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THE 'P5' PROCESS: PROSPECTS FOR ENHANCEMENT

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Introduction

Ever since his return to the Kremlin in 2012, Putin has encouraged Russia to emphasize and modernize its nuclear weapons in order to enhance nuclear deterrence¹. At the same time Russia's leadership had repeatedly mentioned the impact of nuclear arsenals belonging to countries other than the United States and Russia on the global strategic balance and the prospects for U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control. Thus, on the eve of the 2012 Russian presidential elections, Putin expressed his views on the subject as an element of his presidential program on the matters of defense and security: "... We [allegedly Russia and the United States] will not disarm unilaterally. As for further steps in nuclear disarmament, those steps should be comprehensive in nature, and all nuclear powers should participate in the process. We cannot disarm while other nuclear powers are increasing their arms."² Speaking at the National Research Nuclear University, an elite Russian college, in January 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin made the following statement: "My personal position is that at some point, humanity must renounce nuclear arms. But for now, we are far from this, in the sense that other nations aside from Russia have nuclear arms as well—and many of them—and they are not going to renounce this means of armed combat. Such a step by the Russian Federation would be very strange in these conditions, and could lead to some fairly serious, grave consequences for our nation and our people."³

Apparently this idea has risen to the highest political level in Russia, and it is affecting Moscow's official position as a precondition for further nuclear arms reductions following the U.S.-Russian New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), due to expire in 2021. Ever since the time of Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-I) of 1972 Moscow has been trying to capture third nuclear weapon states' forces (NWS) by arms limitation provisions, foremost having in view U.S. nuclear allies – Britain and France.

However up until now these efforts have been fruitless.

The United States' official view on this subject is muter and does not have the same sense of urgency, as that of Russia. Hence, in Summer of 2013 the U.S. President Barack Obama proposed to Russia further strategic arms reductions (down to about 1,000 warheads) without reference to third nuclear weapon states' engagement in the process. Still, Washington would probably also endorse their joining nuclear disarmament at some future time, in particular regarding China.

Most importantly, the idea of bilateral and multilateral nuclear disarmament is considered the indispensable precondition to nuclear non-proliferation. In the famous Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) it clearly states: "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament..."⁴ Since the United States, Russian Federation, Great Britain, France and China ('P5') are the only nuclear weapons states-Parties to the NPT, recognized as legitimate NWS by the Treaty, this demand unquestionably relates to them. Hence, both principal avenues of nuclear arms control: further U.S.-Russian nuclear disarmament and enhancement of nuclear non-proliferation – imply an expansion of the nuclear disarmament format. The third nuclear weapon states (TNWS), namely Britain, France and China logically seem to be the first candidates for joining nuclear arms limitation and reduction agreements. A few years ago this idea was officially formalized in the so called 'P5' forums.

However this seemingly robust concept and endeavor turned to be a trap. The "P5" meetings produced a forum for interesting discussions and constructive general documents, but failed to achieve the principal stated goal: engagement of TNWS in the

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process of nuclear arms limitations and reductions. It looks like there is no prospect of reaching this goal in the future for reasons beside the negative political environment, brought by the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014. Even in case of political resolution of the current crisis and improved international environment, the "P5" format does not seem promising for the task assigned to it. Quite different assumptions, ways and formats would be needed. These issues are addressed below.

1. Origins and Achievements of the 'P5' Process.

The initial idea of the endeavor was put forward by Des Browne, then UK Defense Secretary, in February 2008 at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva. The first meeting took place in London in September 2009. The second was convened in Paris in June 2011, the third - in Washington in June 2012. The fourth 'P5' meeting was in Washington in April, 2013 and the fifth – in Beijing in April of 2014.

During this period the parties negotiated and adopted a number of general documents, which gradually were becoming more and more routine and similar to each other. Those documents universally underlined the intention of the parties to create the conditions for further progress under NPT Article VI, discussed strategic stability, measures for better mutual confidence and transparency. They called for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), emphasized the importance of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), encouraged all states to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). Much attention was dedicated to calling on Iran to comply with the UN Security Council Resolutions and cooperate with the IAEA, as well as to urging North Korea to agree to the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.



