P5 Conference, Beijing 30-31 January

The International Relations Committee expressed interest in receiving an update on the P5 Conference, which took place in Beijing on 30-31 January, under China’s chairmanship. Philip Barton, Director General Consular and Security, FCO, led the UK delegation, accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

China chose the theme of “Strengthening P5 Coordination and Safeguarding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Regime”; a strong NPT is crucially important to the world and the P5 have a particular responsibility to work for a successful NPT Review Conference in 2020. Discussions were held on each of the three pillars of the NPT – disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear technology, as well as current challenges to the NPT regime and how to mitigate them. There was an exchange on the P5’s respective national nuclear doctrines and postures, and agreement to continue these discussions. All countries stated their intention to publish national reports at the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

A public session with academic representatives took place on the second day. This was a useful opportunity to clarify the UK position on a variety of NPT-related issues to a broader audience.

This was a useful meeting and I attach a copy of the Chair’s summary. The UK initiated the P5 process in 2009 to build mutual understanding between the Nuclear Weapon States. While we do not see eye to eye on all issues, increased understanding of each other’s policy positions, capabilities and doctrines, is important to avoid miscalculation or misunderstanding, as well as to build trust. China will continue as coordinators until the Third NPT Preparatory Committee in New York in May. The UK will then become the coordinator until the Review Conference in 2020.
Five Nuclear-weapon States Hold a Formal Conference in Beijing

2019/01/30

On January 30, 2019, the formal conference among the five nuclear-weapon states (also the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations (UN) Security Council) was held in Beijing. Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Jun attended the opening ceremony and chaired the conference. Director of Strategic, Security and Disarmament Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nicolas Roche of France, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov of Russia, Political Director General of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Philip Barton of the United Kingdom (UK) and Under Secretary of State Andrea Thompson of the United States (US) respectively headed delegations to attend the conference.

China, France, Russia, the UK and the US, as the nuclear-weapon states designated by the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), formed the five nuclear-weapon states mechanism as a coordination mechanism during the review process of the NPT, and the five states have maintained regular communication on important issues concerning strategy and security since 2009, jointly promoting the review process of the NPT. It is the first time for the five nuclear-weapon states to hold a formal conference after a two-year interval. Centering on the theme of "Strengthening P5 Coordination, Safeguarding NPT Regime", representatives of the five states carried out in-depth and candid communication on nuclear policies and strategies, nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and other issues. Zhang Jun, on behalf of the Chinese side, the current rotating coordinator of the five nuclear-weapon states cooperation mechanism, made chairmanship conclusion remarks after the conference, stressing that all parties have reached three important consensuses:

First, the five nuclear-weapon states committed to sharing responsibility for international peace and security. The five nuclear-weapon states all recognized that the current international security environment faces severe challenges and that maintaining sound relations among major countries is of great importance to the settlement of global strategic problems. They agreed to take an objective view on respective strategic intentions, strengthen exchanges on nuclear policies and strategies, enhance strategic mutual trust and maintain common security, in a bid to spare no effort to prevent nuclear risks that may be caused by misunderstandings and misjudgments. The five nuclear-weapon states undertook to maintain the existing international arms control system and comply with all international arms control agreements. They reiterated relevant commitments to negative security assurances, including active security and negative security. The five nuclear-weapon states are willing to restart consultation with Southeast Asian countries on the Protocol to the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty and continue committing to promoting the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Second, the five nuclear-weapon states undertook to jointly safeguard the NPT regime. They stressed that the NPT is the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and also an essential part of the international security architecture, and undertook to comprehensively and completely implement the NPT and promote its universality. The five nuclear-weapon states will follow the principle of "undiminished security for all", promote greater progress in nuclear disarmament, and realize the goal of a world free of nuclear
weapons step by step. They believed that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons deviates from and harms the NPT, and reiterated their stance of unanimous opposition. The five nuclear-weapon states confirmed that they will do their utmost to solve the nuclear non-proliferation issue through political and diplomatic means, and support the International Atomic Energy Agency in strengthening the safeguard and supervision system under authorization. The five nuclear-weapon states committed to promoting international cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and agreed to strengthen coordination and cooperation in the fields of nuclear safety and nuclear energy security. They also agreed to submit national reports to the 2020 NPT Review Conference, so as to jointly push the Review Conference for a success.

Third, the five nuclear-weapon states committed to continuing to use the five nuclear-weapon states cooperation platform to maintain dialogue and coordination. The current international security situation is undergoing complicated and profound evolution. The international security environment, the direction of the international order and the confidence of the international community hinge on interaction among major countries. The five nuclear-weapon states agreed to maintain strategic dialogue, strengthen exchanges on nuclear policies and strategies, enhance coordination in the review process of the NPT, and conduct researches on implementing specific work through the channel of ambassadors for disarmament in Geneva. All parties supported China in taking the lead to carry out the second phase of the work of the P5 Working Group on the Glossary of Key Nuclear Terms, and welcomed the UK to hold the next formal P5 Conference in 2020. The five nuclear-weapon states actively promote the international community to conduct open and constructive dialogue, and will hold a dialogue with international academic institutions, the media and officials from embassies of some non-nuclear-weapon states in China on January 31.

Zhang Jun expressed that as the permanent members of the UN Security Council and the nuclear-weapon states designated by the NPT, the five nuclear-weapon states conducted in-depth exchanges of views with mutual respect as well as a candid and practical attitude, reached many consensuses and charted the course for cooperation, which showcased the active attitude of major countries to cope with international security challenges through coordination and cooperation, and was conducive to enhancing the international community’s confidence in international security environment.

Zhang Jun stressed that with increasing unstable and uncertain factors in the current international security situation, major-country relations and responsibilities will be keenly watched. The five nuclear-weapon states should reinforce coordination and cooperation, seek common security and safeguard global strategic stability. As the rotating coordinator of the five nuclear-weapon states cooperation mechanism, China will continuously remain committed to promoting the five nuclear-weapon states to build consensus, manage differences, replace major-country competition with major-country coordination and replace zero-sum games with win-win cooperation, so as to make positive contributions to advancing world peace and stability.

Received 13 February 2019