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MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT VERIFICATION

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Introduction

Madam Chair, thank you for giving us the opportunity to once again address this meeting. Much has happened since we last presented to this meeting, in 2009.

I would like to mention some of our activities since then, and focus on a particular area that we wish to pursue.

Earlier this year, to mark its 25th anniversary, VERTIC convened a three-day gathering at the Wilton Park conference venue in West Sussex, England, for a set of discussions under the banner of: *‘Uncertain Futures—Where Next for Multilateral Verification?’*

One of the main points to emerge from that conference was that, while progress in multilateral arms control verification is often painstakingly slow, it seems that from time to time ‘windows of opportunity’—moments where ideas, technical feasibility and political interests are aligned at both domestic and international levels—may present themselves.

And though they may be few and far between, it is in these windows of opportunity where—assuming that the right preparatory work has been done in the interim periods—meaningful strides forward can be made.

Progress to date

Overall, in spite of the slow rate of advancement, in the 25 years since VERTIC’s founding in the mid-1980s there has been a substantial amount of progress in the multilateral verification of arms control.

To name just a few examples, the Chemical Weapons Convention has come into force, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has been brought into existence and the IAEA has developed the Additional Protocol to its standard nuclear safeguards agreements—with 110 states now implementing the enhanced safeguards measures contained in the model Additional Protocol text (as of 27 July 2011).

There are, of course, tens of thousands of nuclear weapons still in existence, in the arsenals of the five recognised NPT Nuclear-Weapon States and those nuclear-armed states currently outside the NPT.

But, as some of my VERTIC colleagues have written in a forthcoming report on the subject of ‘Irreversibility in Nuclear Disarmament’, while there is clearly much more to be done with regard to implementation of disarmament obligations the increased political attention on nuclear disarmament seen

over recent years has arguably led to a sense that disarmament is no longer such a remote and unachievable goal.

Why verify?

Understandably, parties involved in negotiating nuclear arms accords are for the most part keen that such agreements include suitable and robust provisions for monitoring and verification.

Verification allows the parties involved to gain assurance that what has been agreed to is being implemented as agreed. As well, it can act as a deterrent against cheating and—ideally—as a means of building confidence and trust.

With bilateral accords, such as the strategic arms reduction treaties agreed between the US and Russia since the end of the Cold War, confidence and trust develops only in a linear fashion between the two parties. In future agreements where multilateral involvement (such as through the direct engagement of the IAEA) could be envisaged, the scope for building confidence and trust is much wider.

Multilateral involvement in nuclear disarmament verification

In the context of nuclear disarmament, verification (whether bilateral or multilateral) entails an array of challenges, hurdles and potential pitfalls relating to national security, health and safety and—if NPT Non-Nuclear-Weapon States are involved—the risk of release of proliferative information.

In a future, multilateral setting, a number of possible scenarios for disarmament verification could be envisaged:

- A process where verification involves only Nuclear-Weapon States;
- A process where both Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapon States participate in verification;
- A process where Nuclear-Weapon States participate in verification alone, but relay their findings to a larger pool of countries that includes Non-Nuclear-Weapon States; and
- A process where verification involves only Non-Nuclear-Weapon States.

In any of these where non-nuclear-weapon states are involved, either as participants in verification or as recipients of information, steps would need to be taken to ensure that no NPT-prohibited nuclear weapons design and manufacturing information was revealed to them.

To date, there has been little work done by Nuclear Weapons States to involve Non-Nuclear-Weapon States in nuclear disarmament verification - with the notable exception of the UK-Norway Initiative, which began in 2007.

The UK-Norway Initiative

This initiative was established in order to investigate the role that a non-nuclear-weapon state such as Norway could potentially play in the field of nuclear arms control verification.

As the first time that a Nuclear-Weapon State (the UK) and a Non-Nuclear-Weapon State (Norway) have carried out such joint work this was, and so far remains, a unique and ground-breaking collaborative endeavour.

The initiative began as an information exchange and peer-review exercise, but as the collaboration took shape, work proceeded along two research strands: one looking at ‘managed access’ procedures that would permit a certain level of Non-Nuclear-Weapon State access to a dismantlement process; and another that investigated the concept of a jointly-designed ‘information barrier’ device to shield proliferation-sensitive information from inspectors during the taking of verification measurements.

To further explore the utility of managed access protocols, developed by the joint study group, a mock dismantlement exercise was held in Norway in June 2009, with the role-reversal of Norway playing a fictitious “Nuclear-Weapon State”.

The prototype information barrier which by that time had been jointly designed and built to operate on a surrogate radionuclide was also exercised during this exercise. The exercise, played out at a Norwegian facility, with full mock negotiations, showed that with the right kind of preparation it would be technically possible to involve non-nuclear-weapon state personnel in a verified warhead dismantlement process.

