

# Getting to the Table: From Bilateral to Multilateral Nuclear Arms Control Negotiations

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## **Abstract**

Nuclear arms control is caught in a quagmire. While the traditional arms control architecture is in serious decay due to tensions and geopolitical competition, new formats are yet to be tested. After long negotiations, the United States and Russia eventually agreed on a five-year extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), but the difficult question of what the future of arms control looks like remains unresolved. Based on interviews with senior experts and government officials as well as careful analysis of key documents, this paper aims to identify the ways forward, with a specific focus on the possibility of pursuing multilateral arms control. Making use of negotiations literature, it identifies key stumbling blocks and discusses four interlinked steps setting the stage for multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations. These include measures to overcome the current state of distrust, to identify the right actors, set of issues to discuss at the negotiation table and ways to ensure future compliance by all parties involved.

## Introduction

“In many ways, nuclear weapons represent both the darkest days of the Cold War, and the most troubling threats of our time. Today, we’ve taken another step forward by -- in leaving behind the legacy of the 20th century while building a more secure future for our children” (The White House 2010). With these words, former U.S. President Barack Obama announced the successful conclusion of negotiations on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between Russia and the United States in 2010.

Today, more than ten years later, the future of nuclear arms control looks bleak with its traditional architecture almost a thing of the past. Since the first days of the Trump administration, Russian officials have raised the importance of the issue of extending New START (Pifer 2020), but it was not until the summer of 2020 that Washington and Moscow began formal discussions in earnest about the fate of the treaty, a few months before the treaty’s expiration on 5 February 2021. While a last-minute decision from both heads of state (and a change of U.S. presidential administration just weeks before the treaty was due to expire) ensured that the treaty got extended for another five years, the protracted and difficult negotiations between Russia and the United States brought to light once again the difference in interests and positions of the two largest nuclear powers on the future of nuclear arms control. While Russia prefers the traditional bilateral negotiation format with the United States, focused primarily on strategic nuclear weapons, the United States’ is concerned both with strategic and tactical nuclear arms which also brings China into the picture. However, even though discussions about the inclusion of additional nuclear powers into a future nuclear arms control regime have considerably gained in traction over the last couple of years (e.g. Allison and Herzog 2020; Arbatov, Santoro, and Zhao 2020), among the nuclear P5 - Chinese, French, and British officials usually dismiss the idea of any engagement in such negotiations.

Given this outset, the goal of this paper is not to simply replicate existing discussions, but to conduct a theoretically informed analysis identifying major stumbling blocks and discussing possible pathways towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations in the future. In other words, the focus of our paper is not on already existing negotiations, but on how to get major stakeholders eventually to the negotiation table.

To this end, we will build upon the 3-D negotiation framework of David A. Lax and James K. Sebenius (2008) as well as on April Carter's research on the conditions for success and failure of arms control negotiations during the Cold War (1989). More specifically, with multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations being a hypothetical scenario in the distant future, we will primarily focus on the third dimension of their framework and discuss the most promising setup, scope, and sequence for bringing nuclear weapon states (NWS) to the negotiation table.

Having outlined our analytical framework and defined key terms for our discussion, we will continue by identifying major obstacles on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations. While it is possible to approach this issue from an even broader perspective, we decided to focus on the interests and positions of the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. We continue by discussing four interlinked and sequential steps to overcome the current gridlocked situation and conclude with a number of policy recommendations preparing the ground for multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations. Our analysis will be based on a careful examination of key documents, previous research, and policy briefs as well as on a series of interviews with experts and government officials from nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states.

## **Getting to the Table: Conceptual Definitions & Analytical Framework**

In this section, we outline the analytical framework of this paper. As we are primarily interested in exploring how to get multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control even started, we have decided to relate the 3-D negotiation framework by David A. Lax and James K. Sebenius (2008) to the context of arms control negotiations as well as to draw upon April Carter's work, analyzing the success and failure of previous arms control negotiations during the Cold War (1989).

Criticizing existing negotiation literature as well as many negotiators for being primarily concerned with negotiation tactics, Lax and Sebenius propose a three-dimensional approach to negotiations (2008, 1). Their first dimension builds upon the majority of existing negotiation literature and focuses on various *tactics* to overcome some of the most common problems at the negotiation table, such as "a lack of trust between parties, poor communication, and negotiators' 'hardball' attitudes" (Lax and Sebenius 2003), issues that have also negatively affected on

previous arms control negotiations during the Cold War (Carter 1989, 273–75). The second dimension covers all aspects related to *deal design*, which requires negotiators to have a most comprehensive understanding of underlying issues and interests involved and to come up with creative solutions (e.g. package deals, staged agreements, isolating difficult issues) to craft deals that provide lasting value for all parties involved (Lax and Sebenius 2008, 10). For example, during previous negotiations, some of the most difficult issues have been to agree upon a clear definition of military parity and strategic stability as well as on the role of verification in proposed arms control agreements (Carter 1989, 269–71). Finally, complementing Lax and Sebenius’s 3-D negotiation framework, the third dimension takes even one more step back and focuses on the *setup* of negotiations as such. Do they bring the right actors, in the right order and at the right time to the negotiation table? Do they focus on the right set of issues and address the interests of all parties present? And do parties enter with realistic expectations and a clear understanding of the consequences of possible no-deal scenarios (Lax and Sebenius 2008, 12)? Such considerations regarding the scope, sequence, and format of negotiations have also had a considerable impact on the success or failure of previous arms control negotiations during the Cold War (Carter 1989, 279–91). In addition, Carter has also shown that external factors, such as great power confrontation, developments in weapons technology, economic constraints, and public pressure, play an important role in finding the right time in which governments might be inclined to seriously engage in arms control negotiations (Carter 1989, 278–79).

All three dimensions of the 3-D negotiation framework are once again summarized in the subsequent table:

Dimension	Nickname	Where	Focus	Sample Moves
First	Tactics	“At the table”	People, process	Improve communication, build trust, counter hardball ploys, bridge cross-cultural divides
Second	Deal design	“On the drawing board”	Value, substance, outcomes	Invent and structure agreements that create greater value, meet objectives better, are more sustainable
Third	Setup	“Away from the table”	Architecture	Ensure most favorable scope (right parties, interests, no-deal options), sequence, and basic process choices

Table 1. 3-D Negotiation Framework (Lax and Sebenius 2008, 19).

As we are in this paper concerned with the *pre-negotiation phase* of multilateral nuclear arms control, we will primarily focus on the third dimension in this framework and try to identify the most promising setup, scope, and sequence for bringing major stakeholders to the negotiation table. In order to do so, let us now turn to identifying and defining a number of key negotiation terms and challenges.

