



**Outlook for the 2015 NPT Review Conference and Beyond:  
The Roles of the Russian Federation and the United States**

By

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I welcome this opportunity to participate in this year's Moscow Nonproliferation Conference and wish to thank Anton Khlopkov and the Center for Energy and Security Studies for organizing this event. I was asked to discuss the role of the P5 and NPT depositaries in making the 2015 NPT Conference a success and to consider Russian-US cooperation in particular.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of the actions taken by the two States that hold over 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Despite their many differences over nuclear policy issues, these States share a similar perspective about such weapons—a perspective that contrasts with a view widely shared among non-nuclear-weapon States.

More than many might realize, the future of the NPT rests very much on which of these two visions of nuclear weapons will prevail. *Vision One* holds that such weapons are indispensable, legal to use, militarily effective, a reliable insurance policy, and a source of national pride and international prestige. *Vision Two* views the very existence of nuclear weapons as a grave danger to international peace and security, a confidence-reducer at both the strategic and regional levels, a huge waste of money and technological resources, and if used, a catastrophic threat to humanity.

For better or worse, both visions will shape the future of nuclear weapons. The global non-proliferation norm will be impossible to sustain if Vision One remains enshrined in the security policies of any States, not just those with the largest arsenals. Possession without disarmament—justified by nuclear deterrence—invites proliferation. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said, “the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has proven to be contagious.”<sup>1</sup>

All of this reaffirms the importance of fulfilling the disarmament commitments made at NPT Review Conferences and in Article VI. The more these are reflected in actions by the Russian Federation and United States, the brighter will be prospects for—getting other nuclear-weapon possessor states into the disarmament process, halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and achieving nuclear disarmament.

These are just some of the reasons why the Russian Federation and the United States must lead the way in revitalizing the nuclear disarmament process—a process that must include substantial roles by other nuclear possessor states, non-nuclear-weapon states, international organizations including the United Nations, and of course, civil society.

They can lead in many ways—through unilateral and joint statements; through actions anchoring disarmament priorities in domestic laws, policies, regulations, budgets, and institutions; through enhanced transparency of deep reductions in relevant capabilities; and through collaboration in advancing disarmament in multilateral arenas like the UN disarmament machinery and the NPT review process.

While the bilateral nuclear arms control process remains stalled, unilateral reductions are still possible following the precedents set by the “presidential nuclear initiatives” of 1991-1992, which reduced deployments of tactical nuclear weapons. But there are limits to going it alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech at a conference hosted by the EastWest Institute, United Nations, 24 October 2008.

Neither unilateral measures nor by actions that exclude possessor states will be sufficient to achieve global zero. The classic standards of disarmament—namely, verification, irreversibility, transparency, universality, and binding commitments—can only be achieved through an inclusive process. Unilateral actions cannot satisfy these stringent criteria—and universality alone requires engagement of the possessor States.

Most UN Member States support the pursuit of a nuclear weapons convention or a framework of agreements with the same goal. Earlier this month, 109 members of the General Assembly's First Committee voted in favour of its annual International Court of Justice resolution calling for "multilateral negotiations leading to an early conclusion of a nuclear weapons convention".<sup>2</sup> Among them were four States that are believed to possess such weapons: China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India, and Pakistan. This goal has also been endorsed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, by Mayors for Peace (with its over 6,300 city representatives), and by other influential civil society groups.

Is it that difficult to imagine that the Russian Federation and the United States will one day reconsider their opposition to such a convention? How can nuclear disarmament ever be achieved without law? Since some legal framework will be necessary, and since commitments to pursue disarmament have been often re-affirmed, isn't it time to start thinking about what legal obligations will be needed? This will likely involve an extensive process of consultation, analysis, and negotiations. So why delay?

Remember that Article VI already obliges its States Parties to undertake "negotiations in good faith" on nuclear disarmament. Because of its importance in the NPT review process, the commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament—however exploratory—would help substantially in responding to a malaise that persists both in the NPT review process and the UN disarmament machinery.

And because of their implications for international peace and security, I believe such negotiations would also help to revive interest in another NPT goal, "general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" (GCD).

