



Vladimir Orlov:

«THERE IS NOW A RISK THAT THE ENTIRE INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION REGIME WILL ERODE»

The 2015 NPT Review Conference, which took place in New York from April 27 to May 22 ended without consensus on a final document. The U.S., the UK and Canada blocked the document over objections to the paragraphs on the creation of the WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East. The Review Conference was also marked by violent disagreements between the P5 and the non-nuclear weapon states over the implementation of Article 6 of the NPT.

In his interview to the *Security Index* journal, the Founder and Special Advisor to PIR Center Vladimir Orlov, who participated in the Review Conference as member of the Russian delegation, placed the outcomes of the Conference in a broader context, spoke about opportunities lost and the future of the nonproliferation regime.

— ***NPT Review Conference 2015 failed to produce the final document. Do you think that the wider international situation has contributed to the outcome?***

— Even before the conference, many of the participants were deeply skeptical about the possibility of making any progress on nonproliferation and disarmament this year. There are some good reasons for such an attitude. First and foremost, the two *main* members of the P5, Russia and the United States, are in a state of bitter confrontation that shows no signs of abating. Second, there has been a severe deterioration of the security situation in Europe. Third, the Middle Eastern states — especially Egypt — are deeply disappointed with the lack of any progress on implementing the 1995 RevCon's decision calling for Israel to join the NPT, and on establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. Fourth, there is a deep crisis of the multilateral disarmament process, as demonstrated by many years of stagnation at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Another sign of the crisis is that the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was signed back in 1996, has yet to enter into force because a handful of states — including the United States — have yet to ratify. Fifth, there are growing tensions in East Asia, including North Korea's determination to accelerate its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

— ***In your view, was the failure inevitable?***

— Two opposite trends were in progress at the 2015 RevCon. *The first trend* was towards a complete bust-up. It was obvious among some members of the P5, some of the *non-*



*nuclear activists*, and several Middle Eastern states, especially Egypt. Each country had its own motive not to try very hard for a compromise. For example, what France saw as unacceptable concessions on disarmament issues was regarded by Austria and Mexico as watered-down steps not even worth considering.

*The second trend* was towards finding a difficult compromise despite all the differences. At some point, it seemed that most of the delegations were in just such a frame of mind. There were no illusions or unrealistic expectations. No one was trying for a massive breakthrough that would go beyond the 2010 Plan of Action. Realizing that the current international situation was not conducive to ambitious steps or major breakthroughs, the adherents of the compromise approach were determined to make small but tangible steps forward, and to return to their respective capitals with a Final Document approved by a consensus. Proponents of such a flexible approach included Spain, Brazil, Iran, Australia, Sweden, and, at some point, Switzerland. Russia was also determined to achieve a positive result rather than to accept a fiasco. That was the general sentiment of the Russian draft of the Middle Eastern section in the Final Document, which included the proposal for the UN Secretary-General to convene a conference on establishing a WMD-free zone in the region no later than March 1, 2016.

**— Do you think the draft final document prepared by Amb. Taous Feroukhi was balanced enough to forge consensus?**

— When I first read all 24 pages of the document, I was forced to admit that Amb. Feroukhi and her small team had achieved something that was almost impossible. Of course, the document was by no means revolutionary. It was merely a final document of yet another Review Conference. But the draft was very ambitious in at least two key elements.

To begin with, I believe that the 19 points of the paragraph on further steps on nuclear disarmament should have satisfied the non-nuclear-weapon states, which all demanded “further progress”. That paragraph began with a recognition of the “deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons”. It went on to urge Russia and the United States to begin talks on deeper nuclear arms reductions “as soon as possible”. All nuclear-weapon states were called on to improve their nuclear weapons accounting and reporting, albeit “without prejudice to national security”. The document also urged the eight states that have not yet ratified the CTBT, preventing it from entering into force, to do so “without further delay and without waiting for any other State to do so”. Also worth mentioning is the final, 19<sup>th</sup> point, which recommended that the UN General Assembly set up a working group to identify effective measures on full implementation of Article 6.

My first reaction was that the proposed draft represented a victory for the *non-nuclear activists* and a capitulation by the P5 group, torn as it was by internal squabbling. Upon more careful study, however, I began to see the outlines of a reasonable and balanced compromise. It is now clear to me why the head of the Russian delegation later described the draft as a “very useful effort on the part of Amb. Feroukhi, a draft that could and should have been approved”.

