

US-Russia Interaction in the Context of the Conference on Disarmament¹

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Background

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) was created in 1979 in accordance with a decision of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament (SSOD) in 1978. Originally, it consisted of forty members, but in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, its membership expanded to sixty-five. The CD succeeded earlier fora with a similar mission: the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1960), the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament (1962–68), and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (1969–78).

Broadly speaking, US-Russian interaction in the context of the CD consists of two parts. The main part of their activities pertains to the matters of the CD itself and includes work on issues on the Conference's agenda. In addition, Geneva serves as a venue for US-Russian contact with regard to the review process of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as well as the "P-5 process"—a mechanism by which the NPT nuclear-weapon states coordinate their positions with regard to nuclear disarmament. Obviously, decisions are made in each country's respective capital, and the key members of delegations also come from capitals; still, routine interaction and some preparatory work is performed by personnel that can be in daily contact with each other.

The agenda of the CD, which was approved by the UNGA SSOD, included ten areas, of which nine remain in force:

- Nuclear weapons in all aspects
- Other weapons of mass destruction
- Conventional weapons
- Reduction of military budgets
- Reduction of armed forces
- Disarmament and development
- Disarmament and international security
- Collateral measures; confidence-building measures; effective verification methods in relation to appropriate disarmament measures, acceptable to all parties

¹ The paper was prepared for the US-Russia Dialogue on Nuclear Issues meeting on "US-Russian Cooperation at Vienna- and Geneva-based International Organizations," held in Vienna on June 23-24, 2017.

- Comprehensive program of disarmament leading to general and complete disarmament under effective international control

The tenth issue was removed from the agenda after successful conclusion in 1992 of negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Each year, the CD adopts a more specific agenda, which has not changed in years. The most recent agenda, adopted in 2017, includes the following items:

1. Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament
2. Prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters
3. Prevention of an arms race in outer space
4. Effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons
5. New types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons; radiological weapons
6. Comprehensive program of disarmament
7. Transparency in armaments²

The agenda remains stable but inoperative in the sense that it represents, in effect, a list of issues for discussion. Practical, hands-on work that would eventually result in a treaty or another international regime requires a mandate, be it for actual negotiations, the creation of working groups, or other activities. Such a mandate is provided for by the Program of Work, which is also supposed to be adopted annually. Unfortunately, in contrast to the agenda, the CD has been able to adopt a Program of Work only twice in the last two decades—in 1998³ and 2009.⁴ In each case, the Program was adopted only for the ongoing session (in both cases, this was a condition for adoption), and the CD was not able to renew it in 1999 or 2010.

Both Programs of Work identified four “core” items on which progress was possible and desirable, albeit to somewhat different degrees. These are nuclear disarmament, Fissile Materials Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT),⁵ Prevention of Arms Race in

² Agenda for the 2017 session (Adopted at the 1402nd plenary meeting on 24 January 2017), CD/2085

³ CD/1501

⁴ Decision for the establishment of a Programme of Work for the 2009 session (Adopted at the 1139th plenary meeting on 29 May 2009), CD/1864

⁵ The Program of Work in 2009 (CD/1864) lists it as “treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.” The common reference to that point of the agenda, FMCT, is challenged by some members of the CD on the basis that the future treaty should not only provide for cessation of production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices, but also for reduction of existing stockpiles; these countries prefer a different reference to the same program item, FMT (Fissile Materials Treaty).

Outer Space (PAROS), and negative security assurances; the 2009 document provided for the establishment of working groups on all four issues. With regard to FM(C)T, the 2009 Program of Work established a mandate to start negotiations based on the 1995 Shannon Mandate and, with regard to the other three, it created working groups “to exchange views and information.” The 1999 Program of Work also created special coordinators on other agenda items—radiological weapons, a comprehensive program of disarmament, and transparency of armaments. Since the Programs of Work could not be confirmed in the years following their adoption, practical work never started.

Nature of US-Russian Interaction

A significant part of US-Russian interaction within the context of the CD revolves around attempts to overcome that deadlock. Their activities include political pressure and consultations in and outside the chamber, searching for compromises, a broad variety of preparatory activities, such as work of experts, etc.

