

## **“The Necessity of a Meaningful Action Plan on Article VI of the NPT”**

Five decades ago, shortly after the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) entered into force, the United States and Russia concluded a series of [bilateral arms control and arms reduction agreements](#) to cap and eventually reduce their massive nuclear arsenals, which have constrained nuclear competition and reduced the threat of nuclear war.

Despite political differences and periods of conflict, Soviet and American leaders recognized the value of arms control in creating a more stable and predictable geostrategic environment. As then-Senator [Joe Biden put it in a speech in 1979](#), “pursuing arms control is not a luxury or a sign of weakness, but an international responsibility and a national necessity.”

Twenty-seven years ago, as states-parties negotiated the terms for the extension of the [nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty](#) (NPT), the future of the treaty was not assured, as progress on disarmament remained uncertain.

Yet at the [1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference](#), states-parties came together, committed to the “complete elimination of nuclear weapons,” and endorsed specific disarmament actions, including further nuclear reductions, the conclusion of talks on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and more. The bargain facilitated the indefinite extension of the NPT and the conclusion of negotiations on the CTBT. Additional commitments were made at the 2000 and 2010 NPT review conferences to advance implementation and compliance with all three pillars of the treaty.

Although the U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles have decreased significantly from peak Cold War levels, and the CTBT has successfully halted nuclear weapon test explosions, the risks posed by the risky nuclear deterrence strategies and the deadly nuclear arsenals of the five NPT nuclear-armed states remain far too high.

Further progress on nuclear disarmament by the United States and Russia—along with China, France, and the United Kingdom—has been and remains at the core of their NPT Article VI legal obligations to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.”

But, since the conclusion of the 2010 New START agreement, U.S.-Russian strategic stability and nuclear arms control talks have not produced results. Today, important bilateral nuclear arms control agreements are either [gone](#), are being ignored, or are in jeopardy. The only remaining treaty that verifiably limits the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals is [New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty \(New START\)](#), which will expire in early 2026.

Although China, France, and the U.K. have engaged in discussions on nuclear terms and doctrines through the N-5 Process, they have stubbornly refused to seriously engage in talks on ideas and proposals that would cap or reduce their own deadly arsenals.

Meanwhile, all nuclear-armed states are spending tens of billions of dollars each year to replace and upgrade their deadly arsenals. Russia is developing new types of intermediate-range missiles

and is threatening to deploy exotic new strategic systems, including [nuclear-armed torpedoes](#). President Putin also recently suggested he might put nuclear weapons-capable missiles and aircraft in Belarus. The United States has recently deployed new, lower-yield warheads on sea-launched ballistic missiles. [China](#) and [the United Kingdom](#), among other nuclear-armed states, are also increasing the quantity and capabilities of their nuclear arsenals.

Now, in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2022 decision to invade Ukraine and issue threats of nuclear weapons against any state that might try to interfere the risk of nuclear conflict by accident or by design is growing. As a result of Russia's actions, the U.S.-Russian dialogue on strategic stability and arms control was put on indefinite hold.

The deteriorating situation is the product of more than a decade of neglect of disarmament diplomacy in key capitals. None of the "N-5"—the NPT's nuclear-armed states—can credibly claim they are meeting their NPT disarmament obligations.

The only bright spot: in 2017, more than 130 nonnuclear weapon states decided to take action to highlight the existential dangers of nuclear weapons, stigmatize nuclear weapons use and the threat of their use, and implement their Article VI obligations to pursue nuclear disarmament by negotiating the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons \(TPNW\)](#).

The TPNW represents a constructive new approach to reinforce the taboos against nuclear weapons, bolster the NPT, and create more pressure for meaningful actions by the nuclear possessor states to verifiably cap, reduce, and eventually eliminate their arsenals. The first meeting of TPNW states parties produced a concrete set of 50 actions to advance nuclear disarmament and implement the Treaty.

And in a welcome move, TPNW states parties, citing "increasingly strident nuclear rhetoric," issued [a consensus political statement](#) that declared that "...any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is a violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. We condemn unequivocally any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances."

Unfortunately, thus far, all nuclear-armed states have refused to engage with the TPNW. We call upon them to do so and urge all NPT states-parties to join the TPNW.

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Clearly, the nuclear arms reduction process envisioned by the NPT regime is currently not working. The deficit in disarmament diplomacy and the growing nuclear danger mean that this is no ordinary NPT Review Conference.

