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FACT SHEET

2015 NPT Review Conference

The Ninth Review Conference (RevCon) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will take place in New York on April 27-May 22, 2015. CNS has compiled a set of frequently asked questions (FAQ) related to the upcoming meeting.

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1. WHAT IS THE NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE? WHAT IS IT EXPECTED TO DO?

In accordance with Article VIII.3 of the NPT, every five years, state parties convene to review the implementation of the treaty and, since 1995, to set a forward-looking agenda for its further operation. At the NPT Review and [Extension](#) Conference in 1995, state parties [decided](#) to “strengthen” the review process and to convene ten-day preparatory committee (PrepCom) meetings in each of the three years preceding the review conferences (RevCon). If necessary, a fourth prepcom may be held in the year of the review conference.

RevCons review and assess the implementation of the treaty as well as decisions of past conferences. Of particular relevance, in this regard, are the outcomes of the 1995, 2000, and 2010 RevCons. Delegates consider a wide array of issues, such as nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation; promotion and strengthening of safeguards; peaceful uses of nuclear energy; nuclear safety and security; implementation of the [1995 resolution on the Middle East](#); response to withdrawal from the NPT; strengthening the review process, and universality of the treaty. The RevCon should also agree on a set of actions that state parties agree to undertake during the next review cycle and subsequently to advance implementation of the NPT.

Ideally, the conference adopts by consensus an outcome document containing both a review of treaty implementation and a forward-looking program of action. In practice, only about half of the RevCons to date have been able to agree on a final document. Although adopting decisions by a vote is an option in principle, NPT parties have never resorted to voting in the past.

In 1995, the Review and Extension Conference indefinitely extended the NPT as part of a “package” agreement consisting of three [Decisions and a Resolution on the Middle East](#):



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- Decision 1 on Strengthening the Review Process;
- Decision 2 on Principles and Objectives on Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation;
- Decision 3 on Extension of the NPT, and
- 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, calling for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region.

The 2000 Review Conference produced a consensus [Final Document](#) that, among other things, contained 13 practical steps for nuclear disarmament.

The 2010 Review Conference was successful in adopting a [64-item Action Plan](#) on disarmament, nonproliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy as well as a set of recommendations on the implementation of the 1995 Middle East Resolution.

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2. HOW IS THE REVIEW CONFERENCE ORGANIZED? WHO IS CHAIRING THE 2015 REVCON?

The review conferences last four weeks and take place at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. RevCons begin with General Debate, where heads of delegations deliver opening statements, laying out their respective governments' goals and expectations for the conference and the NPT regime more broadly. Usually during General Debate, a number of foreign ministers and other high-level officials represent their countries, highlighting the importance NPT parties attach to the treaty.

Substantive issues are allocated to three Main Committees (MC) of the conference: MC I deals with nuclear disarmament and negative security assurances; MC II with nonproliferation and regional issues, and MC III with peaceful uses of nuclear energy and other issues. NPT state parties have an option of creating Subsidiary Bodies (SB) under any or each of the MCs to address specific issues. In the past, SB 1 has focused on forward-looking action for nuclear disarmament; SB 2 on the Middle East zone free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and SB 3 on the institutional reform for the NPT as well as Article X (NPT withdrawal). It is expected that the 2015 RevCon will follow the same structure. The three MCs begin their work at the end of the first week of the RevCon and are usually expected to conclude negotiations and submit their respective reports by the end of the third week. Their work, however, might be extended into the fourth week if necessary. If a Main Committee cannot agree on a report by consensus, it can still forward its draft report to the RevCon president to use in negotiating the final document.

The president-designate of the 2015 Review Conference is Ambassador Taous Feroukhi of Algeria. Ambassador Feroukhi is currently serving as director-general for Political Affairs and International Security at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Mr. Thomas Markram, head of the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Branch at the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), will serve as secretary-general of the review conference and Mr. Valere Mantels, senior political affairs officer at the WMD Branch, will serve as deputy secretary-general. Customarily, state parties confirm the appointments of the president and the secretary-general at the beginning of the RevCon.



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It is also a custom that MC chairs are the diplomats who had chaired the three PrepComs, in reverse order (i.e., the chair of the third PrepCom is the chair of MC I, etc.) If a PrepCom chair cannot be at the RevCon, another diplomat from the same country typically is appointed to serve in his or her place. At the 2015 RevCon, MC I chair is Ambassador Enrique Roman-Morey of Peru; MC II chair is Ambassador Christian Istrate of Romania, and MC III chair is Ambassador David Stuart of Australia. Subsidiary body chairs will be appointed by the conference upon nomination by the RevCon president.

