Andrey Baklitskiy – Written evidence (NPT0046)

Nuclear risk

1. While the current level of risk of nuclear use is still quite low, the overall trend is disturbing. Across the world the emphasis of nuclear weapons is growing, there is a lot of volatility as arms control agreements disappear and new types of nuclear systems are developed and deployed.

2. As the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan shows, possession of nuclear weapons does not preclude military conflicts, which come with the possibility of escalation to the nuclear level. The danger is not limited to the South Asia, any serious military confrontation between DPRK and the USA, China and the USA, India and China, or NATO and Russia will inevitably have a nuclear dimension.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation regime

3. Contrary to what some experts claim, current arms control crisis and disarmament impasse would not mean the end of the NPT or the nonproliferation regime any time soon. While it is true that none of the major issue of disagreement from the 2015 NPT Review Conference would be addressed by 2020, raising the chances of ending another RevCon without an agreed final document, it will probably not result in mass exodus or increase in nuclear proliferation.

4. Countries mainly seek nuclear weapons to deter other states from attacking them and increase their standing. Majority of the world community does not feel the need to embark on the nuclear quest and so is the natural base of the non-proliferation regime and the NPT. Significant part of the countries that feel vulnerable are covered by extended deterrence provided by their nuclear armed allies. The remaining states are deterred from pursuing nuclear weapons by the cost that will be imposed on them by the international community. Only in the extreme cases countries chose nuclear weaponization, preferring to come to a negotiated agreement.

5. However, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA showed its limited interest in mutually acceptable multilateral solutions to international crisis. Washington’s campaign of targeting broad sectors of Iranian economy and thinly disguised calls for regime change in Tehran strengthen those in Iranian leadership who advocate leaving the nuclear deal and expanding its nuclear program. The restart of a full scale Iranian nuclear program could result in a nuclear technology race in the Middle East, escalation of tensions around Iran, or even military strikes against Tehran by the United States, Israel or other regional players, pushing the region into another war. While the fate of the JCPOA is still to be decided, an
important factor would be the cooperation of remaining parties of the agreement – including the UK – on providing Iran with promised economic incentives.

6. US-DPRK dialogue is a welcome change compared to 2017 “fire and fury” approach from Washington, however it could be easily reversed. The high expectations that followed the top-level negotiations could become a trigger for confrontation if the results fail to materialize. International community and the P5 should support the process and add stability to it. At the same time, by treating Pyongyang remarkably differently from Tehran, the US strengthen the notion that nuclear weapons are not only useful as a deterrent but also provide a valuable negotiating advantage. While each country ultimately decides for itself if its national security is strengthened or weakened by the pursuit of nuclear weapons, the approach of current administration may suggest that nuclear possession could be a safer strategy than nuclear hedging.

**Nuclear arms control**

7. Following US announcement of withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) treaty on February 2, 2019, the parties have six months to find the compromise. If history of the controversy is any guide, there will be no major course corrections in Moscow and Washington, and the treaty will cease to exist in August 2019.

8. Against this backdrop there is a significant probability of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) not being renewed and lapsing in 2021 or even being terminated prematurely. The US President famously called New START a bad deal and refused the extension proposal from President Putin during their first phone call. US National Security adviser John Bolton is openly skeptical about the treaty as is a sizable number of Republicans in Congress. With the departure of Jim Mattis as US Secretary of Defense, New START lost its biggest supporter in the Administration.

9. As a result, Moscow and Washington might end up with an intermediate ballistic and cruise missiles arms race (previously limited by the INF treaty), ICBMs and heavy bombers arms race (previously limited by New START), in addition to ongoing offensive – defensive arms race and incipient hypersonic arms race.