The first term in this row is *target point* (or *aspiration value*), which represents a party’s preferred outcome of a negotiation process (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2004, 34). This target point can also be understood as a party’s *position*, which can, but not necessarily has to represent a party’s actual *interests* (Lax and Sebenius 2008, 76). At the other end of the bargaining range, we find the so-called *reservation point* or *value* also representing the tipping point at which parties prefer to simply walk away from the negotiation table without a deal, leaving them with what is usually referred to as their *BATNA – Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement* (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2004, 19). Finally, the *Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA)*, refers to the bargaining range that exists between the reservation points of negotiating parties (Mnookin, Peppet, and Tulumello 2004, 19).

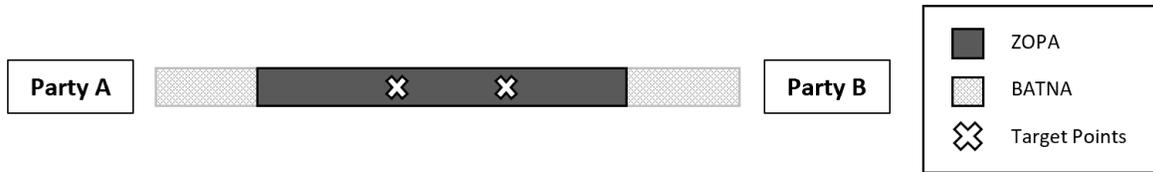


Figure 1. ZOPA, BATNA, and target points in a two-party negotiation setting (Own illustration).

However, while determining the ZOPA clearly represents the key to a successful negotiation outcome, three major challenges often make this process much more difficult in practice. First of all, negotiating parties usually not only hold private information about their respective reservation points, but also tend to have considerable incentives for misrepresenting their true interests and positions, allowing them to strike more favorable deals on their behalf (Fearon 1995, 395–401). As already highlighted in the first dimension of the 3-D negotiation framework, this problem might only be mitigated by improving communication and establishing sufficient levels of trust at the negotiation table. Secondly, even if parties are able to identify and agree on a deal within their respective bargaining range, considerable lack of trust might hinder them to actually uphold their commitments with each other (Fearon 1995, 401). This problem also explains the central role of verification in particularly sensitive agreements, such as is also often the case in nuclear arms control. Finally, while identifying the reservation points and ZOPA within a more simple two-party negotiation setup is already a complex and difficult task, this challenge only gains further in complexity by every additional actor that is added to the negotiation table as it also is the case for our discussion on how to set the stage for multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control. This complexity is also depicted by the following graph:

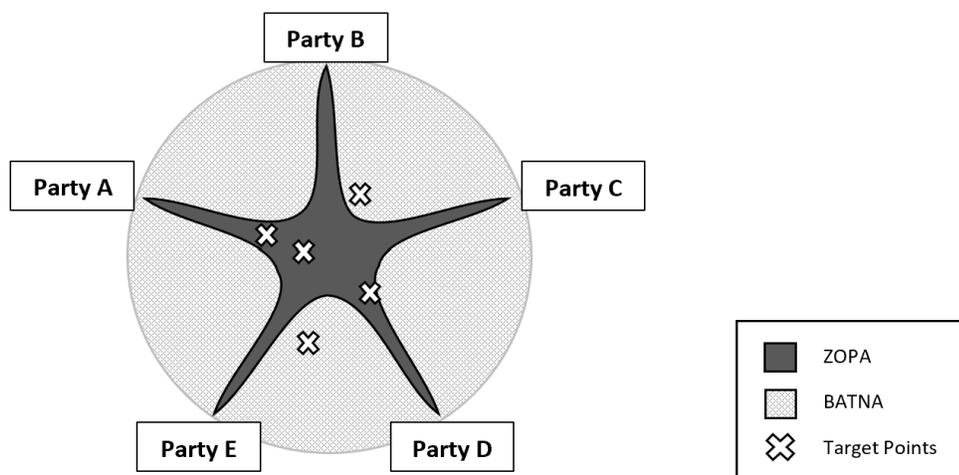


Figure 2. ZOPA, BATNA, and target points in a multi-party negotiation setting (Own illustration).

Before concluding this section, we would also like to provide a couple of conceptual definitions, first, distinguishing between what we understand by referring to *disarmament*, *arms control*, and *confidence- and security-building measures*. In the context of this paper, *disarmament* will be understood as a process that focuses on a clear reduction or even the complete ban of a certain weapon, technology, or delivery system. By *arms control*, we refer to measures that aim at controlling the armament of states and to reduce the risk of an unintended arms race, for example by imposing certain restrictions for military forces, weapon systems, or activities (e.g. regional or total limits for certain weapon categories). Finally, *confidence- and security-building measures* will be understood as a set of different measures that aim at reducing the risk of unintended escalation and to build trust between political and military adversaries. This might be achieved through increasing transparency over military forces, equipment, and activities or by increasing the amount of direct military-to-military contacts and co-operation (Goldblat 2002, 3–13). As *trust* (and the lack thereof) will also play a rather central role in this report, it is important to also provide a short definition of this term. Unfortunately, despite extensive research, no commonly shared definition exists to this date, which is why we will rely upon a functional minimum definition that is based on what most scholars have come to agree upon. That *trust* refers to the risk an actor takes, when making his own interests depend on the fulfillment of positive expectations about the likely behavior of another (e.g. Hardin 2002, 7; Misztal 2013, 18–19; Booth and Wheeler 2010, 12–13).

## **Getting it Right: Major Obstacles on the Way towards Multilateral Nuclear Arms Control Negotiations**

The current arms control architecture is in serious decay. The termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, the United States' and Russia's withdrawal from the treaty on Open Skies (OS) in 2020 and in 2021 respectively, are all symptoms of a larger trend spelling doom for the traditional arms control architecture. Most arms control regimes constructed at the end of the Cold War were based on a bipolar world order and a relative balance of military power between the USSR and the United States and its allies (Arbatov 2019). However, the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a completely different geopolitical, military, and technological context that “no longer follows the two-state (e.g. United States and the Soviet Union), one-weapon (e.g. nuclear weapons) model of the Cold War” (Rose 2018b). It is defined by new great power competition between the United States and China as well as between Russia and the United States, the blurring of lines between traditional and non-traditional types of warfare as well as by the development of new technologies and weapon systems. In other words, the negotiation environment of today is no longer that of the past and the decay of arms control agreements is gradually leading to a situation of lacking regulations, decreased transparency, and an increased arms race risk (Trenin 2019, 3–5).

