



LOOKING AHEAD AT THE NPT REVCON 2020 THROUGH THE RECENT PREPCOM

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Keywords: NPT Revcon, Nuclear, JCPOA, NPT

In 2020, the NPT will complete 50 years in force. With 191 States parties, it is widely considered to be the foundation of the global nuclear governance regime covering nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It is considered to be a major success in halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and has contained their possession to nine States (USA, USSR/Russian Federation, UK, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea – in that chronological order). As per the decisions taken when the NPT was indefinitely and unconditionally extended in 1995, the Prep Coms are proposed to consider “principles, objectives and ways in order to promote the full implementation of the Treaty”, and to make proposals” for the following Rev Con to settle on.

In 2019 Prep Com, the last of the three held before the next NPT RevCon, around 150 state parties participated in the discussions. It was held in New York from 29th April, 2019 to 10th May 2019. An estimated 106 proclamations were made in the General Debate pursued by recurring statements on issues such as: - i) “nuclear

disarmament and security assurances, ii) nuclear verification (IAEA safeguards), nuclear weapon-free zones, regional issues including with respect to the Middle East, and North Korea and South Asia; and iii) peaceful uses of nuclear energy, NPT review process and provisions for withdrawal from the Treaty.”

This session of the Prep Com, similar to its forerunners, figured out how to finish the procedural arrangements and supported the nomination of Ambassador Rafael Grossi (Permanent Representative of Argentina to the International Atomic Energy Agency and other global associations in Vienna) as President of the 2020 NPT Review Conference. However, the State parties were not able to make any recommendations on the substantive agenda for the review conference.

Core Discussions

In the second draft that was unveiled by the Prep Com Chair, there was a call for actions to strengthen nuclear disarmament by the five nuclear weapon states, to deal with the humanitarian consequences

of nuclear weapons use, and to stress the importance of achieving greater gender diversity. Regarding the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), many states supported its complementarity with the NPT, and called out for the “need for a legally-binding norm to prohibit nuclear weapons in order to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons”. The Prep Com also made a special reference to the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). Among the other issues addressed in the last Prep Com were nuclear non-proliferation and peaceful nuclear uses. During a discussion on the Iranian Nuclear Program, many states communicated their support for implementation and compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), though there was a division amongst the key parties on an upcoming conference on a zone free of WMD in the Middle East. Further negotiations with North Korea on denuclearization were also emphasised.

In a significant development during the PrepCom, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, just a day before the meeting ended, announced that the Iranian leadership was in a mood to withdraw from the JCPOA and, even from the NPT, if the JCPOA file was referred again to the UN Security Council. About withdrawal of states from the treaty, Article X of the NPT states that, "a state may withdraw from the treaty, requiring three month's advance notice should "extraordinary events" jeopardize its supreme national interests." And according to the Iranian President, if pressure exerted by the US, to dismantle the JCPOA and UNSC resolution 2231,

continued, it would be detrimental not only to the stability and security of the Middle East region, but also to the NPT. In a firm statement he said, “Such policies will not be left unanswered and Iran will adopt appropriate measures to preserve its supreme national interests.”

The Prep Com also focussed on the values of peaceful application of nuclear energy to global developments and the importance of nuclear safety and security practices to sustain peaceful nuclear activities. In this context, President Rafael Grossi of Argentina stated that, the next Rev Con of 2020, shall give an opportunity to “strengthen the implementation of Article IV so that all States parties can have access to research, production and use of nuclear energy, and can sustain the widest international exchange on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.”

Looking Ahead

Though there were several disagreements between the delegates on various issues such as the chair’s recommendations, in concluding statements yet, the courteous that prevailed throughout all the sessions were really appreciable. But this respectful tone was challenged when disputes broke out between Iraq, Syria, Russia and United States. Russia assailed the United States on issues extending from the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA to its inability to issue adequate visas for Russian representatives to come for the Prep Com. Iran, Syria and the United States fought on issues of Syria's compliance with its IAEA safeguard obligations, U.S. compliance with the NPT's prohibition on transfer of nuclear

weapons and U.S. weapons modernization. The states were thankful to the Prep Com, for successfully being able to clear up procedural hurdles, ranging from deciding on the confirmation of Review Conference President-Designate Rafael Grossi. States have also emphasized that the success of the upcoming RevCon would largely depend upon the activities that the states undertake during the interim period. Throughout the following few months all State Parties should respect their commitments to the NPT, and work towards developing common consensus on the need to reinforce the integrity and the authority of the treaty and its full implementations alongside the concurred commitments from the 1995, 2000 and 2010 review conferences. The NPT State parties will next assemble at the United Nations in New York for the next NPT Review Conference that would be held from April 27 to May 22, 2020, to celebrate the 50th commemoration, the Golden Jubilee, of the world's most significant and key nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament treaty and to chart the course for the following five years (2020-2025).

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

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