The degree of cooperation between the United States and Russia varies from one “core” issue to another:

- The positions of the two countries on FMCT are very close, in fact, nearly identical. Both support the 1995 Shannon Mandate and emphasize, in particular, that the future treaty should address production of weapon-grade fissile materials (there is a degree of difference, from time to time, with regard to existing stocks, which will be noted below);
- The two countries almost completely disagree on PAROS: Russia, jointly with China, pushes for early negotiations on that issue, while the United States resists it with equal resolution, proposing instead a set of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs). Although Russia appears prepared to work on TCBMs, it views them as a step toward negotiations on a full-scale treaty and remains suspicious of the possibility that TCBMs might be an end in itself and used to undermine PAROS negotiations.

Both the United States and Russia share the same approach to the nuclear disarmament agenda item. Specifically, they treat their bilateral nuclear arms reductions as steps toward the implementation of Article VI of the NPT and portray the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and earlier treaties as practical steps that move the agenda forward. There is little discussion (in fact, surprisingly little) of multilateral nuclear disarmament, i.e., the inclusion of, at a minimum, other P-5 states into the process. Both support the negative security assurance item, but have so far demonstrated little appetite for negotiations on that issue that could result in legally binding obligations. This attitude is likely because the key policy documents on nuclear strategy (the Nuclear Posture Review for the

United States and the National Security Concept for Russia) contain almost identical language on negative security assurances, which should be, by and large, acceptable to non-nuclear weapon states. It is difficult to determine why the United States and Russia refrain from leveraging this issue, which could help break the deadlock at the CD and create positive momentum to revive this forum. Such negotiations would essentially codify policies that the two countries already have.

US and Russian positions on all the “core” issues have not changed for many years, except for occasional variations of a tactical nature. This stability defines the framework of US-Russian interaction within the CD, including quite a high degree of cooperation on a range of issues. In particular, the two countries coordinated activities on the points of the agenda where their positions overlapped and, at the same time, sought to limit the impact of their disagreements, drawing a clear line between issues of agreement and discord. Their interactions followed this pattern until the significant downturn in their bilateral relations in 2014.

Additionally, the two countries, from time to time, launch new initiatives, sometimes jointly, sometimes individually. An example of this type of joint action is a 2007 US-Russian proposal to make the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty—which banned all US and Soviet/Russian land-based missiles with a range between 500 and 5,500 kilometers—multilateral. This initiative was intended to address Russian concerns about the development of intermediate-range missile capability in multiple states in Eurasia within reach of Russian territory (North Korea, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, etc.), which triggered discussions in Moscow about the possible abrogation of that treaty. Although the initiative did not succeed, it was an important instance of bilateral cooperation (although it did not prevent subsequent challenges to the INF Treaty).

The opposite example is the Russian proposal on an International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism tabled in 2016,⁶ which elicited a negative response from the United States because it appeared to be linked to the charges about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government. The more combative nature of the Russian initiative and the openly negative American response fit the pattern of the bilateral relations following the 2014 crisis.

Clearly, processes outside the CD format affect these interactions. The above-referenced joint initiative to multilateralize the INF Treaty belonged to a period when the relationship between the two countries was positive and reflected the expectation that it might grow further. Conversely, the deep crisis in US-Russian relations, which began in 2014, adversely affected interaction between the two countries in the CD. Some American observers believe that, in recent years, Russia

⁶ See Russian proposal for the Program of Work, August 3, 2016, document CD/2070.

has de-emphasized the FMCT and other agenda items on which the two countries used to cooperate rather closely, and has instead begun to more actively push issues on which the two countries diverge, including PAROS and the new Russian initiative on an International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism.⁷ It is difficult to determine conclusively whether this perception is accurate, but one wonders whether a statement by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the CD on March 2, 2015, reflected skepticism with regard to US-Russian cooperation within the CD: that statement reiterated support for the CD, promoted Russian proposals on PAROS and other issues, but curiously did not mention an FMCT even once.⁸ For analytical purposes, the most important question that needs to be addressed is the extent and depth of the influence of the broader political scene on bilateral interactions in the CD.