To successfully apply the third dimension of Lax's and Sebenius' 3-D negotiation framework to this unprecedented environment and to the pre-negotiation phase of multilateral nuclear arms control, we analyzed key documents and conducted a series of interviews with experts and government officials from nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states. These not only allowed us to gain a sound understanding of the pragmatic interests lying behind officially stated national positions, but also to identify major obstacles on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, which we subsequently elaborate upon in more detail.

### **First Obstacle: A Serious Lack of Trust**

The first major obstacle on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations is the serious lack of trust that currently characterizes the relations between major nuclear weapon states. This lack of trust is the result of the growing tensions and a systemic rivalry between the

United States, China, and the Russian Federation and has reduced their willingness to enter into any serious negotiations about (further) cuts or limits to their nuclear arsenals. For example, our conversations with US experts and government officials highlighted that without significant changes to the declining global security environment, it seems impossible to make further progress on nuclear disarmament and arms control. The same seems true for Russia and China, whose strained relations with the United States create a difficult political environment for engaging in more substantial talks on nuclear disarmament and arms control.

While the situation today is certainly different from that of the past, the problem of great power confrontation as a serious inhibiting factor in arms control negotiations could also be observed during large periods of the Cold War and has been a major reason for various failed arms control negotiations in the past (Carter 1989, 278–79). For decades, the geopolitical confrontation and severe lack of trust between the United States and the Soviet Union pushed both sides to relying on the build-up of a credible nuclear and conventional deterrence posture, in order to ensure their national interests and security (Klimke, Kreis, and Ostermann 2016) and from the early stages of their development, to the drastic hours of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, nuclear weapons have played a central role in this geopolitical standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union (Gottemoeller 2020). This situation could only be resolved through a long and difficult process of decades of confidence-building and the credible support for negotiators by their political leadership, eventually preparing the ground for a number of arms control agreements, such as the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 1972, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 1987, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and START II) in 1991 and 1993 (Gottemoeller 2020).

The long and difficult path to nuclear arms control during the Cold War suggests that until at least a minimum level of trust is established, the governments of nuclear weapon states will only mantra-like repeat their respective national positions and continue to rely primarily on deterrence postures, reluctant to openly discuss their national interests at stake. However, from a negotiation perspective, such a blunt and open exchange about national interests would be needed, to enable identifying a ZOPA for any future multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations.

### **Second Obstacle: Disagreements about Parties**

The second obstacle is the disagreement among nuclear weapon states as to which parties should be present at the negotiation table. During the 1970s, 80s and 90s, when arms control negotiations took place between the United States and USSR/Russia, there were five declared nuclear weapons states with the US and Russia accounting by far for the largest nuclear arsenals.

Importantly, both adversaries acknowledged the looming risks of their confrontational relationship and an uncontrolled nuclear and conventional arms race, preparing the ground for substantial arms control negotiations. While the United States and Russia still account for more than 90% of nuclear weapons in the world (Arms Control Association 2020), the United States has recently become increasingly concerned with China's nuclear arsenal making it advocate to also bring China to the negotiation table (interview with U.S. Official 1, 2020, December 22; interview with U.S. Expert 1, 2020, December 28).

China, on the other hand, has maintained that the United States and the Russian Federation need to revert to nuclear arms control as the number of weapons both states possess are significantly higher than those of China, and the Chinese government has iterated, time and again, that it will not get pulled into an arms control treaty where the numbers that each state brings to the table are so heavily skewed against it. As Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of the Foreign Ministry Fu Cong in an interview with the Russian Newspaper Kommersant stated: "China's nuclear power is not on the same order of magnitude as that of the U.S. and Russia. [...]. China would be ready to participate in the international talks on nuclear disarmament if the U.S. agrees to reduce its nuclear arsenal to China's level, which is not going to happen in foreseeable future." (interview with F. Cong, 2020, October 15).

Russia seems generally open to consider multilateral formats for nuclear arms control, as highlighted by the Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Ermakov. During the General Debate in the First Committee of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly he underlined that: "it is time to seriously reflect on how to make the nuclear disarmament process multilateral" and that "such a dialogue should involve all States with nuclear military capabilities" (2020). At the same time, the remaining nuclear weapon states, France, and the United Kingdom, have a mixed stance on multilateral arms control. For example, for France, strategic stability talks open new themes of

potential interest, such as space, cyber, or strategic risk reduction. So, notwithstanding the declaratory refusal of any French engagement in multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, a lot would depend on the actual scope and subject of the envisioned agreement. However, as highlighted in one of our interviews, France is not afraid of diplomatic and public pressure and will not accept “any agreement at any cost” (interview with British Expert 1, 2021, February 9; interview with British Expert 2, 2021, February 16; interview with French Experts, 2021, January 4; interview with French Officials, 2021, February 2).

With the exception of Russia, P5 nuclear weapon states (P5) – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – see unfavorably the possibility of opening up arms control discussions to states outside of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). For example, the United States, which brought the whole discussion about the multilateralization of nuclear arms control up front with their proposal for trilateral New START follow-up negotiations, have been clear that they would reject opening up negotiations to other states beyond the P5 such as India, Pakistan, Israel or North Korea.

The different interests and positions regarding the right composition and format of future negotiations as summarized below and in particular the fact that the target points of China, France, and the United Kingdom are identical to their respective BATNAs pose one of the major obstacles towards the multilateralization of nuclear arms control negotiations beyond the traditional US-Russia framework. Simply put, China, France, and the United Kingdom can simply refuse to take part in any substantial discussions about limits to their nuclear arsenals and would still reach their respective national goals. Therefore, without considerable public and diplomatic incentives, identified subjects of mutual concern and interest, and a carefully drafted sequence for getting major stakeholders to the negotiation table, no multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control will be realistically achievable.

	<b>Target Point</b>	<b>Reservation Point</b>	<b>BATNA</b>
<b>The United States</b>	inclusion of China	talks in P5 format	continuation of US-Russian bilateral framework
<b>Russia</b>	focus on US-Russian negotiations	talks in P5/P7/P9 format	continuation of US-Russian bilateral framework
<b>China</b>	no engagement in negotiations	talks in P5 format	no engagement in negotiations
<b>France</b>	no engagement in negotiations	talks in P5 format	no engagement in negotiations
<b>United Kingdom</b>	no engagement in negotiations	talks in P5 format	no engagement in negotiations

Table 2. Target Points, Reservation Points, and BATNAs regarding the composition of possible negotiations.