Chinese Type 908 replenishment ship at the port of Malta, March 2013. Copyright: Martin Brayley.

Many provisions were addressed to the enhancement of the NPT and its regimes, in particular: universalization of the 1997 Additional Protocol to NPT nuclear safeguards, strengthening export controls, supporting the Nuclear Suppliers Group and Zangger Committee, preventing nuclear terrorism. For this purpose, in particular, the group called for securing all nuclear materials within four years – in line with the appeal of President Obama. The 'P5' called for implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Also the parties urged all states to apply the IAEA recommendations on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities.

Since the 2011 Paris meeting the 'P5' made efforts to better prepare for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. In particular the importance of implementation of the Action Plan adopted by the 2010 NPT Review Conference was underlined. The group discussed the progress made towards signature of the Protocol to the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ), endorsed the establishment of the Central Asian Nuclear

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Weapon Free Zone and supported the plan of convening a Conference on the establishment of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) free zone.

Beside the mentioned documents the 'P5' process produced some practical results. One of these was the creation of the working group (led by China) on the Glossary of key nuclear terms, which made a big progress with the aim of completing the first phase of the Glossary by the 2015 NPT Review Conference. Another working group was created to deal with nuclear verification issues.

While recognizing some usefulness of the discussions and documents of the meetings, it should be pointed out that the 'P5' did no tangible progress towards its main initial goal: engaging all five NWS in the nuclear disarmament process through involving Britain, France and China in practical negotiations and agreements. The routine common position of the latter three states has been that the U.S. and Russia should reduce their nuclear weapons arsenals to bring them closer to the UK, French and Chinese force levels as a precondition for negotiating common reductions for all five NWS.

The essence of the attitude of the "big two" (whether vocal in Moscow or implicit in Washington) is that in order to move substantially below the New START they need a binding guarantee of other NWS joining the process with specified timing and force levels of this step. Moreover, for Russia getting close to the nuclear force levels of each of the three smaller states would imply at least a triple inferiority to the aggregate level of NATO nuclear forces, while for the U.S. that would mean a double inferiority to the summed nuclear arms numbers of Russia and China, which proclaim themselves "strategic partners". Besides, for Russia this would exacerbate its conventional inferiority to NATO and China, while for the U.S. it would put in doubt its security guarantees to European and Asian allies.

2. Questioning the Basic

Assumptions

The principal deficiency of the 'P5' nuclear initiative was applying the model of multilateral arms control over various nuclear activities to the "hard core" arms control of partial and phased limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons – i.e. delivery vehicles and warheads.

The first model has been relatively successful in achieving since 1963 several nuclear test-ban treaties (culminating in the signing of the CTBT in 1996), the NPT in 1968, as well as a number of treaties on non-deployment of nuclear weapons in various spaces (i.e. Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which prohibited the deployment of WMD in space, and the Treaty of 1971, prohibiting such deployment on the Seabed and Ocean Floor), as well as in various geographic regions (nuclear weapon or WMD free zones). Also this collective model was implemented in total prohibition and physical elimination of the whole two classes of WMD: by the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972.

The second model was only implemented in eight U.S.-Soviet/Russian agreements on SALT/INF/START/SORT during 1972-2010. This kind of treaties was very different from all others since it directly addressed the nuclear deterrence potential and arsenals of the nations, considered the key pillar of their security and that of their allies.

The trap of the 'P5' nuclear process was that its concept stemmed directly from the NPT Article VI. Thus the NPT model of collective obligations regarding activities was mistakenly applied to the task of physical limitation and numerical reduction (elimination) of nuclear arms and forces of five states. However, the NPT Article V does not necessarily imply five-party negotiations or "2+3" (the U.S., Russia + the three others) forum for practi-

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cal nuclear arms limitations. It just says that NWS should proceed with nuclear disarmament without specifying any particular format of the process.