US and Russian Attitudes toward the CD

For all practical purposes, the CD has failed to live up to its mandate, obligations, and expectations for more than two decades. This has been the case since 1996, when it completed negotiations on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Many states, including those represented at the CD, have expressed deep dissatisfaction with this failure and have explored opportunities to pursue negotiations outside its framework; the successful completion of negotiations on the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention (also known as the Ottawa Treaty) in 1997 outside the CD framework serves to many as proof that successful action is more feasible on an ad hoc basis without resorting to the CD mechanism.

Even though the positions of the two countries remain close on a number of important issues, there are limits to what the United States and Russia can achieve within the CD framework. Russia cannot claim the superpower mantle the Soviet Union once had, even though it remains one of the key countries, especially on matters of nuclear disarmament. Even the United States has lost some of its influence, although not as much as Russia. Thus, even though the two countries may agree on certain issues and seek to act in a coordinated fashion, success is far from assured. In other words, there can be no return to the time of the ten- or eighteen-party groups, in which the superpowers acted as co-chairs and could, by joint effort, push negotiations forward.

The continuing deadlock at the CD establishes a broad framework for US-Russian interaction with regard to that body: Both countries strongly support the mechanism embodied by the CD, and that shared interest represents the lowest common denominator, which is, in the end, not that low.

⁷ See Russian proposal for the Program of Work, August 3, 2016, document CD/2070.

⁸ Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, March 2, 2015.

This assessment means that the United States and Russia will continue to adhere to similar or shared positions in the CD regardless of political, diplomatic, or tactical disagreements, keeping alive the possibility of resuming cooperation. Indeed, statements made by both Washington and Moscow in the summer of 2017, after a new round of sanctions was enacted by the United States, indicated that both governments thought it possible to cooperate on a variety of global issues outside the narrow scope of bilateral relations. In that sense, the CD, along with other international organizations, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, represents one of the core elements in the US-Russian relationship on international security. In contrast, bilateral endeavors, such as nuclear arms reduction talks, are significantly more subject to the broader political developments, especially after the end of the Cold War, and cooperation on those issues can stop completely, as it has since the conclusion of New START in 2010.

US and Russian commitment to the CD is hardly surprising. It is rooted in extensive and productive cooperation on a broad range of issues both in the CD and its predecessors referred to above, most notably the NPT, the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention, the CTBT, and a range of others. Perhaps more importantly, the CD format allows the United States and Russia to control the agenda, the process, and the outcome of negotiations, to greater or lesser extent. For example, the two countries held regular bilateral consultations on all key negotiations at the CD, and at times even submitted joint draft texts (the NPT is the best-known example of this type of action). This experience helped shape the process of multilateral negotiations and, to a certain extent, determined the contents of the final document. Furthermore, the rule of consensus allows the two countries, in principle, to block unwanted developments and prevent the inclusion of provisions that one or both may deem unacceptable into the final text of a treaty.

In contrast, ad hoc negotiations outside the CD framework, by definition, cannot be controlled as successfully and could result in agreements that run counter to the perceived interests of Russia, the United States, or both. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) embodies these challenges—both countries appeared to share the perception that the initiative was unacceptable. The shared rejection of the TPNW actually can help bring them closer. In this regard, both countries, even as they seek to revive negotiations at the CD, seem to prefer inaction at the CD to action outside it (to a somewhat different degree, as will be shown later). Accordingly, they can be expected to continue efforts to break the deadlock at the CD because in the long- or perhaps even medium-term, this mechanism can survive only if it is able to demonstrate at least a modest degree of efficacy.

