

Session 8: Evaluating the 2010 NPT Review Conference

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Summary

Sharon Squassoni (moderator, CSIS) opened by noting that the 2010 review conference was widely perceived as successful, but raised the question of whether this perception was largely due to the dismal failure of the 2005 conference.

Hossam Aly (Egyptian Foreign Ministry) argued that the achievement of a consensus document was a critical success. Further, the nuclear disarmament action plan explicitly identified a nuclear free world as the end goal of disarmament, re-affirmed the 13 steps towards disarmament, required the P5 to report to Prep Con in 2014 on progress towards disarmament, and reiterated the 1995 proposal for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East. For the first time, the agreement paid reference to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear use, and made reference to international law in doing so – perhaps hinting for the first time that the use of nuclear weapons might itself be illegal under international law. A key disappointment was that the review was merely a “Chairman’s note”, and that there was little progress on negative assurances. Further, a key NAM demand – that a nuclear weapons convention be agreed as a route forward – was not agreed. Aly argued that the review showed the value of thorough preparatory work, and of greater US leadership under President Obama, and that key challenges in the years ahead were to move forward on the 2010 action plans as well as make substantive progress on the Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

Scott Davis (US State Department) agreed with many of the comments made by Aly. He acknowledged some dissatisfaction with the notion that a consensus document automatically renders the conference a success, but argued that observers should consider what the alternative would have meant for the NPT. Key successes included the reflection of President Obama's vision of a nuclear weapons free world, discussion of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Key disappointments included the failure to name Iran and Syria as being in non-compliance, or to reach consensus on abuse of the withdrawal clause in the NPT.

Abe Nobuyasu (Japan Institute of International Affairs) argued that the key success was the adoption of a consensus document with comprehensive action plans, but argued the language was weak. He said this represented a modest success, but that the importance of consensus meant that this was the best that can be hoped for. He argued that much work towards the goals of the NPT can be done outside the framework of the NPT. In the next five years, progress on the NWFZ in the Middle East, and on FMCT and CTBT are critical.

Peter Crail (ACA) argued that the NPT is in a better state than it was prior to the conference, and that the review conference should therefore be judged a success. Looking forward to 2015, he argued that progress on disarmament, detecting and dealing with non-compliance, and on a NWFZ in the Middle East were critical challenges.

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