Obviously each of those states assign specific military and political tasks to its nuclear forces and programs and thus the simplistic model of “joining the club” (of nuclear disarmament) could never work. Quite naturally the ‘P5’ forum activities shifted to the first paradigm of collective nuclear arms control (paying attention mostly to the NPT, CTBT, FMCT etc.), rather to the second mode of limitation and reduction of actual nuclear delivery vehicles and warheads.

Each of the five NWS (and for that matter the other four as well: Israel, Pakistan, India, North Korea) assign various tasks to their nuclear forces. One and the basic task is deterring nuclear aggression through the threat of devastating retaliation. For this purpose nuclear arms are measured against their ability to survive and retaliate after nuclear or conventional counterforce (disarming) enemy strikes and penetrate ballistic missile defense systems of the opponent. However, there are other purposes and functions that nations assign to nuclear arms:

- deterrence of overwhelming conventional aggression,
- deterrence of attacks using other kinds of weapons of mass destruction,
- deterrence of nuclear or other WMD aggression against their allies,
- deterrence of conventional aggression against their allies,
- deterrence of several potential nuclear aggressors simultaneously.

In addition, some nuclear-armed states orient their weapons to helping them sustain security guarantees to and political influence over allies, to support global or regional status or to serve as bargaining chips in negotiations on arms control and other issues.



*2nd Infantry Regiment of the French Foreign Legion during a ceremony at Pont du Gard, July 2, 2012.
Copyright: Mmoods.*

Hence, even bilateral nuclear arms control has periodically experienced serious difficulties in finding a mutually acceptable formula for an agreement—as evidenced by the present state of U.S.-Russian dialogue, which is stalled due to differences over missile defense, conventional precision-guided long-range systems and sub-strategic nuclear arms. Such problems would be much more complex in the context of multilateral arms control arrangements or in applying nuclear arms control at regional levels.

The experience of 46 years of practical nuclear arms limitation and reduction talks (since 1968) demonstrates that negotiations and agreements are only possible between countries that, first, have relations of mutual nuclear deterrence and, second, have approximate equality (parity) in weapons types and numbers. The first condition implies that in the context of mutual nuclear deterrence one state makes concessions on limitations and reductions of its weapons in exchange for acceptable concessions of the other state. The second condition means that concessions should be approximately equal and would legitimize resulting equality as the only acceptable principle (in the early stage of U.S.-Soviet talks these two principles were formalized as “equality and equal security”). Otherwise in the absence of parity the

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inferior side would not agree to legalize its inferiority by an agreement, while the superior side would hardly give away its superiority “free of charge”.

Neither of the above conditions exists in the context of the ‘P5’ nuclear disarmament idea. The United States, Britain and France do not have mutual nuclear deterrence relations. They are political and military allies; there is no sense for them to make concessions to each other by limiting their nuclear weapons. On the contrary, the nuclear forces of the U.S. and Britain (and recently those of Britain and France as well) indirectly add to each other’s deterrence potential.

As for Britain, France and China, they do not have mutual deterrence relationship and are largely out of range from each other’s nuclear delivery systems. If their nuclear forces were assigned the purpose of political prestige only, there might be some sense in agreeing on their approximately equal levels (although China would probably object even to this, pointing out that the other two are under NATO security guarantees and need much fewer arms than China). However, since they design nuclear weapons with specific deterrence purposes vis-à-vis other nations (and not against each other), there is little reason for them to negotiate trade-offs in limiting and reducing their weapons.

No question, British and French nuclear forces are designed to deter Russia and are targeted at its territory and vice-versa. Hence, the two European states and Russia have mutual deterrence relationship and might discuss reciprocal concessions through arms control. However, Russian nuclear forces are much larger than British and French, and thus the second condition of parity is absent, since the material basis for agreements is lacking. Britain and France would neither agree to legalize their nuclear inferiority, nor make concession to the old Moscow’s demand to add their arms to American strategic forces under the common ceiling equal to Russian weapon levels. London and Paris are claiming that their forces provide for autonomous national nuclear deterrence and

security. Russia for its part would never agree to reduce its strategic forces to the levels of Britain and France, which enjoy the benefits of American security commitments under NATO nuclear “umbrella”.