That said, the positions of the two countries on the primacy of the CD have not always been identical. At times, the United States has appeared more open to the possibility of negotiations outside this forum. For example, during a series of high-

level meetings at the CD in early 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton indicated that, should the CD remain blocked on the FMCT, the United States was prepared to pursue alternative options for a negotiating forum. Referring to the continued obstruction of the FMCT mandate by Pakistan, she stated that “if we cannot summon the shared will even to begin negotiations in this body, then the United States is determined to pursue other options.”⁹

Russia took issue with that approach. Speaking the next day, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed strong support for the CD and objected to the potential weakening of the UN disarmament machinery. “A lot of ideas were voiced including some radical ones – to revise the consensus rule in the work of the Conference or to start negotiations on its agenda items elsewhere,” he said. “We cannot support these ideas. ... No matter how difficult it might be, we need to search for compromises rather than try to find an ‘easy’ way out by launching ‘parallel’ negotiations processes outside the Conference on Disarmament.”¹⁰

This (rather weakly displayed) difference between their approaches to the CD’s role appears to reflect deeper differences in their perceptions of the role of formal multilateral fora. Especially since the end of the Cold War, Russia has strongly supported the traditional, well-established and well-institutionalized international organizations, within whose frameworks Moscow apparently feels more comfortable and can exercise greater control over outcomes. The United States, in contrast, has developed a propensity for greater reliance on ad hoc mechanisms when its desired outcome cannot be achieved through traditional channels, perhaps believing that it would still be able to control the outcome sufficiently well. In other words, for Washington, the goal is the outcome and it does not matter too much how it is achieved, as long as it believes it can exercise sufficient control over the matter, or, better, takes the initiative (the TPNW negotiations clearly did not belong to that category); for Moscow, the mechanism means as much as the outcome. The difference may seem tactical, but could, in certain situations, lead to tangible disagreements.

In any event, the United States clearly did not intend to push the position it expressed in 2011 too strongly or for too long. It had quietly disappeared from

⁹ Remarks of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at the Conference on Disarmament, February 28, 2011 (<https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/assets/media/98A5ED875DB4000CC12578470053D8BE/file/1210USA.pdf>).

¹⁰ Statement of H.E. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, March 1, 2011 (<https://unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/assets/media/F2C753C466AD602DC1257846005C3761/file/1211RussianFederation.pdf>).

official statements by the end of spring of 2012. Already on May 31 of that year, an official US statement signaled a return to its previous position.¹¹

Interaction on FMCT: Cooperation and Divergences

The balance between the shared and the diverging approaches of the United States and Russia can best be seen in actions undertaken by two countries in and outside the CD chamber regarding an FMCT. Official statements at the CD on that agenda item have been almost identical. The two countries have often supported each other's initiatives (one example includes US support for the Russian initiative in 2012 for adopting a "simplified" program of work with a mandate "to deal with" the four core issues). Similarly, the two countries worked closely on the initiative to establish the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) tasked with developing recommendations that would contribute to the future FMCT. This group was established by UN General Assembly Resolution 67/53 in 2012 and consisted of representatives from twenty-five countries. It worked throughout 2014 and 2015, and submitted its report in 2015.¹² The United States was represented by Jeffrey Eberhardt (director of the Office of Multilateral and Nuclear Affairs, Department of State) and Russia by Mikhail Ulyanov (director of the Department of Nonproliferation and Arms Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The level of cooperation of the two countries within the GGE was solid, according to insider accounts, but, like other attempts to revive the FMCT, the task was not achieved. The work of the GGE continued in 2017 in an open-ended consultative format.

Cooperation was not as close or consistent outside the chamber, although parties sought to avoid public confrontation and generally tried to keep disagreements manageable. For example, in 2011 and 2013, the United States launched consultations in the "P-5+" format with participation of India and Pakistan to explore whether Pakistan, which had been blocking progress on an FMCT, might drop its opposition if the mandate were changed to include stocks of weapon-grade fissile material (making it an FMT instead of FMCT). These consultations did not result in a breakthrough, however, like so many other efforts. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to emphasize that Moscow indicated displeasure with the US initiative. It continued to argue for a strict interpretation of the 1995 Shannon Mandate and insisted that the future treaty only cover new production of fissile material (the United States, on that occasion, was prepared to interpret the mandate as allowing significant flexibility because the scope of the future treaty, according to that document, was to be determined at negotiations). It is important, however, that while Russia registered its disagreement in no uncertain terms, it did so in a restrained fashion, according to insiders. Opposition by China, in contrast, was apparently more forceful and loud.