UNODA functions as the Secretariat of the entire NPT Review Process, as the treaty has no designated implementing organization or permanent secretariat. (The International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA], established under a separate statute, implements safeguards under Article III of the NPT.) At the RevCons, an IAEA representative also customarily serves as the secretary of MC II, as it addresses safeguards and verification issues.

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3. WHAT ISSUES ARE LIKELY TO ARISE AT THE 2015 REVIEW CONFERENCE?

While the delegates at the 2015 RevCon will address a variety of issues, agreement nuclear disarmament and the Middle East WMD-free zone will likely be key to a successful outcome again. Review and the future of the Action Plan adopted at the 2010 RevCon will also be a central issue for the conference.

- The **2010 Action Plan** is expected to serve as the basis for review at the 2015 RevCon. (See [“What is the 2010 Action Plan?”](#)) However, there is significant divergence of views among state parties on what constitutes an appropriate pace of implementation of the plan, particularly its disarmament section. The nuclear weapon states (NWS) have taken a long-range view of the Action Plan, arguing that it was adopted “as a roadmap for long term action.” Many of the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) do not share this view, especially as it is unclear what the “long term” means, expressed in years or review cycles. At the same time, there is no agreement among the NNWS themselves as to the reasonable timeline for the implementation of the Action Plan, which will further complicate its review. Linked to this is the question of the future of the Action Plan, and states so far have addressed it in a very limited fashion. Even if the NNWS were to accept the Action Plan as a long-term roadmap, a simple reaffirmation, or a “rollover,” at the Review Conference would not be enough. State parties need to decide how to update and amend the Action Plan, possibly by assigning more specific targets and timelines to some items and identifying priority actions for the next five years.
- The lack of progress on **nuclear disarmament** has been a perennial source of frustration for the NNWS. (For progress on implementing the disarmament section of the Action Plan see [“What is the status of implementation of the Action Plan?”](#)) This year, the debate on next steps for disarmament is affected by several factors. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support of the separatists in Ukraine have led to a dramatic worsening of relations between Russia and the West and freezing of NATO-Russia cooperation. The US-Russian dialogue on further bilateral arms control measures had practically reached a stalemate by 2014, and was further complicated by the Ukraine crisis and alleged Russian violation of the [Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#)



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(INF). These developments engender pessimism, especially among NATO states and other US allies, about nuclear disarmament and the prospect of the RevCon agreeing on any further measures. On the other hand, a new initiative focused on the **humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons** (HINW) has gained momentum since 2010 and is injecting new energy into the disarmament debate. The initiative, dismissed at first by a number of the NWS as a “distraction,” highlights the humanitarian imperative of disarmament and unacceptability of the use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. (See [“What is the Humanitarian Initiative?”](#)) Along with gaining wide support among the NNWS and civil society, the humanitarian initiative has also exacerbated tensions within the NPT, revealing divergent views not only between the NWS and NNWS, but also between states in and outside nuclear alliances. States disagree in particular on whether the “traditional” step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament preferred by the NWS is the only option or whether a much more urgent action is both necessary and possible. These conflicting viewpoints are likely to have a serious influence on the debate at the RevCon.

- **Middle East WMD-free Zone:** see [“What is the status of implementing the recommendations on the Middle East?”](#)

Several other issues, while not necessarily central to the outcome, are of significance for the 2015 RevCon, including:

- **Compliance and Iran’s nuclear program:** While the final outcome of the P5+1 talks with Iran remains to be determined, parameters of an agreement that emerged in March 2015 go a long way toward reassuring the international community that Iran would not acquire or pursue nuclear weapons. This recent development could engender a sufficiently positive atmosphere at the RevCon to mitigate the usually acrimonious debates on compliance with nonproliferation commitments. It could also help reduce the recurring tension among state parties with respect to balancing the right to peaceful use and nonproliferation. In the longer term, if concluded and implemented, a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action would also strengthen the nonproliferation regime overall.
- **North Korea and response to withdrawal from the NPT (Article X):** North Korea remains the only state that has withdrawn from the NPT, and there has been no progress in recent years in returning it to the treaty. The 2015 RevCon, similarly to previous conferences, is not likely to agree on any specific measures regarding North Korea and its nuclear weapon program. However, the United States and other countries have linked the North Korean case to the broader issue of tightening the withdrawal clause under Article X of the NPT to make it more costly for states to leave the treaty. Article X stipulates that a state can withdraw from the NPT if it jeopardizes its “supreme national interest” and has to notify other state parties and the UN Security Council three months in advance of withdrawal. No specific consequences or measures in response to withdrawal are prescribed by the treaty or past RevCon decisions. The United States, Russia, and other states have advocated the adoption of a set of measures to be triggered by a withdrawal, such as UN Security Council consultations, return of nuclear equipment acquired while the state was an NPT party, and others. Many non-aligned states have been wary of what they see as attempts to reinterpret Article X, and debates on this subject at the 2010 RevCon did not yield any significant results. Promoted in particular by the NWS, the issue is likely to be revisited at the 2015 RevCon.