### **Third Obstacle: Disagreements about Scope**

Even if an agreement about the right composition, sequence, and format for multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations can be found, another key challenge remains - the difficult question of what issues should be discussed at the negotiation table. Here, the interests and positions of nuclear weapon states seem to lie even further apart.

The primary reason for these divergent views is to be found in the continuous erosion of a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi*, generated by a shared sense of peril following the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. At the basis of this concept was the acceptance of the concept of mutual vulnerability by the two superpowers, the USSR and the USA. This led subsequently to the establishment of norms of behavior and a joint commitment to non-provocative nuclear behavior, considered as mutually beneficial (Sethi 2019, 3).

However, today our world is very different. As brilliantly coined by Indian scholar Manpreet Sethi, we live in “an atmosphere ‘free for all’ or ‘nuclear cacophony’ that is allowing a free run towards an offence-defence spiral as countries pursue the concept of absolute security” (2019, 3).

This goal of absolute security is being pursued through the modernization of nuclear forces, the building up of new capacities and delivery systems, such as Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRV)-capable missiles or nuclear capable Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) (Kile and Kristensen 2020b) and has also seen a rapid dismantlement of key agreements underpinning nuclear and conventional arms control. These changed framework conditions are also reflected in nuclear weapon states' different national positions on arms control.

The recent US approach to arms control has been marked by a desire to move beyond previous agreements, as the world cannot “keep pretending that the two-party construct for nuclear arms control, which comes from the Cold War, is able to address satisfactorily the security issues of a multipolar world” (Billingslea 2020, 3). From a US perspective, the primary challenge facing arms control in today's context is “the pressing need to rein in the Russian and Chinese nuclear build-ups that are currently underway” (Ford 2020, 1). There has also been a growing US concern that current arrangements only account for strategic nuclear weapons, which due to its geographical location, make the majority of the US stockpile, while China and Russia have been actively developing non-strategic and so-called “exotic” nuclear capabilities, considered to threaten the US and its allies in Europe and the Pacific. In fact, nearly 90% of Chinese missiles are in the range of 500 km to 5,500 km, and additional efforts have been made to complete China's nuclear triad through plans of fielding heavy strategic bombers (Kile and Kristensen 2020a, 356).

Russia, on the other hand, approaches arms control from the standpoint of strategic stability and has repeatedly expressed its concern about the impact of the termination of the ABM Treaty in 2002 and the United States' ballistic missile defense program, which it perceives as being capable to undercut its nuclear deterrent. Russia's priorities for future negotiations include US anti-missile defense capabilities, ‘nuclear sharing’ arrangements with NATO allies, the potential weaponization of outer space, nuclear risk reduction (e.g. through verification and moratoria) as well as new conventional strategic weapon systems (interview with Russian Expert, 2020, December 28).

In comparison, China maintains that its policy of No First Use and Credible Minimum Deterrence is sufficient in the current debate on nuclear risk reduction (interview with F. Cong, 2020,

October 15). Focusing primarily on its near surroundings, China maintains that outside forces in the region are a threat to its security and, like Russia, has begun to increasingly voice its concerns with regards to US missile defense systems in the region. Since its nuclear doctrine does not allow the state to deploy nuclear weapons in a state of readiness, Chinese representatives react in a very sensitive manner to any proposals of verification or greater transparency as to the overall numbers and exact locations of its nuclear arsenal (interview with Chinese Expert, 2020, December 23). Likewise, France and the United Kingdom remain very reserved to discuss any inclusion of their nuclear arsenals in future nuclear arms control negotiations, referring to the already low numbers of nuclear warheads in their arsenals (interview with French Experts, 2021, January 4; interview with French Officials, 2021, February 2; interview with British Expert 1, 2021, February 9).

Also, outside the P5-framework are nuclear weapon states like India, Pakistan, or the DPRK, directly affected by and reacting to a changed political, military, and technological international environment. For example, faced with growing Chinese capabilities, India has likewise embarked on a modernization of its nuclear arsenal.

These examples of different national approaches to arms control and a diverse set of interests underline the challenges of finding the right set of issues and identifying a ZOPA in the context of multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations. Moving from bi- over tri-, to multilateral negotiation setups, this challenge only gains further in complexity by every additional actor added to the negotiation table. The only conceivable solution to this problem seems to be a reconciliation of interests through both a sequenced approach to negotiations and viable package deals between major stakeholders.

	<b>Target Point</b>	<b>Reservation Point</b>	<b>BATNA</b>
<b>The United States</b>	<p><b>Yes:</b> all types of nuclear weapons (strategic and non-strategic), effective verification</p> <p><b>No:</b> strategic capabilities like BMD, Prompt Global Strike, hypersonics</p>	nuclear risk reduction, outer space	political commitments underlining the role as responsible nuclear power, strategic stability talks
<b>Russia</b>	<p><b>Yes:</b> entire spectrum of both nuclear and non-nuclear offensive and defensive arms with strategic capability; BMD, reduction of US/NATO presence in Europe.</p> <p><b>No:</b> unilateral concessions</p>	Reciprocal Moratoria and verification of tactical nuclear weapons; nuclear risk reduction, outer space	political commitments underlining the role as responsible nuclear power, strategic stability talks
<b>China</b>	<p><b>Yes:</b> acceptance of mutual vulnerability, US (and allied) military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, BMD</p> <p><b>No:</b> verification of Chinese nuclear weapons; reductions of nuclear arsenal</p>	nuclear risk reduction, outer space	no engagement in negotiations, political commitments underlining the role as responsible nuclear power
<b>France</b>	<p><b>Yes:</b> arms control measures enhancing national and European security</p> <p><b>No:</b> reduction of French nuclear arsenals, hypersonics</p>	nuclear risk reduction, outer space	strengthen European "actorness", political commitments underlining the role as responsible nuclear power
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<p><b>Yes:</b> reductions of Russian tactical nuclear weapons on the European continent</p> <p><b>No:</b> reductions of British nuclear arsenals</p>	nuclear risk reduction, outer space	political commitments underlining the role as responsible nuclear power

*Table 3. Target Points, Reservation Points, and BATNAs regarding the scope of possible multilateral negotiations.*

#### **Fourth Obstacle: The Risk of Non-Compliance**

The fourth and final obstacle on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations are the more recent experiences of disputes about compliance with existing commitments and agreements as well as the gradual decay of existing arms control regimes. While this development certainly is the symptom of a larger downward trend in international politics, it is not possible to dismiss the fact that disputes over compliance have been one of the main drivers behind the constant erosion of the traditional arms control architecture for many years. This, for example, becomes evident in the longstanding dispute over alleged Russian non-compliance with the INF Treaty, which resulted in the United States' withdrawal from the treaty in 2019 (U.S. Department of State 2020, 12–21) or in an unresolved dispute between the United States and Russia, which resulted in both countries' decision to withdraw from the treaty on Open Skies (OS) (U.S. Department of State 2021, 53–57; TASS 2021). In addition, also the walking away of countries from different agreements throughout the years, with little, if any apparent consequences, has made progress on arms control much more difficult today. Here, one might refer to the United States' withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 (Goldblat 2002, 71–74) or to the unilateral suspension of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) by Russia in 2007 (Federal Foreign Office 2021), but, also to more recent experiences, such as the meanwhile reversed withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (McGrath 2020) or from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Smith 2019) during the presidency of Donald Trump. These decisions have undermined the reliability of international treaties and agreements and together with unresolved disputes about compliance, explain the current lack of political will to engage in any serious arms control negotiations. Because, why would any government agree to (additional) limits of its nuclear or conventional arsenals, if serious doubts about the other side's sincere interest and commitment remain?

