty that he has encountered in implementing his disarmament agenda. As explained above, a stultifying inter-agency process, resistance in the House and Senate to even very modest innovations in nuclear policy, and an un-obliging Russian nuclear weapons state interlocutor, have combined to stifle movement on almost all nuclear disarmament and arms control fronts, the major exception being those related to nuclear security. Although some would point to the consensus 2010 NPT Action Plan as another major exception, the progress made to date in implementing the disarmament action items is underwhelming, and it is doubtful if the new P5 Process will do much to change that dynamic. Indeed, the United States will need to exert much more leadership within that forum if it is to realize its potential rather than serve as a brake on the disarmament inclinations of some P5 members.

31. Under present circumstances of greatly increased US-Russian tensions following the crisis in Ukraine, it is hard to imagine any new steps in negotiated nuclear reductions in the near term. Even US unilateral measures that anticipate a reciprocal response from Russia will be hard to fashion and are unlikely to receive much support from arms control advocates within the administration. As a consequence, aside from useful steps that can be taken with respect to disarmament and non-proliferation education and promotion of NWFZs, the most reasonable approach by which the United States can advance disarma-

ment is to do so based on rational calculations of its defence needs and the resources available to meet them. Such calculations of self-interest should lead to a force posture that is less reliant on nuclear weapons and less constrained by (although not ignorant of) what Russia regards to be appropriate for negotiations. If the United States saves money in the process while Russia wastes resources by expanding an already bloated but unusable nuclear arsenal, so be it.

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**APLN and CNND**

The **Asia Pacific Leadership Network (APLN)** comprises some forty former senior political, diplomatic, military and other opinion leaders from fourteen countries around the region, including nuclear-weapons possessing states China, India and Pakistan. The objective of the group, convened by former Australian Foreign Minister and President Emeritus of the International Crisis Group Gareth Evans, is to inform and energize public opinion, and especially high-level policy-makers, to take seriously the very real threats posed by nuclear weapons, and do everything possible to achieve a world in which they are contained, diminished and ultimately eliminated. See further <http://apln.anu.edu.au>.

The **Centre for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (CNND)** contributes to worldwide efforts to minimize the risk of nuclear-weapons use, stop their spread and ultimately achieve their complete elimination. It works in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and acts as the Secretariat for APLN. The director of the Centre is Professor Ramesh Thakur, former UN Assistant Secretary-General, and it is assisted by a distinguished International Advisory Board chaired by Professor Gareth Evans. See further <http://cnnd.anu.edu.au>.

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