Likewise, China undoubtedly has nuclear deterrence relations with the United States, but allegedly is drastically inferior to the U.S. in numbers and quality of nuclear arsenal. Hence, the second condition for practical nuclear arms limitation is also lacking between these two powers.

Finally, strategic relations between China and Russia are quite mute. Formally they are not military allies. On the other hand, they do not have mutual nuclear deterrence relationship – at least officially. Still some portion of their respective nuclear forces is probably tacitly assigned against each other, despite expanding economic cooperation and good political relations, which due to the crisis between Russia and the West have become closer than ever since the 1950’s. Their forces are largely unequal (in Russia’s favor) and quite asymmetric. Also they are targeted on several other parties: Russian – against the U.S. and its European and Pacific allies; Chinese – against the U.S., its Pacific allies and India. For all these reasons it is hard to imagine arms control bargaining and trade-offs between Moscow and Beijing.

Still some preliminary steps for involving the TNWS in the nuclear arms limitation process are conceivable. The ‘P5’ format is not quite adequate for this task, although it may be considered a useful departing point for the follow-on endeavor.

3. Engaging the United Kingdom and France

For several reasons, it is worthwhile to start with the United Kingdom and France when investigating how—and whether—an expanded framework for nuclear arms control would be possible.

It is hard to imagine arms control bargaining and trade-offs between Moscow and Beijing.

First, in parallel to the United States and Russia and in contrast to other nuclear-armed states, these two nations have recently been reducing their nuclear forces unilaterally. Second, both countries are quite transparent as to their existing nuclear forces and modernization programs. The Great Britain has 4 nuclear missile submarines with 48 deployed sea-based ballistic missiles (SLBMs) carrying 160 operationally available warheads (in sum about 225 are in stockpile)⁵. France has 4 nuclear missile submarines with 48 missiles and 240 warheads, plus 30 land- and carrier-based medium-range airplanes with 30 air-to-surface missiles – about 270 warheads (290 in total stockpile). Hence together the two European states possess around 430 operationally available nuclear warheads (515 in aggregate stockpile).

Third, their national security is better assured than that of all other nuclear states because they are located in Western Europe—one of the most secure areas in the world—and they are protected by North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union security guarantees.

Fourth, official circles in the UK and France generally share classic U.S.-Russian principles of strategic stability and parity. Moreover British politicians have repeatedly expressed their overall support for the concept of a nuclear-free world. This notion tangibly affected public debates over a British nuclear modernization program and UK-French cooperation on some nuclear-weapon development activities.

Fifth, the nuclear forces of these two nations are technically most similar to the elements of U.S. and Russian strategic triads: foremost submarine-launched ballistic missiles in Britain and France. They would be relatively easy to technically integrate into the tested U.S.-Russian methods of strategic arms control.

Last but not least, both British and French political and expert elites have been involved for

many decades in intelligent discussions about the theoretical and practical issues of nuclear deterrence and arms control, hence there are no historic, cultural, or linguistic obstacles to expanding this narrative to address their own nuclear arsenals.

At the same time, the balance of nuclear forces between Britain and France in relation to Russia (which allegedly has about 2,500 strategic warheads and altogether 8,500 warheads in stockpile)⁶ implies that presently there is no parity between them and Russia. Moreover, there is no urgent strategic need (in contrast to Moscow's political view) for involving the two nations in arms reductions. This is true not only as long as Washington and Moscow implement the New START, but also if and when they conclude a hypothetical follow-up treaty to reduce their strategic offensive arms to approximately 1,000 operationally deployed warheads. This conclusion is predicated on Paris and London continuing a robust policy of sustaining stable deterrent capabilities at lower force levels.

It is unlikely that France and the UK will consent to directly engaging in nuclear disarmament in the near future. However, they could adopt some of the transparency measures and confidence-building mechanisms negotiated by Moscow and Washington under the New START, thus indirectly legalizing their unilateral nuclear arms reduction plans and their forces' forecasted future numerical ceilings. This may be the most realistic option for connecting Paris and London to U.S. and Russian efforts to make nuclear arms control a multilateral endeavor.

