



# CONFERENCE REPORT – P5 TRACK 1.5 MEETING

**Hybrid meeting, 2 December 2021, Paris**

The meeting in Track 1.5 format that took place during the Conference of the Principals on Thursday December 2, 2021 in Paris was prepared by the workshop, orchestrated by the Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), of a group of some twenty international experts on Wednesday November 24, 2021 (in virtual format). This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss three themes presented on December 2: Strategic Risk Reduction (SRR), peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and the continuation of the P5 process during the next NPT review cycle. Nuclear doctrines and non-proliferation issues were also debated, the key points of which are summarised below.

This collection of ideas, concerns and recommendations is intended to inform the discussion among P5 members in the current cycle of the process and in its continuation after the 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference.

## ***Strategic Risk Reduction and doctrines***

SRR has been increasingly pushed at the forefront of discussions between P5 members. This sub-subject was initiated within the discussion on doctrines and supported because of its topicality but also with a view to promoting a definition of SRR that would go beyond the more restricted topic of nuclear risk reduction. Given the current importance of this issue, the creation of a specific working group dedicated to discussing it appears relevant.

The meetings of P5 members, their willingness to discuss among them, especially on doctrines, is in itself an important way to limit misunderstanding and to reduce the risk of uncontrolled escalation towards nuclear conflict. Additionally, efforts on transparency, for example the proposed side-event on doctrines, are welcome, and the work done on the glossary is a step forward.

However, while confidential talks play an important role in this framework, which is duly appreciated, the process has created expectations for more concrete measures. The working paper on this issue is welcome especially as it develops a shared approach on risks or proposes ways to address specific risks in a concrete manner. A useful and realistic step could be the listing of existing crisis communication channels, in particular hotlines, in order to increase knowledge on which mechanisms are already active, which could be reactivated, and which should be created. The topic of crisis management remains one of the more pressing in the short term, and could be addressed through a reflection on the creation of national risk reduction centres by all P5 states and joint thinking on the policy of launch-on-warning or on new measures aimed at avoiding incidents in space. The risks that could emerge following incidents linked to exercises and patrols of nuclear-weapons platforms (bombers and submarines) should also be addressed, and tools to deal with these incidents proposed. Another important issue is the mingling of nuclear and non-nuclear strategic capacities and the reliance on similar platforms and command and control infrastructure. P5 may profitably have closed discussions on how to avoid escalation after an involuntary strike on strategic assets.

While addressing SRR is recognised of paramount importance, it should always be done in a way that shows that it does not replace the objective of nuclear disarmament contained in the NPT. In that sense, adopting concrete measures and linking them to the NPT review process might be the right approach. This should be done in complementarity with long-term efforts to propose a shared visions of risks and how to mitigate them. Also, it should take advantage of the work done in other forums on this issue, such as the Stockholm Initiative or CEND. Working groups could be organized to compare ideas and assess recommendations. Such activities could also be conducted with NGO experts given the wealth of suggestions and publications available on this topic.

#### **P5 perspectives**

*It was recalled that the P5 had finalised a working paper on the issue, published in December 2012.<sup>1</sup> The P5 appreciates the commitment of other groupings, such as the Stockholm Initiative or NPDJ, to work on this topic as well, and an interaction with representatives of these countries will take place at the end of the Principals' meeting. This effort and focus on doctrines and risk reduction will remain central, even after the Review Conference. It was noted that the focus on "strategic" risk reduction (instead of "nuclear") is deliberate and seems the most constructive way to address the issue and, especially, to focus on the risk of escalation to the nuclear threshold following misperception or misinterpretation. It was also confirmed that the dialogue on doctrines is an important part of the P5 work. It is mostly conducted behind closed doors, but a side-event at the 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference will provide information about the spirit of this work. Finally, it was mentioned that the P5 strived*

---

<sup>1</sup> "Strategic Risk Reduction," Working paper submitted by China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, NPT/CONF.2020/WP.34, 21 December 2021.

*to adopt a common statement reiterating the principles contained in the Reagan-Gorbachev statement.<sup>2</sup>*

### ***Peaceful uses and non-proliferation***

The peaceful uses of nuclear energy, traditionally conceived as the third pillar of the NPT, have received renewed attention since the turn of the century. The fear of nuclear disasters, the development of civil applications for medical care, agriculture, archaeology, etc., but also the contrasting perception of a risk of nuclear terrorism, and the question of the development of so-called “ENR” technologies are at the heart of new issues. These issues are not the more contentious among the P5 countries. Here, there is room for consensus and for initiatives. International cooperation is very effective in this sphere, often on a bilateral basis.

The IAEA's Technical Cooperation Programme and Peaceful Uses Initiative are among the most positive aspects of the implementation of Article 4 of the NPT. Unfortunately, these successes are systematically overshadowed by the major strategic issues that are the subject of disagreement between powers and regional blocs. The P5 can contribute to improving the perception of these success stories of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. In that sense, discussions on peaceful uses should not be perceived as a way of distracting attention from other issues, including article 6 of the NPT.

The proliferation of know-how and technologies, the rapid development of new technologies, the risks of exploiting nuclear energy in countries that are accessing civilian applications for the first time have become new challenges to the objective of non-proliferation and the export policies of supplier states. These transformations are at the centre of the agenda – not only the P5 agenda but also, most of all, the NPT agenda. The nuclear industry's involvement in dealing with these challenges has become a key to success.