Consequently, a robust verification regime, capable of credibly detecting breaches of mutual obligations and commitments will be key to any future arms control agreement. At the same time, the history of arms control negotiations shows that sensitive issues, such as transparency and verification of military capabilities have always been among the most difficult and controversial items on the agenda and among the most common reasons for their eventual failure (Carter 1989,

270–71). While Russia and the United States can build upon over 50 years of experience from both the negotiation as well as the verification of different arms control regimes, it will be more difficult to make the remaining nuclear weapon states get used to comprehensive transparency and verification procedures. For example, exchanges with Chinese experts suggest that any talks about transparency or verification are still highly sensitive and delicate issues for China, concerned with the vulnerability of its more limited nuclear arsenal.

## **Summary**

Mapping and assessing the national interests and positions of the main nuclear weapon states, we have identified four major obstacles on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations.

First, the increasing systemic rivalry between the United States, Russia, and China has not only led to considerable tensions in their relations, but has also resulted in a serious lack of trust that reduces their willingness to enter into any serious negotiations about (further) cuts to their nuclear arsenals. As a consequence, nuclear weapon states currently tend to hide behind firm national positions and are reluctant to engage in any serious negotiations about their national interests at stake, a key prerequisite for any possible ZOPA to be identified in future nuclear arms control negotiations.

Secondly, we observe that the difficult question of which nuclear weapon states should be present at the negotiation table remains open. While some states like China stress that it is first and foremost incumbent upon the two biggest nuclear powers, the United States and Russia, to agree on significant cuts to their nuclear arsenals, the United States and its allies underline the importance of including China into a future arms control regime. At the same time, Russia points at the nuclear arsenals of the other NATO members, the United Kingdom and France, and the implications that these arsenals might have for Russian security interests.

Third, even if nuclear weapon states could agree on a process towards multilateral negotiations, it would remain inherently difficult to define a balanced set of issues that would equally reflect their respective national interests. For example, while the United States would like to extend nuclear arms control negotiations to also include Russia's tactical nuclear weapons in Europe,

Russia advocates for the inclusion of the United States' Ballistic Missile Defense program, both of which represent clear red lines in the current geopolitical environment.

Finally, even if the difficult process of building trust between systemic rivals succeeds and the difficult questions about the parties and scope for multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations could be resolved, the more recent disputes about violations and withdrawals from various arms control agreements (e.g. the INF-treaty, the Treaty on Open Skies) demand creative solutions for addressing issues of non-compliance and for overcoming potential commitment problems. In other words, if a state cannot be trusted in upholding a negotiated agreement, there is little political appetite for even engaging in serious negotiations. At the same time, while the United States and Russia can look back at decades of experience, other nuclear powers, such as China, would first need to become more comfortable with transparency and verification procedures and creative solutions, e.g. reflecting the size of each country's nuclear arsenal, would be needed.

## **Getting to the Table: Four Steps Towards Multilateral Nuclear Arms Control Negotiations**

In the previous section we have learned that in the current state of great power competition and given the high levels of distrust between major powers, nuclear weapon states primarily try to strengthen their respective national positions and deterrence postures. However, without a clear picture of their national interests at hand, it will remain difficult to identify a favorable negotiation setup, sequence and scope that would allow for these diametrically opposed positions to change anytime soon. To address this problem, this section discusses four interlinked steps to overcome the current gridlocked situation on the future of nuclear arms control.

### **First Step: Overcoming the Current State of Distrust**

The current level of distrust in the relations between major nuclear powers, is clearly one of the most inhibiting factors on the way towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations.

Therefore, to allow for any progress, it is indispensable to first overcome the current state of distrust in the relations between nuclear weapon states. From previous research on trust, we know that while building trust essentially comes down to repeated positive interactions between

mutually opposed parties (e.g. Adler and Barnett 1998, 45–46; Hardin 2002, 145–50), not just any type of interaction will be able to achieve this difficult goal. In fact, for trust-building efforts to be successful, it is important that these interactions a) focus on policy issues and areas of mutual interest, b) allow for significant levels of cooperation, c) make it possible to interact and engage at eye level, and d) receive full support from higher political and military authorities (Schaller 2020, 4–6).

In this regard, strategic stability (or security) talks, as they are often proposed in the context of nuclear arms control (e.g. Baklitsky, Bidgood, and Meier 2020), are generally capable of playing a key role in addressing underlying issues of concern and to eventually build trust in the relations between nuclear weapon states. As such, the recent meeting by U.S. President Biden and Russian President Putin in Geneva, reaffirming both countries' commitment to “an integrated bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue” (The White House 2021), has been a good starting point. Depending on the envisioned parties and scope of future multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations, these bilateral strategic stability talks, could in perspective be complemented by additional bilateral talks or even by tri- or multilateral formats to also include other nuclear weapon states, such as China, France, or the United Kingdom.

However, since strategic stability talks will, by definition, also always address conflictual issues of divergent interests, perceptions, and views, it is important to identify areas of mutual interest and potential cooperation, to allow these talks to take place in a more cooperative and constructive environment. Otherwise, a considerable risk remains that strategic stability talks might only reproduce existing negative perceptions and reinforce current levels of distrust between nuclear weapon states. In other words, if not carefully planned, timed, and employed, strategic stability talks even run the risk of consuming more trust than they are able to build. Based on our interviews with experts and government officials, such issues of common interest might be the field of nuclear risk reduction or the expectable shared interest of being perceived as responsible nuclear powers in the world.

