



Key Issues for the 2026 NPT Review Conference

NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT AND ARMS CONTROL

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Nuclear disarmament has traditionally been at the centre of the review process debates, as the non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) have sought greater accountability of the nuclear-weapon States (NWS) for the implementation of Article VI and disarmament commitments adopted by the [1995](#), [2000](#), and [2010](#) Review Conferences.

The 2026 Review Conference is taking place in a particularly difficult context: the salience of nuclear weapons is on the rise, all five NWS are modernizing their arsenals, and the trend of the overall reductions in the numbers of nuclear warheads [has stopped and is poised to reverse](#). Following the expiration of the New START Treaty in February 2026, there are no bilateral nuclear arms control agreements in force, and no new treaty is being negotiated or even seriously discussed. Far from achieving progress on nuclear disarmament, the international community faces the prospect of a new nuclear arms race.

Many States Parties at the Review Conference will call for the resumption of US-Russian arms control and further reductions, but there could be less unity on the subject among the NNWS than is usually the case.

The United States has indicated it was not interested in continuing arms control on a bilateral basis with Russia. On 6 February 2023, Under-Secretary of State Thomas Dinanno [announced](#) the start of a “new era” of arms control that requires the participation of NWS beyond Russia. The United States has repeatedly called for China to be involved in nuclear arms control, expressing concern about the expansion of its nuclear arsenal and lack of transparency. Other Western countries, particularly US allies in Asia-Pacific, share these concerns.

China is [estimated](#) to have about 600 warheads, which means its arsenal more than doubled in 10 years. The Pentagon projects that China’s stockpile would surpass 1000 warheads by 2030. China, while remaining opaque about the size of its arsenal, has called the projections exaggerated and [reiterated](#) that the NWS with the largest arsenals – Russia and the United States – should continue engaging in bilateral arms control to further reduce their stockpiles.

Russia is not opposed to the multilateralization of arms control in principle, but for it, that means the participation of the US/NATO allies France and the United Kingdom, neither of whom has signalled willingness to join arms control negotiations in the near future. Both States currently have nuclear arsenals smaller than that of China, but both are set to expand. The 2021 [Integrated Review](#) announced the increase in UK’s stockpile ceiling from 225 to 260. In March 2026,

President Emmanuel Macron [announced](#) that France would increase its stockpile by an unspecified number from its current ceiling of 300 warheads.

The expansion of nuclear sharing – actual or potential – to new States is also likely to be contentious in the context of both the disarmament (Main Committee I) and non-proliferation (Main Committee II) debates. In recent years, China in particular has intensified its criticism of the deployment of US nuclear weapons on the territory of several NATO allies. Russia, while criticizing NATO nuclear sharing policies, [announced](#) in 2023 that it had begun stationing nuclear weapons in Belarus. In March 2026, President Macron [announced](#) the advent of “forward deterrence” – a new cooperation with a number of European allies that would involve, among other things, “temporary deployment of elements of [France’s] strategic air forces to allied countries.”

In this environment, it is highly unlikely that the Review Conference would agree on an objective review and assessment of implementation of Article VI and past commitments on nuclear disarmament. It is also hard to see prospects for agreement on next steps, with the possible exception of measures to enhance transparency and reporting. One option would be for the Review Conference to reaffirm the commitment to full implementation of Article VI and commitments adopted by past review conferences, without going into detail on specific steps. However, many NNWS might view this, in itself, as insufficient for a substantive outcome. The NWS, for their part, might hesitate to agree to a blank reaffirmation of past commitments, citing the changing circumstances and the fact that some of the previously adopted steps cannot be implemented as formulated.