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SUPPORTING MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT VERIFICATION

NPT Review Conference Presentation: Supply and Demand for Multilateral Verification of Disarmament

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The Demand for Multilateral Verification of Disarmament: the IAEA

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The Action Plan from the 2010 Review Conference seeks to lay out a road-map for a world free of nuclear weapons and shows the international community's support for a multilateral approach to developing nuclear disarmament verification techniques.

So, according to Action 19: 'All States agree on the importance of supporting cooperation among Governments, the United Nations, other international and regional organizations and civil society aimed at increasing confidence, improving transparency and developing efficient verification capabilities related to nuclear disarmament.'

That provides a clear starting point. So, we need to find out what states actually think about this issue. Are they on the same page as to *how* this cooperation should be supported, and how 'efficient verification capabilities related to nuclear disarmament' should be developed in practice. The Action Plan—being a product of consensus—revealed only broad support for multilateral cooperation on disarmament verification. It could not reveal the details and practicalities of multilateral approaches to disarmament verification, or the individual perspectives of states parties on the issue.

For instance, where one state might wish to focus on one aspect of nuclear disarmament verification—such as the dismantlement of nuclear warheads—others might place their focus elsewhere. While some states may wish, at least in the initial stages, to support cooperation on a state-to-state basis—as manifested in the UK-Norway Initiative—others might want to orientate their efforts around international or regional organizations. Or some countries may want to support a broad 'portfolio'-type approach that looks at lots of different mechanisms for different disarmament scenarios.

As Andreas has already mentioned, the emphasis of this project is on the role international organisations can play in this effort, and in particular, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The IAEA certainly seems like a natural hub for coordinating efforts to develop nuclear disarmament verification capabilities, based on statements to that effect and past experience. We know that demand can dictate supply. If we think it's valuable for the international community to be supplied with information, tools and capacity development in nuclear disarmament verification capabilities, we first have to understand what the *demand* actually is, and how it might develop over the next few years into a sophisticated and broad initiative.

Beyond what's been said in the 2010 Action Plan, both the IAEA Secretariat and its member states have not been silent on this issue.

The agency's Statute envisioned a role for the IAEA in pursuing nuclear disarmament. Article III.B.1 of this Statute states that 'In carrying out its functions, the agency shall conduct its activities in conformity with policies of the United Nations furthering the establishment of safeguarded worldwide disarmament'. (The IAEA's own mid-term strategies tend to continue to recognise this statutory requirement.)

Also, some of the agency's member states, both individually and as part of country groupings, have been actively encouraging the agency to embrace a role in nuclear disarmament verification - in statements and working papers to the NPT Review Conference process, as well as to the IAEA General Conference - and have advocated for a stronger recognition of this role amongst other members.

The clearest manifestation of this support for the IAEA's role in nuclear disarmament verification came at the agency's General Conference last year, where all states supported a safeguards resolution noting that 'the agency must remain ready to assist, in accordance with its Statute, with verification tasks under nuclear disarmament or arms control agreements that it may be requested to carry out by the States Parties to such agreements'.

So, we know that states parties to the NPT support an IAEA role in verifying nuclear disarmament, and this recent safeguards resolution serves as a reminder that the IAEA should be preparing itself to play an active role in nuclear disarmament if it is called on to do so. And add to this the various initiatives such as the PMDA, UK-Norway, and the on-the-ground ad hoc experiences of the agency in South Africa, Libya, and Iraq. This is very useful information, and it sets the stage for a detailed debate about what the future should or could look like.

What we now need to know is what kind of specific verification needs are we thinking about, how can they be addressed, and who, exactly, can do it. We need to know what States are interested in, what they want to get solid technical appraisals about, what preparations they want to be involved in, and what capacity they expect to be available, multilaterally, when they are developing their policy positions, and what, really, is a feasible, effective and efficient plan.

For example, should the IAEA be ready to assist in the verified dismantlement of nuclear warheads? Should it be ready to verify the decommissioning of nuclear weapon infrastructure? Or should it primarily be safeguarding nuclear material? Or all of the above?

Finding answers to these questions is the first step towards developing and sustaining a multilateral approach to disarmament verification, and potentially, the IAEA's disarmament verification capability as indicated by its Statute, and by the recent Safeguards Resolution. Finding answers to these questions therefore is an important part of our work to support this goal.

So, we've taken a direct approach. We've reviewed statements to date in a range of forums, including the IAEA, and we've studied the IAEA's previous experience in disarmament verification, some of which I've mentioned.