¹¹ Statement by US Ambassador Laura Kennedy, May 31, 2012.

¹² A/70/81

In these instances, one could clearly see the impact of the broader political context on the US-Russian interaction in the CD. Whereas in 2011 and 2013, Russian opposition to the US attempt to reinterpret the Shannon Mandate to overcome Pakistan's opposition appeared restrained and was not even mentioned in official Russian statements or other documents, a similar attempt in 2016 faced a more public rejection. The Foreign Ministry not only mentioned it in a public document (the background on the CD), but also employed a mildly derogatory term to describe it.¹³

PAROS: Handling the Differences and Searching for Common Ground

The issue of PAROS, on which the two countries diverge, allows a different perspective on US-Russian interactions within the CD, helping to illustrate the observations above. The differences between the US and Russian positions on PAROS have long history—they began before the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union saw it as a means of curbing the American missile defense program (the Strategic Defense Initiative, or “Star Wars,” which the United States pursued in the 1980s) and continued afterward as an embodiment of Russian and Chinese opposition to other stages in the development of the US missile defense program. Obviously, it is not limited to missile defense and has become significantly more comprehensive, including issues, which, to an outside observer, might be in the interest of the United States, such as antisatellite weapons. Still, the United States continues to oppose it, arguing that existing international mechanisms (in particular the Hague Code of Conduct) are sufficient for regulating military activities in space.

In 2008, Russia and China proposed a draft Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and of the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT), tabling a revised version of the text in 2014. According to Russian official sources, this version enjoys the support of one-third of the CD, which is much less than the FMCT, which is supported by all members but one, but still a sizeable group. The status of the PPWT initiative on the CD Program of Work is lower than that of the FMCT: the 2009 Program provided for the creation of a working group “to exchange views and information” on such a treaty, whereas, for the FMCT, it approved a mandate to start negotiations. The fate of PAROS, however, is the same as that of FMCT—no practical work has been started, owing, to a large extent, to opposition from the United States and its allies.

¹³ “Zateya,” which approximately means a non-serious endeavor. “Konferentsiya po Razoruzheniyu, Spravka,” February 16, 2017 (http://www.mid.ru/ru/mnogostoronnijrazoruzenceskijmehanizmoon/-/asset_publisher/8pTEicZSMOut/content/id/2344609)

Nonetheless, it is interesting and significant that the United States did not oppose the inclusion of PAROS as one of core issues in the 1998 and 2009 Programs of Work, despite the different US and Russian interpretations of the mandate. Russian Ambassador Viktor Loshchinin stated in 2010 that Russia's "consent to a discussion mandate for the Working Group on PAROS means that subsequently, when the situation is ripe, the work shall move to the negotiation format."¹⁴ US Ambassador Laura Kennedy offered a different vision of the outcome for the same working group: "While the United States is prepared to engage in substantive discussions on space security as part of a consensus program of work ...we have not yet seen a proposal that meets these criteria. There are, however, many areas that unite us rather than divide us and many ways forward in which we do agree. ... We can all agree on the need to develop near-term, voluntary, and pragmatic space transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs)."¹⁵

In practice, this means that the main difference in the positions of the two countries lies in the status and the scope of a future document: a full-scale treaty in the Russian and Chinese view and a set of transparency and confidence-building measures for the United States. This difference allows for certain degree of cooperation should the parties choose to pursue it. They did indeed work together within GGE tasked with developing TCBMs in the context of PAROS in 2012–13. The group adopted a final report in 2013, which was presented to the CD in May 2014, by the chair of the GGE, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation Viktor Vasiliev. This meant that, despite disagreements about the ultimate goal of the PAROS working group, Russia did not refuse to cooperate on the more modest goal proposed by the United States. This outcome suggests that the differences in the two countries' positions were not antagonistic or, at least, they were not treated as such during this period. As noted above, rhetoric seems to have heated in the last several years, owing to the overall worsening of the US-Russian relationship.

