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## Antibodies to Disarmament

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[Vladimir Orlov, Sergey Semenov](#)

*PIR Center experts Vladimir Orlov and Sergey Semenov dwell upon the X NPT Review Conference.*

The NPT has been the most important international security treaty for more than 50 years. This affirmation is undisputed by its member-states. What state will speak up against nuclear nonproliferation, cessation of the nuclear arms race, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy? But the devil is in the detail. And the conference tasked with reviewing the implementation of the treaty is being prepared in no easy circumstances.

Due to the pandemic, the event was postponed for almost two years. As we write these lines, the UN Secretariat has again signaled that due to the growing spread of the omicron strain of coronavirus, it will not be able to ensure that the NPT Review Conference in New York in January will be held in person. “Absolutely surreal”, says William Potter, one of the most seasoned nonproliferation minds of the world, who has not missed a RevCon for the last 25 years.

Substantive difficulties, however, overwhelm organizational matters. The rift between the stances of nuclear and non-nuclear-weapons states is far greater than the advised 1.5 meters of social distance. Especially when it comes to disarmament, where we have witnessed an unprecedented consolidation of those advocating for an early prohibition of nuclear weapons. And the anti-nuclear vanguard is determined to “kick” new disarmament commitments out of the nuclear powers.

The international environment, in its turn, fosters whatever thing, not disarmament. Thanks to the U.S., the INF Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty went south, on the verge of survival is the Iran nuclear deal. The work on rectifying the international security architecture crisis will suffice for a dozen of summits, both Russian-American and with the participation of all P5 nations.

In these circumstances, there is a temptation to discard the calls to disarm *here and now* as naïve and even hazardous. But notwithstanding their utopian nature, one may understand the motives of the *anti-nuclear vanguard*. The risks of armed conflict between the *grandees* of world politics are increasing. And the fallout from such a conflict will not distinguish between nuclear and non-nuclear-weapons-states. Therefore, we should search for ways to address the legitimate concerns of those states who cannot rely upon nuclear deterrents to defend themselves.

Contrary to the polarized rhetoric, this is the area where the points of convergence are palpable. The P5 has already presented its vision of nuclear risk reduction. The New START has been extended, the U.S.-Russian consultations on strategic stability have been relaunched. Though it is still not enough for “radicals”, the chances to find a compromise on disarmament are not lost.

NPT is not exhausted in disarmament. How to forestall the encroachment of nuclear weapons? How to foster the promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy? Such issues cannot be relegated. They also have enough pressure points, including the risks of IAEA safeguards politicization, DPRK nuclear and missile program, the fate of the Iran nuclear deal, and the establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East. There is another fresh challenge on how compatible AUKUS plans and nonproliferation commitments are.

The objective of the RevCon is to trim the ground for joint work on these matters in the coming three years. It is in the Russian interests that the conference fixes at least the basic contours of the common ground on all of the three pillars of NPT without overemphasizing its separate element. The optimal solution is to adopt a not-so-far-reaching, unambitious, but a sensible document. By consensus. Without repelling anybody. Poor NPT- peace is better when a good quarrel. ~~Otherwise, there is a risk that by the time the next RevCon is held in 2025, the debates of NPT states will resemble a dispute with anti-vaxxers, every state confident that it is beyond any doubt on the right side of history.~~

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Tel.: +7 (495) 987-19-15

Mailing address: PO Box 147, Moscow, 119019, Russia

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