But in order to get a comparable, repeatable and more detailed understanding of states' views, we also developed a 'Survey of IAEA Member State Views on an Agency Role in the Verification of Nuclear Disarmament' in an attempt to understand their views on the scope and direction of the agency's role in disarmament verification, the steps the IAEA should take to prepare for this role, the kind of capacity development member states might want, and the type of support each member state is prepared to give towards this end.

We developed a set of questions that hopefully add detail and richness to the debate so far. But we also tried to make sure that the questions could be answered by any country irrespective of its level of engagement with this issue so far. On this note, we also only asked for 'views' rather than 'official positions' on these questions, since, as I noted above, this is an evolving area.

We also provided an accompanying guidance document, to help respondents. This included information on the aim of the survey, how we would handle responses, our project, a definition of sensitive material, and background information including relevant parts of the IAEA Statute, an outline of the IAEA's activities in South Africa, Libya, and Iraq, and the PMDA. It also noted that this survey uses 'disarmament verification' as an umbrella term covering:

- Application of safeguards to all non-sensitive forms of nuclear material in former nuclear-armed states
- Decommissioning of enrichment and reprocessing facilities used in weapons production, or their conversion to non-military purposes
- Decommissioning of warhead delivery systems, or their conversion to non-nuclear roles
- Dismantlement of nuclear warheads and other nuclear explosive devices, and -disposition (i.e. Destruction/storage/recycling for other uses) of weapons-grade nuclear material in sensitive forms;
- Disposition of weapons-grade nuclear material in non-sensitive form; and
- Cessation of nuclear weaponisation research and development and associated capabilities, including decommissioning, conversion or removal of facilities and non-nuclear items specifically involved in production of nuclear weapons.

In addition, in the context of this survey, disarmament refers to *any* country disarming, whether alone or with others as part of a pact. It is not focused specifically at NPT nuclear-weapon states, non-NPT weapon states, or others. Rather we are looking at all possible disarmament scenarios and initiatives—whether unilateral, bilateral or multilateral; voluntary or forced. The term 'sensitive' in this survey refers to nuclear material to which access may be restricted due to proliferation concerns and/or states' own national security restrictions.

There were 12 questions in all, since people are not always happy answering lengthy questionnaires. They followed the format: yes, no, not yet considered, under consideration or no view. The questions were grouped into the section areas I mentioned above: 'The IAEA's role', 'Interest in the issue and preparedness activities', and 'Other international options'. Each section had a short explanatory note to help the respondents understand what the questions were about.

In order to make sure that states felt comfortable answering these, potentially sensitive, questions, each country had the option to make their responses anonymous (other than using broad indicators such as geographical region, bloc membership).

We distributed the survey to all member states, and followed up. VERTIC staff also met with as many states as possible. As part of good practice, we also had the survey reviewed by a number of states, and a professional organisation.

You'll find the full list of survey questions on the hard copies available here. For this presentation, we'll relay our thoughts on the answers we've received to date. First, our questions relating to what the scope of the IAEA's role in nuclear disarmament verification suggests that the majority of IAEA member states feel the agency should be involved in almost all aspects of nuclear disarmament. Our Survey gave respondents the option to pick aspects of nuclear disarmament that they felt the IAEA should have a role in verifying. These included:

1. The decommissioning or conversion of military enrichment and reprocessing facilities;
2. The dismantlement of nuclear warheads and the disposition of resulting nuclear materials;
3. The cessation of nuclear weaponisation research and development, and associated capabilities;
4. And the disposition of all forms of non-sensitive military nuclear materials.

Eighty-six per cent of survey respondents felt that the IAEA should have a role in all these activities. Extrapolating this sample out to the IAEA membership as a whole suggests—with 95 per cent confidence—that at least two-thirds would agree. Our sample was split on whether the IAEA should verify the decommissioning of nuclear warhead delivery systems, and we are unable to extrapolate any useful information about the IAEA membership on this matter.

And of course, states generally felt that the IAEA should apply safeguards to non-sensitive forms of nuclear material in formed armed states, since this is essentially what they do anyway.

Building on this question we asked whether IAEA personnel from non-nuclear weapon states should play an active role in verifying the dismantlement of nuclear warheads if 'suitable systems are developed to ensure proliferation-sensitive information is not released to them'. None of our sample disagreed with this statement. Extrapolating this out again to the IAEA membership as a whole (again with 95 per cent confidence) suggests that at least two-thirds of IAEA member states would support such a role.