People forget that GCD—which integrates WMD disarmament with conventional arms control—is a goal also found in a dozen multilateral treaties. The concept extends to other measures to strengthen international peace and security—including strengthening the prohibition against the threat or use of force, the duty to resolve disputes peacefully, and the pursuit of other goals that are rooted in the UN Charter, such as the promotion of social and economic development, the protection of human rights, and the rule of law.

As I am speaking here in Moscow, allow me to add that these goals are not at all obscure to government officials and scholars in this great country. They have been long recognized as necessary to pursue for humanitarian, financial, and defence-related reasons.

One of the first ventures to strengthen international humanitarian law was the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868, which outlawed explosive bullets due to the "unnecessary suffering" they caused and because they were "contrary to the laws of humanity."

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution A/C.1/69/L.23, 4 November 2014. The vote was 109-24-18.

Amid a general build-up of arms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Foreign Minister Mikhail Mouravieff circulated the Czar's famous Rescript proposing a peace conference in The Hague in 1899. Referring to the "crushing burden" of arms expenditure, the Rescript stated that the military utility of that investment was illusory. If we substantially increase the amounts cited, these words are as relevant now as when they were written over a century ago:

*Hundreds of millions are devoted to acquiring terrible engines of destruction, which, though today regarded as the last word of science, are destined tomorrow to lose all value in consequence of some fresh discovery in the same field.*

As for the GCD concept, it was the subject of a detailed proposal introduced by Maxim Litvinov in the League of Nations back in 1927.<sup>3</sup> He stated that disarmament offered "the best guarantee of security for all peoples and all countries" and proposed its achievement through a comprehensive, multi-staged process with time lines. As for the savings gained from the disarmament process, he said they should "be employed by each State at its own discretion, but exclusively for productive and cultural purposes".

In 1961, Soviet ambassador Valerian Zorin and US official John McCloy agreed on a Joint Statement listing eight "principles as the basis for future multilateral negotiations on disarmament". While GCD continued to be deliberated in Geneva, it soon gave way to what were called "partial measures", what some today call the "step-by-step process" of disarmament—a process firm in its logic, yet frail in its actual achievements especially when it comes to outlawing nuclear weapons.

Perhaps the time has come for the Russian Federation and United States to revisit the McCloy-Zorin Joint Statement, even if only to explore once again those "principles as the basis for future multilateral negotiations on disarmament". Some useful questions to ask would include—how are they still relevant, can they be adapted to present conditions, do they offer a means to reconcile WMD disarmament with conventional arms control, and can they help in strengthening the Charter's system for maintaining international peace and security?

I am convinced that the more these two States reflect on the common ground on which they have stood in the past—including their longstanding support for disarmament, even comprehensive disarmament, and the "crushing burdens" of engaging in competitive arms races—the more attractive the nuclear weapons convention and a broader treaty on GCD will become. This of course will not likely be possible in time for the 2015 NPT Review Process—which is regrettable since it would be welcomed throughout the world—yet these remain worthy goals to pursue. There is no reason why progress in their bilateral relationship and nuclear disarmament must necessarily be limited just to fulfilling the modest, incremental commitments in the 2010 NPT Action Plan.

This might also offer the best scenario for the future of the NPT, the future of the non-proliferation regime, and the future of international peace and security. Writing in another context, Leo Tolstoy best explained the challenge ahead:

*We all complain of the senseless order of life, which is at variance with our being, and yet we refuse to use the unique and powerful weapon within our hands — the*

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<sup>3</sup> Speech to the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, League of Nations, Geneva, 30 November 1927, at <http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/league/le00302a.pdf>.

*consciousness of truth and its expression; but on the contrary, under the pretext of struggling with evil, we destroy the weapon, and sacrifice it to the exigencies of an imaginary conflict.*<sup>4</sup>

Let us avoid that struggle and embrace *Vision Three*: a world free of nuclear weapons.

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<sup>4</sup> Leo Tolstoy, Patriotism and Christianity (London: Walter Scot, 1896), p. 51.