Interaction in Geneva Outside the CD

US and Russian missions in Geneva, including their CD delegations, also have responsibilities related to the NPT review process and, since 2009, for interaction within the P-5 format. Although policy on these issue-areas is formulated in capitals, and key interactions are pursued at high-level meetings, daily, working-level interactions occur primarily in Geneva. Analysis of these issue-areas is outside the scope of this paper, but because they consume considerable time, attention, and effort of diplomats posted to Geneva, a brief note is necessary,

¹⁴ Statement by Ambassador of the Russian Federation Valery Loshchinin, March 2, 2010.

¹⁵ Statement by US Ambassador Laura Kennedy, June 5, 2012.

The arrangement described above is logical given the role of the CD in nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, according to the 1978 mandate adopted by the first UNGA SSOD and the fact that the NPT was negotiated at the CD's predecessor. Although work is conducted outside the public eye, it is very time-consuming: for example, according to one source, preparation for the 2010 Review Conference (including the first joint P-5 statement) took nearly eight months, what many consider to be the high point of cooperation. The two countries closely interacted and, despite many arguments, cooperated both during the negotiations in Geneva and during the Review Conference in New York. Reportedly, frictions began to emerge in 2012, in the run-up to and during the Preparatory Committee meeting, but these primarily concerned secondary issues and remained largely unseen from the outside. P-5 solidarity broke in 2014, when the United States and the United Kingdom decided to participate in the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. By the 2015 NPT Review Conference, many doubted that the P-5 would even be able to agree on a joint statement, which had become traditional.

There is every reason to believe that the significant worsening of US-Russian relations and multiplying conflicts over a broad range of unrelated issues negatively affected bilateral cooperation on NPT and P-5-related issues. At a minimum, the worsening of bilateral relations reduced the willingness to negotiate and compromise on NPT issues while lowering the value attached to the development of a common position and enhancing the propensity for unilateral action. The P-5 process has long been criticized (with good reason) for favoring the principle of the lowest common denominator, which hindered more forward-looking initiatives. For example, it was widely reported that the United States considered attending the humanitarian impact conference in 2013 when it was held in Mexico, and that the principle of P-5 solidarity was one of the (although not the only) reasons it did not make such a decision.

Paradoxically, the successful conclusion of TPNW negotiations in 2017 has the potential to revive US-Russian cooperation. Both countries oppose that document (Russia less publicly than the United States) and may feel the need for closer work to limit its impact on the broader nuclear disarmament agenda and, more specifically, the CD. It remains to be seen whether this possibility will be acted upon in the current, highly tense environment or whether the two countries are able to come up with new initiatives and approaches to revive the CD. Neither appears likely, given the continuing deadlock, but, in principle, they have a good reason to maintain and perhaps even somewhat enhance cooperation within this format.

Conclusion

Overall, the pattern of US-Russian interaction within the CD context over the last decade, which has spanned periods of both reasonably positive and highly negative bilateral relations, has demonstrated two important features.

The first of these features is positive: the shared interest in maintaining the CD framework and the UN disarmament machinery as a whole helps to create a foundation for continued positive interaction in that context and a degree of immunity to broader political processes. It appears unlikely that US-Russian interaction at the CD could disintegrate as much as their bilateral relations on disarmament and nonproliferation. Differences between the two countries on an FMCT and even on PAROS do not appear so serious that they cannot be bridged if there is a political decision and an opportunity to move forward on the CD agenda; they can, for example, move ahead on negative security assurances. In the absence of a political decision, however, the level of divergence will probably remain the same as today.

The second feature is largely negative: even close cooperation between the United States and Russia cannot ensure progress on the CD agenda. Such “collusion” could play a role, but nowhere near the role US-Soviet cooperation played during negotiations on the NPT. The stubborn opposition of Pakistan to the adoption of an FMCT mandate is a stark demonstration of the limits of US and Russian influence on the nuclear disarmament agenda. Thus, even positive developments in the bilateral context can hardly instill optimism about the prospects of breaking the CD deadlock.