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- **Organization of the outcome document:** A seemingly technical, procedural matter, the question of whether the RevCon should adopt the “backward-looking” (review) and “forward-looking” parts of the final document separately could become a source of controversy. In 2010, there was no consensus on the review part of the document, but since the NPT parties were anxious to achieve a positive outcome and had reached agreement on the forward-looking part, the RevCon president issued the review under his own authority. Conclusion and Recommendations for Follow-on Actions that contained the 2010 Action plan were adopted by consensus. If the state parties again fail to reach an agreement on the review, the RevCon president might want to try to use the same formula. However, several states have already voiced their opposition to repeating the 2010 experience.

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4. WHAT IS THE 2010 ACTION PLAN?

The [Conclusions and Recommendations for Follow-on Actions](#) adopted by consensus at the 2010 RevCon and known as the 2010 Action Plan contain 64 action items across the “three pillars” of the NPT: nuclear disarmament (actions 1-22), nonproliferation (action 23-46), and peaceful uses of nuclear energy (action 47-64). In addition, the document endorses a set of practical steps regarding the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a WMD-free Zone in the Middle East. Achieving an agreement on disarmament and the Middle East was crucial to the outcome of the 2010 RevCon, and at the 2015 conference, state parties will be particularly concerned about progress in these two areas.

The action plan includes commitments by the NWS to accelerate the reductions in their nuclear arsenals, reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines, declare and dispose of the fissile material taken out of weapon programs, consider ways to reduce the risk of use of nuclear weapons and engage among themselves on these and other issues. To enhance transparency, the Action Plan also encourages the NWS to adopt a standard form to report on their nuclear arsenals and disarmament efforts. States that have not yet done so commit to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the Conference on Disarmament (CD) is called upon to begin negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

The formulation of actions on nonproliferation and peaceful uses is broader, and they pertain, for the most part, to all state parties. The nonproliferation section calls, among other things, for further support for the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and wider adoption of the Additional Protocol to the IAEA safeguards agreements. The protocol gives the Agency additional tools to verify not only non-diversion of declared nuclear material to weapons programs but also the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities. This section of the Action Plan underscores the importance of compliance with nonproliferation obligations, and urges states “to ensure that their nuclear-related exports do not directly or indirectly assist the development of nuclear weapons.” The section on peaceful uses calls on NPT parties to cooperate in the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, strengthen the IAEA technical assistance program, give preferential treatment to non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS) in exports and cooperation, share best practices on nuclear safety and security, and implement other relevant measures.



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Decisions on the Middle East include a request that the UN secretary-general, together with the three NPT depositaries (Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), convene a conference in 2012, to be attended by all states of the region, on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. The UN secretary-general and the three depositary states, in consultation with the states of the region, also had to designate a host country for the conference and appoint a facilitator to assist with organizing the conference and implementing follow-on steps. (For more on the implementation of the Middle East recommendations, see “What is the status of implementing the recommendations on the Middle East?”)

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5. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2010 ACTION PLAN?

While the adoption of the action plan at the 2010 RevCon was widely regarded as a success, its long-term impact depends on the implementation by the NPT state parties. Broad formulations, the lack of specific targets and deadlines on most of the action items, and differences in interpretation and priorities assigned by different states to different action items pose challenges for the review and assessment.

Several nongovernmental organizations, including [Reaching Critical Will](#) (RCW) and CNS, have conducted their own monitoring and assessments of the action plan implementation. CNS has focused on the disarmament action items and [found](#) progress since 2010 to be limited, though in the past year, some positive developments took place with regard to transparency and reporting.

