

MARCH 2020

CSIS European Trilateral Track 2 Nuclear Dialogues

2019 Consensus Statement

The European Trilateral Track 2 Nuclear Dialogues, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), have convened senior nuclear policy experts from the United Kingdom, France, and the United States (P3) for the past eleven years to discuss nuclear deterrence, arms control, and nonproliferation policy issues and to identify areas of consensus among the three countries. The majority of the experts are former U.S., UK, and French senior officials; the others are well-known academics in the field. Since the Dialogues' inception, high-level officials from all three governments have also routinely participated in the discussions.

The Dialogues have been unique in bringing senior U.S., UK, and French representatives into a trilateral forum for discussing nuclear policy. The United States, United Kingdom, and France hold common values and principles directed toward a shared purpose of sustaining global peace and security, as well as an understanding of their respective roles as responsible stewards of the nuclear order. Their sustained engagement will thus remain unique in the context of international alliances and partnerships and will continue to be essential into the foreseeable future, irrespective of political shifts in any of the three countries.

In 2019, the group's discussion addressed a range of growing challenges in the Euro-Atlantic security environment and beyond, prompting agreement among the group's nongovernmental participants to issue the following statement reflecting the consensus views of the undersigned. All signatories agree to this statement in their personal capacity, which may not represent the views of their respective organizations.

The Future of the Rules-Based International Nuclear Order

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has had remarkable success to date, meeting President Kennedy's challenge to limit proliferation and helping to ensure 75 years of nonuse of nuclear weapons. But as the 2020 NPT Review Conference (Rev Con), which marks the 50th anniversary of the treaty entering into

force, looms on the horizon, anxiety runs high among the international nonproliferation community regarding the future of this landmark treaty. Many believe that, as occurred during the 2015 Rev Con, disputes over a Middle East Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone will prevent agreement on a final consensus document. While such a statement should not be seen as the sole measure of conference success or of the sustainability of the nonproliferation regime, failure to secure such a statement could have significant implications for the future vitality of the review conference process. We must consider in any event how to move forward if the 2020 Rev Con does not produce a final consensus statement—continued commitment to nonproliferation is essential and a P5 dialogue could have renewed value moving forward.

The pressures on the Treaty are many. On one hand, the international nonproliferation community has been challenged by the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which has continued to polarize the nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states by creating a treaty-based push for disarmament outside of the NPT format. The TPNW lacks meaningful and detailed verification procedures, which risks undermining the NPT verification framework centered on the IAEA through duplication, overburdening, competing funding requirements, and offering potential proliferators a pretext to abandon the strict verification procedures of the NPT. The TPNW is not a viable replacement for the NPT and will not be recognized as establishing customary international law. However, even if TPNW secures the necessary 50 ratifications, it will, as a matter of international law, bind only those nations that are party to it because it will not meet the established criteria for a treaty to be recognized as reflecting customary international law. We continue to encourage constructive dialogue between the nuclear weapons states and TPNW supporters while stressing the primacy of the NPT in the international nonproliferation system. The P3 must also make clear that arms control, nonproliferation, and deterrence are compatible and complementary with aspirations for eventual disarmament. Furthermore, we support risk reduction efforts and initiatives that support nuclear responsibility taken in good faith. We likewise encourage the P5 to reiterate at the highest levels the longstanding reassurance that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

The arms control regimes that have contributed greatly to stability, non-proliferation, and avoidance of use of nuclear weapons are under unprecedented strain, with the dissolution of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Russia, the continued unraveling of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany) and Iran, and dimming prospects for extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). The evident anxiety among our three nations and most of the world about the future of arms control and disarmament is understandable.

In addition, since the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and re-imposed sanctions on Iran, tensions between the two have risen. Iran has gradually walked back its nuclear commitments made under the deal, resulting in the E3 triggering the deal’s Dispute Resolution Mechanism. Iran has also struck back against Gulf and U.S. targets in the region through a series of escalatory steps. We agree that Iran cannot be allowed to possess nuclear weapons and that its missile and regional activities pose a threat to international security. The JCPOA remains the best starting point—albeit, not the end-point—for restraining Iran’s nuclear program and addressing these other serious challenges.

Currently, the New START Treaty is the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control treaty between the United States and Russia but is set to expire in 2021. We stand at the edge of a world in which bilateral treaty-based arms control agreements may cease to exist as we know it and with it will disappear the enhanced transparency, predictability, and cooperation that arms control can provide.

In response to these challenges to arms control, the P3 should develop a positive vision for the future of arms control agreements, recognizing that it may differ significantly from what came before. The context for future arms control agreements must include alliances, expand beyond the bilateral U.S.-Russia format, and address new domains (such as cyber), increasing conventional capabilities, exotic systems, as well as shorter-range nuclear weapons currently not covered by existing treaties. Each of these factors must be considered in order to decide whether or not any proposed treaty is in NATO's interest. Continued coordination with partners and allies as well as treaties that value both continuity and compliance will be essential to the future success of the arms control regime. While we recognize the challenging nature of arms control with Russia today, and while we condemn Russia's sustained pattern of violations on a host of arms control agreements, on balance, we support the extension of New START as long as both sides continue to comply in the interim in order to give both sides the opportunity to negotiate a suitable replacement.

We believe effective arms control has played and can continue to play an important part in reducing nuclear risks while helping to reassure allies and build and maintain consensus on nuclear policy.