In particular, the current breakdown among the P5 on managing the spread of fuel cycle capacities has been raised as a major problem for the non-proliferation regime. Supplier countries in the P5 may be seen as showing less restraint in the supply of ENR technologies, due to commercial competition, especially with the emergence of new players in this market. But if the P5 agreed to keep this risk under control, it might convince all players to be careful and play by the rules. However, it was expressed that there is little hope to see the P5 reach a consensus on this score.

The uses of nuclear energy for military applications, such as naval propulsion for instance, have recently generated strong comments and disagreements about compliance with the spirit of the NPT and various commitments under the global non-proliferation regime. In particular, the next eighteen months will be crucial for the United States and the United Kingdom within the P5, and Australia outside that group, to convince the international community that their strategic agreement does not pose a risk to the non-proliferation regime, but rather uses it as a stepping stone to strengthen the regime and its fragilities.

---

<sup>2</sup> Déclaration conjointe des chefs d'État et de Gouvernement de la République populaire de Chine, des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, de la République française, du Royaume-Uni de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord et de la Fédération de Russie pour prévenir la guerre nucléaire et éviter les courses aux armements, Elysee.fr, 3 janvier 2022.

These issues and disagreements may weaken the cohesion of the P5 and affect its ability to be a force for change on this topic.

### **P5 perspectives**

*As the NPT celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, it seems important to P5 members to focus on its positive role in the lives of millions of persons across the world, especially through the development of the peaceful uses of nuclear technologies. There is therefore an agreement to emphasize more these issues within the NPT and to promote, in particular, the ability of nuclear applications and programmes, especially those put in place by the IAEA, to contribute to development goals. Developments on peaceful uses is also consistent with the objective of acting against climate change and has been laid out in a working paper to the Review Conference.<sup>3</sup> The United States and the United Kingdom are also launching a programme to promote many nuclear applications, beyond energy, contributing to development. In that sense, it was noted that it should be understood that for P5 members, peaceful uses are a serious commitment and not a distraction from the other pillars of the NPT. On the non-proliferation front, the resolution of the Iranian case remains seen as extremely important to uphold the regime and that the commercial competition between P5 countries to sell civilian nuclear technologies should not be detrimental to the non-proliferation regime. However, disagreements emerged on the question of non-explosive military use of nuclear materials by non-nuclear weapon states.*

### **The future of the process**

Despite Covid and the many tensions plaguing the P5 process, the ability of the five countries to sustain the exchanges in this format over the period 2019-2022 may be an encouraging sign that all P5 states value its existence and may want to preserve it for the next review cycle. In this context, there are strong pushes for working towards its institutionalisation. This includes a more structured dialogue between members, but also an endeavour to institutionalize the opening up the process to civil society and non-nuclear weapon states. In particular, the engagement towards the Stockholm Initiative seems to be productive and constructive and should be pursued. This dialogue should be considered less as an information forum and more as a really interactive and consultative framework.

Integration of civil society has been considered essential for P5 members as it allows to display transparency and to dispel wrong ideas on the process, but also because it enables substantive exchanges and feeds the process with new ideas and suggestions. In this context, it will be important to commit adequate time and resources for the preservation of these activities during the next review cycle. Initiatives may also usefully reach out to new

---

<sup>3</sup> "Peaceful Uses of nuclear energy, science and technology," Declaration submitted by China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, NPT/CONF.2020/WP.37, 21 December 2021.

communities in order to increase the diversity within the process (business community, NGOs, etc.) and, in particular, to the younger generation.

Moreover, Track 2 meetings could be used to address some of the topics that are too divisive to be brought up constructively in official settings, with an ambition to make acceptable propositions.

Concerning the contents and the workstreams examined by P5 states, it seems important to keep the process focused and to avoid overloading it with too many issues, to reflect the limited time they are able to dedicate to the process and the limited number of meetings. Moreover, the necessity to preserve some continuity between presidencies and to be able to build on the work conducted previously is also a factor to caution against attempts to reframe completely the agenda of the P5. That being said, it appears important to recommit, in the context of the process, to the principle of renouncing to any yield-producing tests, to the adequate support of the CTBTO, and to the objective of the entry into force of the CTBT.

Another topic for which the P5 would be a very well-suited forum is the notion of nuclear responsibility, both between nuclear weapon states and towards non-nuclear weapon states. While the TPNW is an issue on which agreement can be found between P5 members, they should be careful not to emphasize their antagonism towards the Treaty in order to avoid any complications within the NPT format.

With that in mind, it may be useful to consider how current topics can stay relevant for the process, notably the FMCT, on which much progress has not been observable, or the question of the signature of the protocol to the Southeast Asian Nuclear Free Zone.

### **P5 perspectives**

*The P5 reiterated their intention to keep working together after the 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference, and in particular to follow-up the work already achieved in recent years. It was also mentioned that engagement towards civil society and towards non-nuclear weapon states would continue, although it was also mentioned that an important component of the P5's work can only be done beyond closed doors and that the current balance between private meetings and engagement should be preserved. A balance should therefore be found between transparency and confidentiality. Strategic risk reduction was mentioned as a priority of the next Presidency, with an ambition to move from dialogue to actions and to produce tangible deliverables. On the content, it was also noted that nuclear testing and the CTBT, as well as the TPNW, are topics already evoked at the P5 level.*

This paper is part of a series of publications and events organized by FRS to enrich the discussion on the P5 process and on the main issues linked to the NPT and its review cycle. This independent research program is supported by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

More information: <https://www.frstrategie.org/programmes/reflexions-autour-processus-examen-tnp>