The role of nuclear weapons in military and security concepts of nuclear weapon states has remained largely the same, with several states reaffirming their belief that nuclear weapons are the ultimate guarantee of their security. The modernization of nuclear arsenals, on the other hand, has continued, signaling the NWS’ long-term reliance on nuclear weapons and putting into question their commitment to disarmament. Most significant progress was observed on Action 4 regarding the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms ([New START](#)): Russia and the United States have been successfully implementing the bilateral arms control treaty that entered into force in February 2011. However, the US-Russian dialogue on arms control steps following New START has been deadlocked due to differences in priorities and the worsening of relations after Russia’s intervention in Ukraine. No state has announced unilateral nuclear arsenal reductions since the United Kingdom did so in 2010.

The NWS consultations (known as the P5 process), called for in Action 5, have been focusing in particular on transparency, confidence building, and verification measures. In 2014, the five states agreed on a standard reporting form pursuant to Action 21 and submitted their first reports under the common framework to the 2014 PrepCom session. For the most part, however, the reports contained information that had already been available previously. As the views on transparency among the NWS differ, the amount of information and level of detail provided in the reports also varied significantly.

The NWS have been briefing each other about their verification experiences, including the UK-Norway Initiative, US-UK work on nuclear warhead dismantlement verification, and New START verification



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regime. China also shared information on its nuclear disarmament verification related research. While no joint P5 verification projects came out of the NWS consultations, the United States cooperated with the Nuclear Threat Initiative to launch the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. The P5 have also agreed on the first edition of a common glossary of key nuclear terms and are planning to present it at the 2015 RevCon.

The United States and China have made no headway since the 2010 RevCon in ratifying the CTBT, and the CD has remained deadlocked, unable to adopt a program of work and begin negotiations.

For a detailed review of implementation of disarmament action items, please see the latest [CNS monitoring report](#). The [RCW report](#) also assesses implementation of the nonproliferation and peaceful uses sections.

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6. WHAT IS THE HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE? WHAT IS ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE 2015 REVCON?

In the 2010 RevCon final document, NPT state parties expressed “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons” and reaffirmed the importance of compliance with international humanitarian law. Since then, the initiative focused on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use has gained widespread support among the NNWS and civil society, introducing a renewed sense of urgency into the nuclear disarmament debate. At the same time, the initiative has led to tensions in the NPT, as it highlighted the differences of views among state parties on such issues as the legitimacy of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence.

At the 2012 PrepCom, sixteen NPT state parties led by Switzerland issued the first joint statement on the humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament, highlighting both the humanitarian concerns and the question of legality of any use of nuclear weapons. Since then, four more joint statements on the humanitarian dimension have been delivered at NPT PrepComs and UN First Committee sessions, the most recent one presented by New Zealand in fall 2014 on behalf of 155 nations. Underscoring the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and lack of response capacity, these statements have argued that nuclear weapons should never be used again under any circumstances. Largely because of the latter formulation, many of the US allies who rely on extended nuclear deterrence did not join these statements. Instead, Australia has twice presented a parallel statement on the humanitarian consequences, most recently on behalf of twenty states. Along with recognizing the humanitarian concerns, the group also emphasized the need to create security conditions for advancing disarmament.

Three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have taken place to date: in Oslo, Norway in March 2013; Nayarit, Mexico in February 2014, and in Vienna, Austria in December 2014. The conferences have addressed such issues as immediate effects of nuclear weapons use, national and international preparedness for response, potential long-term impacts (including climate and food security), and the risk of accidental use of nuclear weapons. Summarizing expert presentations



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and discussions, the chairs of these conferences have concluded that no state or international body is likely to have the capacity to adequately respond to the humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon explosion. Research presented at the Nayarit and Vienna conferences also highlighted the risk of accidental and unintentional use of nuclear weapons.

The conferences have drawn a lot of interest, with attendance reaching 158 states at the Vienna Conference, along with a large number of civil society organizations. However, the five NWS refused to attend the conferences in Oslo and Nayarit, and in a statement in March 2013, argued that the initiative risked diverting attention from a more “practical” approach to disarmament. However, in 2014, the United States and then the United Kingdom deciding to attend the Vienna Conference. While not signaling a broader change of either state’s positions on approaches to nuclear disarmament the move was welcomed by the NNWS.

The NWS have been concerned in particular that the humanitarian initiative is an attempt to initiate negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention or a ban, which they say would undermine the NPT, the Action Plan, and the step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament. A number of US non-nuclear-armed allies share this view, as well. Many NNWS, however, support the idea of negotiating a legally binding instrument that would prohibit nuclear weapons, though they might differ in their views on the scope of such a treaty. States active in the HINW initiative also emphasize that the focus on the humanitarian dimension is rooted in the NPT and the 2010 Action Plan, and that the initiative can only strengthen the treaty.