This is not to say that the technical challenges of making meaningful verification measurements, whilst protecting sensitive information, have been overcome by the UK-Norway initiative. They substantially remain, so long as any of the inspectors are foreign to the nation which is dismantling its weapons.

What the initiative has demonstrated is:

1. a way forward for managed access of foreign inspectors and
2. the possibility of joint design, build and deployment of trusted equipment in a NWS/NNWS context, without proliferation risks.

The possible future role of Non-Nuclear-Weapon States

While the involvement of non-nuclear-weapon states in multilateral - or even bilateral - disarmament verification processes undoubtedly runs into restrictions, as described, and entails risks that would not be present in a Nuclear-Weapon State only scenario, there are nevertheless a number of potential positive benefits.

For one, only involving Nuclear-Weapon States will do little, if anything, to increase outsider confidence in an arms control or disarmament process, compared to verification involving Non-Nuclear-Weapon state parties also.

Indeed, this was a point recognised during the UK-Norway Initiative, with the project’s 2010 NPT Review Conference working paper noting that ‘participants felt that the involvement of NNWS would be vital in creating widespread international acceptance of, and trust in, a proposed verification regime.’

In the future, it may be deemed politically important - perhaps even essential - to expand verification activities beyond members of just the P5 ‘nuclear club’ and to turn the disarmament goal into a global collaborative endeavour. Within acceptable limits, the reduced secrecy that would be inherent to the involvement of Non-Nuclear-Weapon state parties would help to foster a spirit of greater openness, which could, in turn, lead disarmament efforts in a positive direction.

In addition, confining disarmament activities to only Nuclear-Weapon State nationals places a significant limit on the resource pool on which it is possible to draw.

We should consider the fact that if Non-Nuclear-Weapon states are kept on the outside, then technologies and expertise must necessarily come only from NW states, even if better (or equal) human and technological resources exist elsewhere – quite likely, given the ratio of Nuclear to Non-Nuclear weapon states under the NPT.

But, on the other hand, combining the scientific and technical knowledge of nuclear-weapon state experts with experts from one or a number of the world's many non-nuclear-weapon states, as modelled by the course of the UK-Norway Initiative; may lead to the development of better, trusted, verification technologies and procedures. And it might do so more quickly and efficiently than would be the case for only the Nuclear-Weapon States working amongst themselves.

The possible role of the IAEA

VERTIC has recently been granted funding from the Norwegian government to carry out a study on the possible future role of inter-governmental organisations such as the IAEA, in Multi-National Disarmament Verification research and development initiatives.

There is a case for the involvement of the IAEA in such future efforts. Perhaps the most compelling one is that an Inspector Team needs not only to carry out the measures necessary to satisfy themselves that a given arms control or dismantlement activity has actually taken place; they also need to have the status and pedigree which means that their conclusions will be trusted, by all relevant state parties.

Legally speaking, Article III.A.1 of the IAEA Statute provides for the Agency's right to apply safeguards, at the request of parties, to 'any bilateral or multilateral arrangement, or at the request of a state, to any of that state's activities in the field of atomic energy.'

This broad mandate is then supplemented by Article III.B.1 of the Statute, which notes that the IAEA is to conduct its activities in accordance with the UN goals of promoting peace and international cooperation 'and in conformity with policies of the United Nations furthering the establishment of safeguarded worldwide disarmament and in conformity with any international agreements entered into pursuant to such policies.'

Moreover, one of the main strategic priorities announced by the IAEA Department of Safeguards at the IAEA's Safeguards Symposium last November was a need for the Agency to be ready to take on any other nuclear verification roles that it may be called upon to engage with in the future. Disarmament verification may well be one such role.

Conclusion: the importance of preparatory work

In order to be able to capitalise on the opening of any of the 'windows of opportunity' mentioned earlier, it is important that research and other preparatory work on disarmament verification moves increasingly towards becoming multilateral without further delay.

Non-governmental organisations, such as VERTIC, can play an important role in the promotion of multilateral verification. Their research and analysis can help generate new thinking and new ideas, and NGO outreach can help to bring parties together and find common ground between them on which to build.

By promoting inclusiveness and equity, effective multilateralism can create order and legitimacy and a spirit of cooperation in international affairs. Effective multilateral disarmament verification research has the potential to build trust among parties, to find a consensus on the key technical and procedural sticking-points, to generate ways of resolving those issues, to further the disarmament cause and, to bring new states into the disarmament fold.

We believe that multilateral research efforts directed towards disarmament verification should be supported wherever possible.

In closing, Madam Chair, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to present this statement.