Should Russia and the United States pursue a responsible nuclear disarmament policy, in the longer run the integrated British and French nuclear force could be engaged in a legally binding arms limitation and reduction regime. Besides, if Britain and France consent to adopt confidence-building and transparency measures, as well as inspection activities, like those provided for in New START, it might send a positive message and set a precedent for other countries, primarily China.

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Russian Tupolev Tu-160 long-range bomber. Copyright: Mrsusha2013.

4. Exploring China's Model of Participation

Compared to Britain and France, China would be even more difficult to engage in nuclear arms limitation in military-technical, strategic and political senses. However, involving China is more important and urgent. It is more difficult because among the five great powers - permanent members of the UN Security Council and recognized NPT nuclear-weapon states – China is the only one, which is not providing any official data on its nuclear forces and development program. Due to the lack of official Chinese data, foreign assessments differ widely. The majority of Western sources estimate the overall number at around 250 warheads⁷. The highest Russian estimate gives the figure as high as 3,500 warheads⁸. Some authoritative Russian assessments put the amount at more than 1,100 warheads. Apparently the difference between

250 and 1,100 levels is in part due to higher numbers of medium-range and tactical aircraft nuclear weapons, which the Russian estimate counts (altogether 570 gravity bombs and air-launched cruise missiles on 400 airplanes), as well as warheads on 200 land-based tactical ballistic missiles and 50 long-range, land-based cruise missiles⁹.

The missile and nuclear modernization program that China is conducting, at least to the extent known to the outside world, is much more diversified and hard to match against U.S.-Russian START counting rules, than those of Britain and France. Allegedly, Chinese nuclear forces and program are primarily aimed at deterring the United States, India, and (tacitly) Russia.

In keeping with the traditions and distinct characteristics of its strategic culture, China may use a number of methods that would seem quite unusual to Russia and the West.

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U.S. Rockwell B-1 Lancer during takeoff. Copyright: Peterz30.

In particular, in parallel to gradually building up and improving the characteristics of its nuclear armed strategic, intermediate-range, and tactical missiles, China is quite advanced in the development of medium-range precision-guided conventional ballistic missiles to be used against U.S. Navy and bases in the Far East. Even more important, a portion of its missile and nuclear arsenal may be stockpiled in hardened underground tunnels. This would be a unique development in the history of nuclear arms of the last seventy years.

In fact, if the above Russian estimates are correct, China is the third largest nuclear power in the world after the United States and Russia, constituting a special class of its own and having more nuclear weapons than the rest 6 nuclear arms states combined. Besides, China is the only country in the world that has the economic and technical capability to launch a crash buildup of its nuclear forces to match the United States' and Russia's in the next ten to fifteen years. France and the United Kingdom are different: their nuclear forces are being reduced, they are quite transparent and predictable, and they lack the capabilities or intentions to rapidly increase their nuclear forces in the future. Israel, Pakistan, and India do not aim their nuclear arms against the United States or Russia, and their economic

and technical resources would be too limited to enable them to challenge the two nuclear superpowers even if they wanted to. North Korea might have such intentions, which worries its immediate neighbors, but it lacks the capabilities to become a significant factor in the global strategic balance any time soon.

Hence, in contrast to political preferences of Moscow and relative strategic simplicity of engaging Britain and France, Chinese nuclear forces and modernization are the most important factor for the future of nuclear arms control. Increased transparency might help to clarify the actual size and characteristics of China's nuclear forces, as well as China's potential to build them up. If the country holds less than 250 or 300 nuclear weapons, as believed by a majority of the international strategic community, then there is no urgent need for legally binding limitations before proceeding with further U.S.-Russia arms reductions. A political commitment from Beijing not to increase this number (like that of Britain and France) would probably be sufficient.