Building upon earlier discussions, the Vienna conference featured an overview of existing norms under the international law pertaining to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. The conference chair subsequently [concluded](#) that “there is no comprehensive legal norm universally prohibiting possession, transfer, production and use [of nuclear weapons].” Austria called on all NPT state parties to pursue measures to fill this “legal gap” and renew their commitment to implementing Article VI. Austria further pledged to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve the goal of the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. Over sixty states have now endorsed the [Austrian Pledge](#).

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7. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MIDDLE EAST?

In the 2010 consensus document, state parties agreed to convene a regional conference in 2012 on “the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by the states of the region, and with the full support and engagement of the nuclear-weapon states.” The failure to convene such a conference risks undermining the outcome of the 2010 RevCon and has serious implications for the upcoming 2015 RevCon and the NPT regime at large.

In October 2011, Finland was designated as the host country for the 2012 Conference, and the Finnish Undersecretary of State Ambassador Jaakko Laajava was named as the facilitator. Laajava has reported to all three PrepCom meetings in order to keep state parties informed of progress made in convening



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the conference and remaining obstacles. Despite conducting intensive consultations with states in the Middle East, as well as with the NPT depositaries and co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution (Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States), Laajava has indicated that no agreement had been reached among key parties on the agenda and modalities of the conference.

Participation in the conference by all relevant states is particularly important, and Israel so far is the only state that has not agreed to attend the proposed conference, though it has also not definitively refused to participate, either. After the 2010 RevCon, Israel stated that the consensus document ignores the realities of the Middle East and that, as a non-signatory to the NPT, it is not obligated to follow the decisions of NPT review conferences. Subsequently, however, Israel engaged in consultations on the appointment of the facilitator, and the multilateral informal consultation convened by the facilitator in 2013-14.

In November 2012, the three NPT depositaries announced the postponement of the Middle East conference, which was tentatively scheduled for December 2012. Each of the depositaries released a separate statement, which was reflective of disagreements among the three on how to approach the organization and postponement of the meeting. Russia called for the conference to take place before the 2013 PrepCom; the United Kingdom supported convening the conference as soon as possible, while the US statement listed conditions for a successful conference without specific references to the timing. The Arab states have responded critically to the postponement, and the League of Arab States (LAS) seriously considered boycotting the 2013 PrepCom meeting in protest. Ultimately, only the Egyptian delegation walked out of the 2013 PrepCom. The Arab states have also repeatedly underscored the fact that the 1995 Resolution on the establishment of a Middle East WMD-free zone was part of a “package” that included the decision on indefinite extension of the NPT, and that continued failure to make progress on implementing the resolution undermines that decision.

According to the facilitator’s reports to the three PrepComs, all states in the region share the goal of establishing a zone but there are still disagreements about the conference agenda, modalities, rules of procedure, and what the conference should accomplish. The Arab states are anxious to see the conference take place as a first step toward negotiations on a WMD-free zone in the region and implementation of the 1995 Middle East resolution. Therefore, they would like the conference to establish a formal process. Israel, however, is concerned that such a conference might lead to a “slippery slope” of negotiations on a zone, while the regional conditions Israel deems as necessary for its success (peaceful relations and reconciliation among all states in the region) are not present.

In an attempt to bring the regional states together and overcome disagreements, the facilitator proposed holding informal consultations to discuss conference agenda and other arrangements. After the Arab and Israeli sides put forth incompatible preconditions for the consultations, Ambassador Laajava announced that he and the co-conveners would meet in Switzerland in October 2013 and all regional states were welcome to attend, without preconditions. Since then, five rounds of these informal consultations have taken place in Switzerland until they halted in summer 2014. Several Arab states and Israel participated in all of the meetings, while an Iranian representative attended only the first round. At the consultations, the parties reportedly discussed the rules of procedure and agenda for the Middle East conference, voiced their concerns, and started to address potential outcomes and next steps to be adopted. However, they were still unable to resolve disagreements, and no new date has been set for the conference.



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At the 2015 RevCon, state parties will have to decide how to deal with the 2010 decision and what further steps, if any, the conference could endorse. While it is unlikely that the RevCon will agree on significant measures going beyond the 2010 decisions, it might be possible to extend the facilitator's mandate and reaffirm the states' commitment to convene the Middle East conference by a specific date. The facilitator could then resume the multilateral consultations in preparation for the conference. It is unclear, however, to what extent the Arab states and Iran support such an approach. It is also worth noting that Israel will attend the 2015 RevCon as an observer. Palestine became party to the NPT in February 2015 and will also participate in the RevCon.

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