10. In the absence of the New START the parties would lose the source of reliable information about each other force structure, as well as confidence building measures in the nuclear sphere and the permanent forum for discussion of strategic arms. This will impact the stability of US-Russian confrontation. Apart from the disinterest of current US
administration there are following factors playing into the demise of the bilateral arms control:

- Divergent issues of concern of Russia and the USA and lack of willingness to limit themselves in the spheres, where the sides have an advantage;
- Mutual accusations of non-compliance, which not only impact existing treaties but will make concluding new agreements harder;
- Growing importance of nuclear forces of the third countries and entanglement of US and Russian reactions to the developments in other countries;
- Development and deployment of new technologies (hypersonic, space-based, anti-satellite), which are difficult to incorporate because they are new and also because the parties don’t want to lose an edge;
- Disillusionment with the prospects of arms control agreements improving overall relations between the states;
- Lack of sense of urgency on the part of the decision makers in Washington and Moscow.

11. Taken together those factors suggest there is a low probability of new arms control agreements negotiated and much less ratified by Russia and the USA. In their absence the goal should be to preserve as much from the existing arms control architecture as possible with the focus on confidence building measures. Moscow and Washington would be better off stating that they do not plan to exceed the limits of new START and will notify each other in advance if the situation changes. Continued exchange of numbers of strategic forces, as well as notifications about missile launches and strategic exercises would add stability to the relations. With Bilateral Consultative Commission no longer in place, Russia and the USA would need to establish a regular forum for strategic stability discussions. After the demise of the INF treaty, a non-deployment agreement of INF-range systems in Europe could be negotiated – politically binding instead of legally binding if necessary.

**Nuclear strategies**

12. Russian nuclear strategy got its current shape in December of 2014 with the introduction of the latest Military Doctrine. Contrary to what some Western experts claim, the doctrine did not lower the threshold for nuclear use. Rather, the document stated that nuclear weapons will only be used as a response to use of nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction against Russia and its allies or “when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy” – the same wording that was used in the 2010 Military Doctrine. Moreover, the 2014 Doctrine also pioneered the concept of “non-nuclear
deterrence”, which would take over some of the functions that had previously been reserved for nuclear weapons. With Russia getting more comfortable with its conventional capabilities, as demonstrated in Syrian campaign and regular large-scale exercises, its reliance on nuclear weapons if anything is decreasing.

13. Russia also does not have a “escalate to de-escalate” strategy, neither in the official military doctrine, nor in other known documents. Russian nuclear doctrine, official statements, force development and exercises are all consistent with concerns over the possibility of a counterforce strike from a technologically superior power or a military conflict getting out of hand and escalating to strategic nuclear level, not with de-escalation strikes to end the conflict on Moscow’s terms.

14. At the same time, 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review included de-facto increasing the role of nuclear weapons in providing US security, in particular developing a low yield warhead for the Trident SLBM and a new nuclear SLCM to provide instruments to confront Moscow at lower rungs of the escalation ladder. Those would include “holding at risk [...] , what Russia's leadership most values” or in other words “escalating to de-escalate”. While not a game changer (US had low-yield weapons before), those new systems are moving the United States in a direction that is less averse to nuclear warfighting. Same can be said about the extension of the number of conditions under which the US might consider nuclear use according to the NPR. All of this raised concerns in Moscow about the Washington’s nuclear strategy.

15. The P5 process, created within the NPT framework but gradually broadening its scope, is still quite limited. While it grew in importance in the recent years due to the lack of other mechanisms and increased interest of participants, it still does not address the most pressing issues, which countries prefer to address in bilateral format.

**The role of the UK**

16. As a nuclear weapons state under the NPT, the UK has an important role to play in nonproliferation, disarmament and arms control spheres. As a close US ally, London should encourage Washington to play a constructive role in the NPT Review process. UK could also push for greater transparency among the P5, which could include regular reporting of the numbers of strategic weapons similar to New START reporting as a confidence building measure. Being one of the co-sponsors of 1995 resolution on Nuclear-Free Zone in the Middle East (together with Russia and the USA), London should try to engage the Arab states as well as Iran and Israel in the talks. At the same time the UK should continue
implementing the JCPOA and be ready to go an extra mile to preserve the agreement.

17. UK could also be an important player in the creation of new arrangements for European security. London could be an initiator of a political agreement of non-deployment of ground launched INF-range systems in Europe, which is quite feasible since no European country currently possesses such missiles. Since the INF treaty will be no longer in place, the UK would help by encouraging the mutually acceptable arrangement on 9m729 Russian missiles and US Mk41 launchers in Europe.

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