But if China has 1,000 or more nuclear warheads, plus the weapons stored in tunnels, its arsenal certainly should be limited. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the other two powers to reduce their nuclear weapons signi-

ificantly below the New START ceilings, even if they sort out their disagreements on BMD, sub-strategic nuclear arms, and non-nuclear strategic systems.

Another unique feature of China is that it is the only of the nine nuclear-armed states to officially and unconditionally pledge not to use nuclear weapons first. In a white paper entitled *China's National Defense in 2010*, Beijing urged all nuclear-weapon states to “abandon any nuclear deterrence policy based on first use of nuclear weapons, make an unequivocal commitment that under no circumstances will they use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones. . . . Nuclear-weapon states should negotiate and conclude a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other.”¹⁰

It is interesting to note that due to relative vulnerability of China's nuclear force and its command-control-warning systems, this pledge might have practical value (in contrast to propaganda), only if there is indeed a secret reserve of nuclear missiles in hardened underground tunnels. In this case Chinese nuclear forces would be actually capable of delivering a retaliatory strike after receiving a disarming attack by the U.S. or Russia. But also in this case China would have to possess much larger nuclear forces, than those observed on the surface.

Beijing has officially demanded that the United States (and, logically, Russia) commit to no-first-use of nuclear weapons before China agrees to increase transparency about its nuclear forces. While this demand seems reasonable at first glance, it is in reality groundless. Official information from Beijing on the size of its nuclear forces would be of no value to the United States or Russia in planning for a disarming strike: both Washington and Moscow would rely on their own intelligence information for that purpose. Information provided by Beijing would not have to include any precise data about the locations of its strategic arms deployments. However, if China

were to become more transparent about its nuclear forces and programs, it would greatly help Moscow and Washington to plan future strategic arms reduction treaties.

More generally, China's approach to the military balance and strategic stability differs from that of Russia and the United States. It is expressed as a series of very general, benevolent political pronouncements and does not incorporate the concepts of approximate strategic nuclear parity and mutually assured destruction. In various formulations, China often declares that “it will limit its nuclear capabilities to the minimum level required for national security.”¹¹

Regarding arms control Beijing's official position is that the countries with the largest arsenals “should further drastically reduce their nuclear arsenals in a verifiable, irreversible, and legally-binding manner, so as to create the necessary conditions for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. When conditions are appropriate, other nuclear-weapon states should also join in multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament.”¹²

Beside the size of U.S. and Russian offensive nuclear forces, American Ballistic Missile Defense program in the Pacific is understandably a major concern for China—even more than NATO missile defense system in Europe alarms Russia. China is responding by developing BMD penetration aids, anti-satellite weapons (that could attack satellites critical to the U.S. BMD architecture), and an anti-missile system of its own.

Additionally China is greatly concerned by the development of U.S. non-nuclear precision-guided munitions, such as sea- and air-launched long-range cruise missiles, coupled with space-based intelligence, navigation, and communication assets. Still greater alarm of China is caused by the development of American new strategic conventional weapons: orbital systems (notably the X-37B “space plane,” which has flown three missions), and boost-glide systems, such as those

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developed within the framework of the U.S. Conventional Prompt Global Strike program.¹³

Such arms hypothetically would present a threat, which would deeply undermine China's official nuclear no-first-use doctrine because, formally, this doctrine should not permit nuclear retaliation in response to disarming conventional attacks against Beijing's nuclear forces. If Beijing responded by making reservations about its nuclear no-first-use pledge (that is, providing for the possibility of a nuclear response to a conventional strike against its nuclear forces), then China's nuclear doctrine would not be so different from that of other nuclear-weapon states.

China apparently considers transparency to be an important bargaining chip. It is unlikely, therefore, that it will be persuaded to be more transparent as a goodwill gesture, or as a minimum contribution to a multilateral nuclear disarmament process. In the best case, Beijing can be expected to bargain hard over this issue to get the most from the other parties in return for each element of greater transparency.