On the question of how this capacity should be maintained, such as a dedicated in-house capacity, a roster of experts or a combination of the two, the results were not entirely instructive, but it appears that the majority of countries at least support these ideas or have not made up their mind.

Second, with regard to 'interest in the issue and preparedness activities' nearly all our respondents said that they wished to participate in capacity building, development and training activities, that is, activities that will deepen the level of knowledge and expertise among stakeholders and increase the number of countries with the capacity to engage more fully in disarmament verification, while the remainder said this was under consideration or they hadn't thought about it yet.

There was unanimous agreement that it was an important goal to carry out investigations into the potential roles of the IAEA in disarmament verification, such as practical analysis, studies or exercises for capability or cost assessments, development of technical verification procedures and engagement with member states and surveys such as this one.

The answers to these two questions shows there is a very strong interest in these kinds of activities, and the usefulness of work such the technical work under this project which Andreas will describe shortly, and any related initiatives by others. In fact, much of our project work aims to facilitate such capacity-building, to increase the number of countries with the capacity to engage in disarmament verification issues and activities.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, although countries were unanimous in saying ‘yes’ to the question ‘does your country consider it important to be involved in discussions on the IAEA’s role in disarmament verification?’, opinion was somewhat split on how these discussions should be taken forward. From a list of options including agenda items at the IAEA General Conference, dedicated resolutions tabled for discussion at the IAEA General Conference, and Director-General reports, none emerged as a clear favourite. However, 80 per cent of respondents felt that the IAEA should develop a ‘long-term plan’ specifying roles, capability-building and resource requirements for nuclear disarmament verification. This suggests—using the same extrapolation—that perhaps at least 60 per cent of the IAEA membership would support such a move.

Third and finally, when asked whether a new international body dedicated to verifying nuclear disarmament should be established outside the IAEA, nobody responded positively. And, none of our respondents agreed that ‘nuclear disarmament verification should have no involvement by intergovernmental organisations whatsoever’.

If this reflects the feeling within the IAEA’s membership as a whole—and our survey extrapolation suggests that it does—it seems fairly worthwhile directing capacity-building amongst member states towards engaging with issues of nuclear disarmament verification within the IAEA, as none of them want to move the issue away from this body.

So what has this survey told us about IAEA member state views on an agency role in the verification of nuclear disarmament, and what are we going to do with this information?

Statements and other documentation available prior to, or alongside our survey, demonstrated that there was support for an IAEA role in verifying nuclear disarmament. This is clear from last year’s safeguards resolution. However, our survey suggests that most member states of the IAEA may feel that the agency should have a wide portfolio of roles in verifying nuclear disarmament, including the verification of warhead dismantlement and the cessation of nuclear weaponisation research. There is similarly broad support for IAEA personnel from non-nuclear weapon states to play an active role in warhead dismantlement if proper information control systems can be put in place: something indirectly being explored through the UK-Norway Initiative. In this sense, it appears that the IAEA should not be limited to safeguarding nuclear materials in disarming states—it should be prepared to play a verification role in nearly any aspect of nuclear disarmament it is asked to be involved in.

At the moment, there is little desire to establish a new standalone multilateral institution to verify nuclear disarmament. If states parties to the NPT wish to pursue multilateral approaches to verifying nuclear disarmament, the IAEA remains the most obvious multilateral body through which to achieve this.

While opinions are split over how the IAEA should prepare for such roles, and are similarly split over how this issue should be explored within the IAEA, most member states would welcome a more detailed 'long-term plan' from the IAEA Secretariat specifying its requirements in this area. Meanwhile, member states and other actors should work together to build capacity amongst all member states, so they can engage with this issue.

Although our research hopes to provide a more detailed and systematic understanding of member state views on an IAEA role in verifying nuclear disarmament than we have had to date, it is necessarily still somewhat broad. We still need to turn this outline into a more fulsome picture and a needs assessment of exactly what capabilities the IAEA should maintain, and how member states should cooperate to support this.

With regard to our work on this issue, the results of this survey are being integrated into the ongoing political and technical aspects of our project. Demand dictates or informs supply. Now that VERTIC has a richer understanding of the demand for multilateral verification of disarmament, we can refine our work to supply tools and capacity building to meet this goal and I'm now going to hand back over to Andreas to discuss how our project has been going about this.