The core of the Middle East section in the proposed draft consisted of Russian proposals. Those proposals did not emerge out of nothing, of course; they were the result of marathon consultations with Middle Eastern states, especially Egypt, but also several others. Israel was present at the RevCon both invisibly (for it sometimes seemed that

the Americans and the Canadians were voicing Israel's position rather than their own) and visibly, in the form of Israeli observers. Signs of Israeli presence were everywhere in the lobbies. Sticking to what has already become a tradition, Russian diplomats held numerous meetings with their Israeli counterparts to discuss possible solutions and the degree of their acceptability. Naturally, they also maintained dialogue with the United States and the UK. In fact, up until the final week of the conference that dialogue seemed entirely constructive, as suggested by complaints in the lobbies that "the Russians and the Americans are once again singing from the same hymn sheet on the Middle East".

**– The draft final document was not adopted over the opposition from the US, UK and Canada. What does it mean for the future of the nonproliferation regime?**

– Let me make one thing perfectly clear: the future of the NPT was not at stake at the 2015 RevCon. The NPT has an indefinite term, and the review process has been going through ups and downs ever since the treaty's entry into force in 1970. There have been good RevCons, and there have been bad ones. However, with this reservation, I have to recognize that what happened on May 22, 2015 was a *major setback* for the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Even by the least pessimistic assessments, that setback has destroyed at least a decade of progress.

The consequences of this fiasco will be felt on all fronts. There is now a risk that the entire international nuclear nonproliferation regime will erode. Of course, only a small minority will benefit from such erosion. But that minority has already demonstrated its ability to seize the initiative by unfurling attractive and seemingly universal banners.

With growing tensions on the European continent, with the nuclear factor once again being bandied about, with fresh plans to deploy new nuclear weapons and a clear risk of the INF Treaty being lost — in these dire circumstances, the NPT should be as steady as a rock, with no reservations.

Speaking of European security, the time is coming to start thinking seriously about how we can strengthen the nonproliferation regime on the European continent. The measures might include nuclear-weapons-free zones and other steps to prevent nuclear weapons being stationed outside the borders of the nuclear-weapon states.

The most urgent priority now is to reduce the risk of incidents involving nuclear weapons, i.e. accidental risks with potentially irreversible consequences.

Another pressing issue that still remains unresolved is the interrelation between offensive and defensive strategic weapons, as well as the connection between nuclear weapons and new types of conventional strategic weapons (global prompt strike weapons). Unfortunately, despite the obvious urgency of this problem, most Europeans seem to remain indifferent to it.

At the same time, we have to recognize that the Humanitarian Initiative and the Austrian proposals will continue to gain momentum. In my view, these discussions are merely diverting us from key disarmament issues rather than focusing our attention on them. My understanding is that some people hope to turn that initiative into an alternative to the NPT, and use it as a launch pad for a convention banning nuclear weapons. Will that help the NPT? Not at all. To the contrary, that could be the very source of the NPT's erosion I have already warned of. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.



Should nuclear-weapon states be afraid of the *non-nuclear activists*? Of course not. They need to pursue dialogue with them, both from within and from without. What will it change if they merely turn a deaf ear to them? Let us not forget that the conference in Vienna was attended by all the CIS and CSTO members (except for Russia and Tajikistan), and by all the BRICS states (Russia being the sole exception). Perhaps Russia and France could learn from China, which does not avoid this discussion, but sends low-level delegations to these events.

The most dramatic turn of events, however, could unfold in the Middle East. Israel may now feel triumphant. Tactically, the United States has protected its interests. But how will Egypt respond? Where is the boiling point after which the Middle Eastern states will decide that since the decision of the 1995 Conference has not been implemented, and since no one seems eager to implement it, they have no choice but to take the initiative? And, to avoid that boiling point, who and how will fill the current vacuum when the mission of Finnish diplomat Jaakko Laajava, as facilitator to the Middle East WMD-Free Zone conference, failed?

After the fiasco of the conference, the blame is increasingly being laid at Egypt's door in some quarters. The Egyptian delegation is facing accusations of obstinacy. It is said that the Egyptians were secretly planning to derail the RevCon right from the start. Even if we accept for the sake of argument that the Egyptian delegation did in fact adopt an extremely unyielding stance, one cannot help but think that the Egyptians had already been way too patient. They have been waiting since 1995, with no real progress being made. Indeed, it sometimes feels as though no-one really cares about the fact that the 1995 RevCon decision on the Middle East is not being implemented. 🐘