Because of the Ukrainian crisis, U.S.-Russia relations are worse than at any time since the end of the Cold War, and the prospects for further strategic arms reductions beyond the New START are bleak. However, if the United States and Russia reach a political resolution to the current crisis, the issue of a follow-on treaty will sooner or later return to the agenda and the "China factor" is bound to reemerge. China's nuclear forces may also factor into negotiations if the United States and China decide to start substantive bilateral talks.

In spite of all the difficulties, it appears possible to engage China gradually in the nuclear arms limitation process—although this will not happen in response to rhetorical appeals by other nations. China's participation will be strictly pragmatic: it will get involved once it has concluded that greater transparency and limitations on specific weapons will be offset by concessions made by the United States (and,

indirectly, Russia). In fact, it appears that the following conditions will have to be met before China "opens up" step by step and eventually agrees to limit its strategic weapons:

- The United States should commit to stopping the further buildup of its sea- and land-based BMD assets in the Asia-Pacific and to ensuring transparency.
- The United States should agree to limitations and transparency measures with regard to its strategic and intermediate-range non-nuclear offensive weapons, including Conventional Prompt Global Strike systems.

Formal arms control involving China will create new challenges. China will not agree to a treaty that enshrines the United States' numerical superiority in strategic nuclear weapons. The United States, however, is unlikely to reduce its strategic nuclear forces to China's levels. Still, provided that both sides have the political will to reach an agreement, one way of starting the process may be to impose equal aggregate ceilings on part of their strategic forces (for instance on land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and shorter-range ballistic missiles). In fact U.S.-Soviet first strategic agreement – SALT-I of 1972 covered only part of their strategic forces.

Thus, the United States might gain from transparency and limitations on China's nuclear and conventional land-based missiles—a significant concern to the United States in both a global and a regional context. At the same time, the United States would retain huge superiority in the sea and air legs of the strategic triad, where it would be most difficult for China to catch up. China, for its part, would also benefit from such an agreement. It would be recognized as an equal strategic partner to the United States and as the world's third nuclear superpower. The above agreement would not legally prohibit China from matching the United States in strategic bombers and missile submarines, if it chooses to take such steps. So China's prestige would be preserved, and its inferiority would not be legalized.

Conclusions

The 'P5' format has not achieved and will not reach its principle goal of initiating a multilateral nuclear disarmament. Still, it may serve as a useful first step to better understand this problem and plan practical policies accordingly.

It is highly unlikely that Britain, France and China may be involved in nuclear arms control on any collective basis. They cannot simply jump on the U.S.-Russian "bandwagon" of strategic talks, which have been based for many decades on a robust foundation of stability (i.e. mutual assured second-strike retaliation capability) and approximate, albeit asymmetric parity, as well as on highly sophisticated verification and transparency regimes. The third states just do not fit in this intricate format. Moreover, even this format is presently falling apart due to political tensions and technological developments. Nor can they start a new model of five-parties arms control due to the above asymmetric strategic

relations and disproportioned nuclear forces of the 'P5'.

It seems that under best political circumstances in practical terms multilateral nuclear disarmament might be implemented via several, primarily bilateral fora: the UK and France on the one side and Russia on the other; the United States and China (and for that matter China and India; India and Pakistan). As for Israel and North Korea, their nuclear weapons should be addressed in the context of enhancing regional nuclear non-proliferation regimes, rather than by classic limitation and reduction of nuclear arms.

Taking into consideration the complex interaction of strategic and political relations among nuclear-weapon states (and non-nuclear-weapon states), coordinating the talks between various parties might be the highest achievement of Moscow's and Washington's nuclear arms control diplomacy during next decades.



Russian Topol-M at the Victory Day Parade in Moscow, May 9, 2014. Copyright: Igor Dolgov.

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The Deep Cuts project is a research and consultancy project, jointly conducted by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, the Arms Control Association, and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Deep Cuts Commission is seeking to devise concepts on how to overcome current challenges to deep nuclear reductions. Through means of realistic

analyses and specific recommendations, the Commission strives to translate the already existing political commitments to further nuclear reductions into concrete and feasible action. Deep Cuts Working Papers do not necessarily reflect the opinion of individual Commissioners or Deep Cuts project partners.

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