As always, the Conference must comprehensively assess implementation and compliance on all major political commitments and legal obligations that states have undertaken in the context of the treaty.

But make no mistake: history will judge the success or failure of this pivotal NPT meeting as to whether or not delegations can reach agreement on a meaningful and updated disarmament

action plan, and whether your governments make good on that plan in the months and years that follow.

We strongly urge all states to act with a sense of urgency, a spirit of cooperation, and a determination to produce meaningful results that transcend old fault lines.

Even if a consensus final document is not attainable, a supermajority of states should seek to chart the path forward through a joint declaration.

One key issue this conference must address is the potential collapse of the U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control system.

In early 2021, within days of the original expiration date of New START, President Joe Biden and President Vladimir Putin wisely [agreed to extend the treaty by another five years](#), and re-launched a [“Strategic Stability Dialogue” in the fall of 2021](#) with the goal of negotiating a new agreement or agreements to supersede New START and address other issues of mutual concern.

But following Russia’s massive invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S.-Russian dialogue on strategic stability and arms control has been on indefinite hold.

Without new arrangements to supersede New START, there would not be any limits on the size or composition of the world’s two largest nuclear arsenals for the first time since 1972. Both sides recognize the danger but have not yet agreed to resume their dialogue.

“Our progress must continue beyond the New START extension,” Biden [wrote on June 2](#). “Even as we rally the world to hold Russia accountable for its brutal and unprovoked war on Ukraine, we must continue to engage Russia on issues of strategic stability,” Biden wrote. “Today—perhaps more than any other time since the Cold War—we must work to reduce the risk of an arms race or nuclear escalation.”

President Biden reiterated the call for renewed nuclear arms control talks in his [Aug. 1 statement](#) ahead of the NPT Review Conference: “... my Administration is ready to expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026.”

For his part, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on June 30 that “Russia is open to dialogue on ensuring strategic stability, preserving agreements on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and improving the situation in arms control.”

Unfortunately, officials on both sides have equivocated on when the dialogue might resume, and the two sides have not yet agreed on the resumption of New START inspections since they were suspended during the pandemic.

Delegations at this conference must be united in calling upon them to do so.

Some NPT nuclear-armed states and their allies may bemoan the fact that the environment for disarmament progress is “challenging.”

We can expect that a few states will continue to claim that many past NPT commitments on disarmament have been overtaken by events. Disarmament progress has never been simple or easy, but such deflections are irresponsible.

Instead, the five nuclear-armed NPT states should acknowledge their legally binding disarmament commitments, work with other states-parties on a pragmatic action plan to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons that sets new benchmarks and deadlines, and pledge to act with the urgency that the grave nuclear weapons threat demands.

Notwithstanding the different views on how and whether NPT states parties have fulfilled past Article VI-related disarmament commitments and obligations, nuclear-armed and non-nuclear-weapon states should cooperate on a serious updated disarmament action plan that could include the key elements below.

- A call for the United States and Russia to conclude talks on New START follow-on agreements that achieve further cuts in nuclear warheads and delivery systems no later than 2025 and, pending the conclusion of such arrangements, agree not to exceed the central limits of New START until such time as new arrangements enter into force.
- A pledge by the five NPT nuclear-armed states to engage in nuclear risk reduction talks and to agree to freeze the size of their nuclear arsenals.
- A call for NPT states to initiate disarmament talks in a multilateral format no later than 2025.
- A call for the remaining holdout states to initiate their respective processes to ratify the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and, pending the treaty's entry into force, negotiate and implement new, voluntary confidence-building measures to address legitimate concerns about compliance with the treaty's "zero-yield" prohibition.
- A call for the five NPT nuclear-armed states to update their 1995 negative security assurances and to jointly or individually affirm that they will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT.
- A call to address the legal loopholes in the current safeguards system which allow for materials to be removed from safeguards for military operations.
- A call for all states to refrain from developing and deploying nuclear-armed cruise and hypersonic missiles, as well as other new types of nuclear warheads and nuclear delivery systems, and refrain from cyber offensive infiltrations against each other's nuclear weapons command and control and communications systems.
- A recognition that because the use of nuclear weapons would produce catastrophic humanitarian consequences, "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought and no state should, under any circumstances, directly or indirectly threaten the use of nuclear weapons."

Now is the time to bolster the disarmament pillar of the NPT.

As Pope Francis cautioned when he visited Hiroshima in 2019: "The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral.... Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act."

We thank you for your attention.

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