Another way to support the long and difficult process of trust-building between political and military adversaries, is to embed strategic stability talks within a broader political process, which allows to benefit from a broader set of not only military, but also non-military issues of mutual

interest to all sides. For example, during the Cold War, the Mutual Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) talks between NATO and the Warsaw Pact as well as the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I) between the United States and the Soviet Union did not take place in political isolation, but received additional political support from the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) (Morgan 2016; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2021). The so-called Helsinki-process did not only facilitate high-level contacts and established a set of military confidence-building measures, but also allowed to discuss issues of mutual interest, such as cooperation in the field of economics, science and technology or increased people-to-people contacts between East and West (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe 1975; Morgan 2016). Thus, by reducing tensions, fostering cooperation and (re-)shaping mutual perceptions, the Helsinki process eventually helped to build trust and to prepare the ground for the successful conclusion of arms control negotiations in the tense and difficult political climate of the Cold War (Morgan 2016).

The current tensions and level of distrust in the relations between nuclear weapon states suggest that a process similar to that of the CSCE might also be necessary to help prepare the ground for any multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations in the future. In this regard the recent proposal by Finnish president Sauli Niinistö, to host a new Helsinki summit, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025, deserves careful consideration. In spirit of the CSCE process, Niinistö suggests that this summit could bring together state leaders from all major powers, including from the United States, China, and Russia, to discuss issues related to security and climate change (Yle Uutiset 2021). What makes his proposal particularly attractive with regard to its trust-building potential is the fact that the global fight against climate change seems to have remained as one of the few unifying topics in the relations between the United States, China, and Russia. For example, while the field of economics has become more and more an area of confrontation in U.S.-China relations, both countries only recently released a joint statement reiterating their commitment to cooperate in the tackling of the climate crisis (United States Department of State 2021) and a similar readiness to cooperate in the fight against climate change also seems to be present in U.S.-Russia relations (Harvey 2021).

However, no matter how successful one might be in setting up a process of trust-building between nuclear weapon states, the risk of political setbacks and periods of dry spells always remains. For example, over decades during the Cold War, periods of détente and relaxation were replaced by times of mutual deterrence, high tensions, and confrontation and while Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union started as early as in 1969, it took nearly another twenty years before the INF Treaty (1987) and START I (1991) and START II (1993) were eventually signed (Gottemoeller 2020). Therefore, a strategy of trust-building between nuclear weapon states does not only require considerable political endurance by state leaders and government officials but also demands significant efforts that put the fragile trust built between nuclear weapon states on a broader societal foundation. To this end, track 2 initiatives, such as the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs during the Cold War or track 1.5 diplomacy, such as the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) initiative, launched by the United States in 2019 and bringing together participants from over 40 countries – including from Russia and China (Potter 2019) – can serve as important platforms for absorbing at least some of the political potholes on the long and difficult road towards multilateral nuclear arms control. While their potential impact on high-level decision-making should not be overstated, by bringing together experts, researchers, and in the case of track 1.5 also government officials, such initiatives carry the long-term potential of preparing the ground for trust-building efforts at a higher political and military level. Therefore, they should also be an integral part of any strategy to overcome the current level of distrust between nuclear weapon states and to prepare the ground for future multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control.

### **Second Step: Bringing the Right Actors to the Table**

As suggested by Borrie, “increasing attention has been focused in recent years on the need for multilateral negotiation processes in the disarmament and arms control field to ‘think outside the box’ in addressing contemporary challenges” (Borrie 2005, 7). However, apart from recognizing this need, it rarely remains clear what exactly these innovative new measures would be.

Another approach suggested is to open up negotiations to multiple states, including those outside of the NPT framework. This approach has been tacitly voiced by Russia, hinting that on future

arms control arrangements it may be possible “to design some elements in a way to make the room for others to join” (Ryabkov 2021).

However, this brings us to the core of the problem. The issue of who wants to and who does not want to be a part of the negotiation table. For example, China is keen to keep itself out of any form of trilateral nuclear arms control discussions. As per arguments shared before in the paper, China prefers focusing on the US presence in its neighborhood as the main issue. It is equally keen to limit discussions to the P5-framework. The work done under Chinese chairmanship of the P5 is one example of the Chinese leadership’s claim that the P5 is an important and necessary forum. Equally, China does not see the multilateral P7 (P5 + India and Pakistan) or P9 (P5 + India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) formats as beneficial, concerned about making other nuclear weapons possessor states a part of the conversation.

The UK and France are similar in their outlook towards nuclear arms control but their reasons for choosing to push for US-Russia nuclear arms control may vary a little. Similar to the Chinese, they do not want the discussions to include their smaller arsenal sizes. While it does not seem that the UK and France are averse to widening the discussions to the N9, their stand on Israel is unclear. Any benefits of including India, Pakistan or DPRK, even on a case-by-case basis do not seem obvious at this point.

The Russian position, outlined above, is the most defined when it comes to actors in a multilateral arms control discussion and the actors needed for participation. It draws on the domino effect of having nuclear weapons and the impact of each dyad on each other as well as on the other dyads in the international community.

The United States is making an effort for discussions on multilateral nuclear arms control, such as through the newly introduced CEND (Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament). While discussions on disarmament are different from those on strategic stability and nuclear arms control, they show that the idea of all actors at one table strains not just the table, but the actors involved in the negotiations. Recent discussions by US and Russian government representatives (Carnegie Conf 2021) suggest that both have accepted the futility of trilateral arms control, but that both are keen to engage China in the future. Thus, a suitable option may be for actors to

engage in bilateral discussions on a number of issues, following the lead given in the recent statement by Russian Deputy Minister Sergei Ryabkov. If, as suggested by Ryabkov (Carnegie 2021), US and Russia are able to work out a series of related agreements on strategic stability, they may be able to engage with China on different issue areas (US in the South China Sea and Russia in its border). Similarly, Russia may be able to engage with EU/NATO (regarding their respective border threats and reciprocal tactical weapons moratoria), with the US (on Missile Defence and strategic stability), and with UK (on the sea deterrent) simultaneously. Formal treaties take time and as pointed out earlier, they may take close to 20 years prior to existence. Thus, parallel track conversation on arms control would help ease out the pressure of a final negotiated statement or agreement and can be seen as a mid-term goal for arms control. Until then, it would be imperative for US and Russia to engage in bilateral discussions towards arms control and provide short term relief to the impending arms race.

It may also be a positive sign if the P5 format also covers the conversation on strategic stability is introduced, to ensure engagement with France. As the incoming coordinator, France intends to use its tenure involving P5 senior officials to advance progress on the group's workplan on nuclear weapons issues, which was last updated in 2019. "Paris hopes to build on past achievements and produce deliverables for each of the group's five action items". (ACA). France's plans seem to put in motion a long-term strategy for arms control where P5 states become normatively comfortable with processes such as monitoring and verification.

