

Role of Russia–US Cooperation in Strengthening the P5 Process¹

Remarks by Amb. Grigory Berdennikov²

Since Russia and the US possess the largest nuclear arsenals and are most experienced in the arms control talks than, logically, they have to play the leading role in any P5 process on nuclear matters. Our discussion on Thursday shows how far we are from being able to play this leading role now when we are not even sure what we will be able to agree to discuss at the SSD which is expected to start soon. It seems that the issue of what to discuss could take some time to be resolved.

Historically, there were two distinct periods where the P5 process in nuclear area was active. Those two periods were very different in the nature of the P5 activity and its results.

In the 1990s, the P5 was working on the margins of the Conference on Disarmament on the weekly basis but considered issues that were not limited by the work of the CD, though the main subject of the P5 was the coordination of the positions of the nuclear weapon States in connection with the multilateral CTBT negotiations. And, I am sure that the P5's contribution to those talks was central. But the P5 process was also key on such issues as:

- the coordinated position for the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 and the tactical line ensuring the achievement of this goal at the Review Conference in New York;
- the common formula of the negative and positive security assurances to non-nuclear weapon States for the appropriate resolution of the Security Council;
- the mandate for the CD Ad Hoc Committee negotiating the cut-off treaty to follow the CTBT;
- common position of the P5 in response to the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan.

In other words, the P5 work at that time had clear goals and mandate and was result oriented.

One cannot say that of the second period of the P5 activity in the 2010s when we had a practice of annual P5 conferences organized on rotating basis by P5 members. Since at that time there was no agreement what new agreements to negotiate among the Five, the conferences had very broad agendas comprising such issues as nuclear doctrines, CBMs, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, safeguards etc. The work consisted mainly of exchanges of views and information though on the issue of updating the nuclear glossary there was an effort to agree some terms. After the events of 2014 the public part of the P5 conference was used for propaganda unrelated to its scope of reference.

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Thus, in my view, the P5 process can be an effective tool if members can agree on the common goals or become just a meeting place for general discussions if no such agreement exists. At present, it seems there is very little possibility to find areas of agreement among the Five in the field of the nuclear arms control. I agree with the assessment of General Buzhinskiy on this score presented on Thursday. But I also noted the idea to agree at the level of the P5 the newly resurrected formula about the unwinnable nature of nuclear war. I think such statement by the P5 would be most appropriate especially before the next NPT Review Conference.

If I am allowed to use my imagination even further, I think the P5 could become useful again should the US decide to ratify the CTBT which it had officially proclaimed in the CD as an indispensable step towards the elimination of nuclear arms. If that happens, and China follows the US with its own ratification, as it had promised, then the P5 can become the HQ for coordinating steps to be taken to convince the remaining holdouts to follow suite and allow the Treaty to enter into force. This would change the whole landscape for nuclear arms control and non-proliferation.

One more thing, if I can. Some time ago the US seemed to be very keen about bringing China to the table of nuclear arms control talks until now only bilateral. If this wish is still on, in my view, there is only one way to realize it. Why not the nuclear allies of the US – the UK and France - publicly say that they are ready to join such discussions and invite China to join the emerging consensus of the P5. That could present an offer difficult to put aside.

Thank you.