The Role of Alliances

This year, the group met on the margins of the Leaders Meeting in London on the 70th anniversary of NATO, a reminder of the importance of alliances. Strong alliances, such as NATO, play a vital role in preventing proliferation and ensuring strategic stability. In light of this, we continue to be concerned by Russia's growing militarism along NATO's perimeter, its interference in democratic elections, as well as the increasingly contentious relationship between Russia and liberal democracies.

Countries continue to have reason to believe that acquiring nuclear weapons may offer a way to ensure regime survival. Maintenance of a credible deterrent and U.S.-ally-partner solidarity is a critical element of strategic stability and preventing a cycle of proliferation. Furthermore, NATO is key to preventing major war.

Potential changes to U.S. declaratory policy, particularly the adoption of a "no first use" (NFU) policy for nuclear weapons or a declaration that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack remain of significant concern to U.S. allies and partners. Either policy, particularly if coupled to other changes to the U.S. nuclear posture that could be perceived as weakening the U.S. deterrent, could cause allies to question U.S. commitment to defend allies in conflict. While we do not support such policy changes, if they are pursued at all, it should be done cautiously and with extensive consultations with allies.

We must work to rebuild alliances and reassure allies of our commitments to each other. Moreover, close consultation and cooperation between the United States and NATO members are essential and must improve. At the same time, NATO and the P3 should engage with non-nuclear weapon partners within the alliance to reassure commitment to the Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) mission and make it clear that NATO remains a unified nuclear alliance. We support the London Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government restating that as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance while also committing to the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation—taking into account the prevailing security environment.

New Risks and Challenges for Escalation and Strategy

Over the last few years, the world has witnessed a steady increase in "gray zone" conflict and aggression below the threshold of armed conflict. While these activities do not have an explicit nuclear dimension, they can complicate perceptions of stability and risk unintended escalation. Russia and China have successfully manipulated the "gray zone" to support their interests and challenge Western concepts of

conflict, especially through clandestine manipulations in cyberspace and the widespread implementation of information operations aimed in significant part at election interference and sowing discord in democratic states. However, Russia and China are not the only actors deploying information operations in destabilizing ways. In February 2019, the India-Pakistan crisis culminated in widespread disinformation with potentially dangerous nuclear signaling. Following a terror attack perpetrated by the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which killed 40 Indian paramilitary members in India's Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) state, disinformation and alternative facts spread via the social media platforms Facebook and WhatsApp. The crisis highlighted the destabilizing nature of disinformation and its potential impact on escalation.

Moreover, the challenges of information operations and cyber operations are increasingly mainstreamed into bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and arms control. Verification of arms control agreements depends on the existence and acceptance of solid evidence, but we are witnessing the emergence of a “post-truth” world, where trust in the accuracy and reliability of information across the online ecosystem is increasingly under fire. Furthermore, information operations sow doubt and distrust into the public's confidence in established institutions and can frustrate efforts to build multilateral consensus around treaties or for imposing consequences for treaty violations. Unnecessary secrecy and opacity surrounding the nuclear enterprise increase the vulnerability to information operations by undermining the public's confidence. Though information operations are not necessarily a new technique, they have gone through a technical revolution. Today, social media algorithms, the number of Internet users, and increased interconnectivity have accelerated the speed, depth, and sophistication with which disinformation is disseminated. At the same time, other new technologies and capabilities that could be destabilizing are being developed and fielded. These emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), deep fakes, and increased cyber capabilities, threaten older technology that the nuclear weapons infrastructure is built upon.

Maintaining stability and deterring adversaries in the gray zone will be a growing challenge and could require substantial rethinking of our deterrence approaches. We have seen few indications that symmetrical responses to gray zone activities will be effective; instead, we believe success relies on changing the adversary's calculus by establishing and communicating clear thresholds where possible, imposing costs, and denying benefits. While attribution and public exposure could be a deterrent for some actors, the P3 should also develop a fuller set of responsive actions. Furthermore, when adversaries seek to undermine public trust in our institutions, the P3 must continue to inspire trust in their pronouncements on deterrence matters.

Modernization

Both to replace aging systems and to enhance stability and deterrence in the face of emerging technology, we support the programs of our respective countries for renewal of nuclear forces to safeguard our systems against potential vulnerabilities. This should include strengthening the resilience of these systems against malicious cyber activity, including reducing dependence on networked capabilities.

Nuclear Responsibility and Transparency

In light of new and emerging challenges, the nuclear weapons community must prioritize nuclear responsibility and transparency when possible. The NPT and the broader arms control regime bring much-needed predictability, transparency, and cooperation to the international security environment. Furthermore, nuclear security—in terms of safe control of nuclear weapons, materials, and infrastructure—is one of the few areas where all nuclear-weapon states share a self-interest. As three responsible, like-minded nuclear weapon states, the United States, United Kingdom, and France should leverage this desire

and work with other nations to ensure the safety of these materials and infrastructure. Additionally, we believe the P3 should continue to promote and support initiatives that increase transparency where possible. Greater transparency with our publics could increase trust in the government and established institutions as well as decrease vulnerability to information operations.

There is a growing recognition that the P3 must engage in a broader discussion and a genuine substantive, well-informed debate on nuclear weapons. Moreover, the P3 governments need to do more to develop and communicate a broader narrative on the value of their responsible possession of nuclear weapons and their support for nuclear deterrence policies, as well as an approach to nuclear arms control that is verifiable, enforceable, and contributes to security and stability.

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