### **Third Step: Identifying the Right Scope and Issues to Discuss**

The dismantlement of traditional arms control architecture opens the door to a broad spectrum of potential new arms control negotiations, unprecedented in the post-Cold War era. With the adequate political will, "Russia and the United States now have greater freedom to restructure the arms control architecture, taking into account their interests and those of their allies, as well as new technological developments" (Baklitsky, Bidgood, and Meier 2020, 1).

This century's arms control treaties would primarily focus on qualitative rather than quantitative limitations, on verification as well as countering challenges from emerging technologies and possible warfare in outer space. As Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov suggests, "we will

[...] need to look for another reference point in order to reach separate agreements on individual segments in different configurations” (interview with S. Ryabkov, 2020, December 23).

Based on the analysis of the contentious bilateral and multilateral issues, we see that there are four potentially fruitful areas for future multilateral arms control negotiations, which could be pursued in a short, medium, and long-term perspective.

The first area is the political acknowledgement of mutual vulnerability, which also started US-Soviet arms control negotiations during the Cold War. The US has not recognized such vulnerability with China, taking into consideration the concerns of its allies in East Asia. In this regard, an important political signal continuously called for by the international expert community would be the acknowledgement by China, the US, and Russia of their mutual vulnerability (Kühn et al. 2020, 6–7). The reiteration of Regan-Gorbachev’s joint statement highlighting that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought is a positive outcome from the recent summit held in Geneva (The White House 2021). The timeliness of such a statement is high, considering that the upcoming 2022 NPT Review Conference could be ideal venues for P5 countries reiterating this commitment. Once adopted at the NPT Review Conference, this declaration could be even transformed into a jointly endorsed UN General Assembly resolution by all P7 (P5 + India and Pakistan) or P9 (P5 + India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea) countries, opening venues for dialogue with nuclear weapon states outside the NPT framework.

The second area for future multilateral arms control negotiations is security in outer space. As underlined in the recent Deep Cuts Issue Brief, there is only a blurry line between anti-satellite weapons (ASAT) and midcourse missile defense systems, these two issues are to be discussed together (Baklitsky, Bidgood, and Meier 2020). The US has raised concerns over the testing of alleged Russian ASAT, while Moscow and China have consistently opposed US plans to deploy weapons or elements of missile defense systems into space, highlighting the risk of “an arms race in outer space and importance of ensuring security of space activities” (Ryabkov 2021). In addition, cooperation on outer space issues has already been successful within various UN formats in the past. In 2007, the UN General Assembly approved the UN Debris Mitigation Guidelines, followed by a 2013 U.N. General Assembly resolution, co-sponsored by Russia,

China and the US, urging the implementation of the UN Group of Government Experts study of transparency and confidence-building measures in space. This included publishing national space policies and strategies, providing notifications on outer space activities aimed at risk reduction and improving international cooperation and information exchange. In 2016, the US and China also convened the first-ever US-China space security talks, while two years earlier, in 2014, Russia and China managed to pass a resolution on “No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space” at the UN General Assembly (A/RES/69/32), encouraging nations to undertake political commitment “not to be the first to place weapons in outer space”. What is also interesting is that India, which has very limited involvement in any multilateral arms control initiatives, has been vocal about the importance it attached to the consultations on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), consulting together with Russia, China and the European Union on the development of a Code of Conduct for Outer Space.

The third area are practical steps towards nuclear risk reduction. To reduce doctrinal risk, states should acknowledge mutual vulnerability, publicly renounce absolute security, engage in broad consultations to give more clarity on the situations in which they would consider using nuclear weapons, and be encouraged to put more investment into track 1.5 or 2 joint initiatives on multilateral risk reduction measures. This could also be done by updating current nuclear doctrines, decreasing their confrontational tone and focusing on shared interest in mitigating the strategic stability risks. (UNIDIR, Wilfred Wan, Nuclear Risk Reduction: a framework for analysis, 2019)

To reduce escalatory risk, States should “look to raise the threshold for nuclear use”, especially in volatile situations. One of the proposals voiced during our interviews was to formalize low alert levels. The arsenals of China, India and Pakistan are already in such states, while the other countries could openly discuss this possibility, notably due to new technologies continuously compressing the response timelines. This also opens the question of greater adherence to and some sort of formalization of the no first use (NFU) policy. So far publicly declared by China and India, the NFU policy is an ongoing debate even in these two states with proposals voiced about the need to inject greater ambiguity to deter risk.

Another easily achievable step is the US and China's ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Cited by top Chinese officials as a proof of the country's strong commitment to arms control, the CTBT is a well-functioning risk reduction measure ensuring that no nuclear explosion goes undetected. This step, already promoted under the Obama Administration through UN Security Council Resolution 2310, would send a positive international signal, recommitting the P5 states to Article VI of the NPT.

The risk of inadvertent nuclear escalation due to a C3 (communications, command and control) or some other technical failure, especially in the current environment of lacking trust, is always present. Apart from declaratory practices, a useful risk reduction tool would be to create joint bi-, tri and multilateral initiatives for exchange of data from early warning systems and notifications of missile launches. This would help reduce the consequences of a false missile attack warning and prevent the possibility of a missile launch caused by such false warning. Such steps were already under way in early 2000s, when a Memorandum of Agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on the Establishment of a Joint Center for the Exchange of Data from Early Warning Systems and Notifications of Missile Launches (JDEC MOA) was signed. Its concept consisted of creating in Moscow such a joint center, where each side will have a representative and deputy representative, who shall have equal rights in managing the activities of the JDEC. Such multilateral initiative could potentially be a viable option today.

Finally, the fourth and most difficult area is how to approach more difficult and controversial issues for nuclear weapon states. Here, a carefully drafted give-and-take formula could prove valuable. History has had similar examples, such as the ABM Treaty, which enabled both parties to get reciprocal concessions on the issues of major concern while supporting their national interests. At a later stage, more difficult and controversial items, such as tactical nuclear weapons and ballistic missile defense systems, could be combined into carefully drafted package deals that ensure a balance of interest of all parties involved.

#### **Fourth Step: Establishing a Common Approach to Compliance and Verification**

Disputes over alleged cases of non-compliance have been one of the main reasons behind the serious erosion of arms control for many years. Therefore, given the sensitive political

environment and the currently significant lack of trust in each party's sincere interest and commitment to any future arms control agreement, ensuring compliance through the development of an innovative and rigorous verification regime, is the fourth and final step towards any future multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations. At the same time, since the lessons from the Cold War taught us that verification is often also one of the most controversially debated items on the agenda of arms control negotiations and has been one of the main reasons for their failure in the past (Carter 1989, 270–71), it is important to set aside sufficient time and to identify the right moment for this difficult issue to be discussed.

The specific verification provisions of any regime will need to be derived from the agreement itself, so without knowing what any agreement might seek to limit, it is not particularly useful to speculate on hypothetical design of verification measures. Rather, the problem at hand is to consider ways that parties can build capacity for verification in the future. To be effective, verification must provide parties with sufficient confidence in the compliance by other parties, while balancing its intrusiveness into national security interests and imposition on normal force operations. Verification should also help build confidence in the good faith implementation of the agreement, based on the continuing implementation of agreed verification procedures. When properly designed, the measures should give parties the confidence that it can detect a militarily significant violation (Goldblat 2002, 309–11). And finally, parties will need to carefully consider what a robust consultative mechanism under an agreement looks like, and how it can be adapted to a multilateral environment to address verification challenges that arise. Agreements like the INF Treaty, START, and New START all had forums to consult and resolve various compliance issues. A regime with many parties may resemble these entities but may also need a different structure to account for balance of interests in addressing compliance.

In order to encourage better capacity for successful verification negotiations in a future arms control regime, there are a number of considerations that can facilitate outcomes and prepare participants who may not have much previous experience in verification activities. First, parties must recognize and be willing to accept tradeoffs in a verification arrangement. One must be willing to trade insight into their own forces and operations in order to gain confidence that the other parties are upholding their ends of the deal. Unequally designed provisions increase the

likelihood that parties will not come to agreement on a verification regime, so it will be necessary for all parties to be willing to give up some things in order to reap the benefits of an agreement. Second, parties can enhance their knowledge of verification activities, even if they have never fully participated in a regime before. There are many multilateral initiatives that have shown great promise in enhancing shared verification knowledge, such as the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, the U.K.-Norway Initiative on nuclear warhead dismantlement verification, the Quad verification partnership, and a UN Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, among others. And third, parties can begin to practice and join activities that can build from existing or past verification experiences to build their own experience base. While the United States and Russia have decades of previous practice that has built up to their significant verification expertise, other parties will not begin from such an advanced starting point. These less experienced parties stand to benefit from opportunities to “practice” activities. For example, joint simulations, exercises, or exhibitions of current or past treaty verification activities can be an initial step towards internalizing procedures that will need to be considered in a new regime.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Amid rising geopolitical tensions and a deep crisis of arms control, the recent meeting between President Biden and President Putin in Geneva, during which both reaffirmed their commitment to a bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue might be a first step into the right direction. However, as shown in our paper, there is still a long way to go on this difficult path. The increasing systemic rivalry and a lack of trust between the United States, Russia, and China; the divergent interests and positions of nuclear weapon states on the right parties and issues to be discussed at the negotiation table; as well as the recent negative experiences with disputes over alleged cases of non-compliance and the walking away from existing agreements have all led to a situation in which multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control seem hardly politically viable at this point in time.

Therefore, making use of Lax’s and Sebenius’ 3-D negotiation framework and carefully analyzing the different interests and positions of nuclear weapon states, we focused in our paper on how states might be able to overcome the current gridlocked situation, carefully preparing the

ground for multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations in the more distant future. From our discussion, four interlinked and sequential steps towards this end appear most promising:

1. *Building trust between nuclear weapon states.* Any strategy to overcome the current levels of distrust, hampering any sort of progress towards multilateral nuclear arms control negotiations should contain three core elements:
  - a. *Strategic stability/security talks* can serve as important channels for addressing underlying issues of concern and for eventually building trust through transparency and reducing misperceptions between nuclear weapon states. Currently still at a bilateral level, the talks between the United States and the Russian Federation could be complemented by tri- or multilateral formats, to also include additional nuclear weapon states.
  - b. *Cooperation on issues of common interest*, such as nuclear risk reduction or the global fight against climate change, can provide additional political support and help building trust in the otherwise rather strained relations between nuclear weapon states. In this regard, initiatives, such as to host a new Helsinki summit to discuss issues related to security and climate change, on the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025, deserve careful consideration.
  - c. *Track 2 and Track 1.5 initiatives*, that regularly bring together experts, researchers, and government officials from nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, can serve as important platforms for absorbing political potholes and help to keep the ball rolling, whenever official channels and formats are muted.
2. *Develop a sequenced approach from bi- to multilateral negotiations.* No future negotiation format can be based on the idea of exclusively constraining one nuclear weapon state alone. At the same time, it seems that talks in the P5 format might currently represent smallest common denominator among nuclear weapon states. Therefore, negotiators will need to find a creative way of gradually extending the negotiation format from a bi-, over tri-, to multilateral negotiations in the future, including potentially all nuclear weapon states. Additionally, parallel track discussions between different states on different issue areas could help ease the conversation and bring states closer to possible

multilateral negotiated arrangement or agreements done in different formats and with different status if necessary.

3. *Ensure a balance of interests and identify possible package deals.* Any negotiations would then need to be based on a carefully drafted give-and-take formula containing possible package deals on more difficult and controversial issues. As a first step, political joint declarations, such as the one on mutual vulnerability as well as the reiteration by the P5 of the Reagan-Gorbachev Reykjavik statement on the inadmissibility of the nuclear war could decrease tension and open the door to further more substantive deals and talks, be it on risk reduction, space security or joint operational centers.
4. *Generate and exchange implementation experience and develop robust measures of verification.* Robust verification measures will need to be developed in order to protect the integrity of an agreement and detect cheating in a timely manner. Since detailed and heated debates about verification have the potential to derail negotiations, potential arms control parties stand to benefit from practical experience verification activities. In that way, parties can build practice through understanding tradeoffs in intrusiveness for confidence, enhance knowledge through various multilateral initiatives, and develop joint exercises or confidence building measures.

We view these steps as carrying the biggest potential for slowly bringing about change to the current gridlocked situation, it is however also important to carefully manage expectations. The Cold War has shown us that it is possible to overcome deep dividing lines and to eventually build trust between political and military adversaries. At the same time, decades of mutual deterrence and military confrontation also vividly remind us that the path towards managing the risks posed by an uncontrolled nuclear and conventional arms race is difficult and long. Therefore, let us not lose sight of this important goal. Because, as also Rose Gottemoeller (2020), former chief U.S. negotiator of New START with the Russian Federation concludes: “Nuclear arms control is the only way that we can attain stable and predictable deployments of these most fearsome weapons, and it is the only way that we can ensure we won’t be bankrupted by nuclear arms racing” .

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