

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's remarks at the Conference marking the 50th anniversary of the NPT being opened for signing, Moscow, June 14, 2018

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This conference is dedicated to a remarkable event of global importance, the 50th anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) being opened for signing, which we will all mark on July 1.

The importance of this Treaty to international peace and security cannot be overestimated. The NPT played a key role in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, laid the foundation for consistent movement towards disarmament, primarily nuclear, and the development of broad international cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy. It can rightly be considered an example of the efficacy of multilateral diplomacy, and a standard for interaction between members of the international community in overcoming global international challenges.

To date, the NPT unites 191 states. The only countries outside the Treaty are India, Pakistan, Israel and the newly independent South Sudan. The DPRK, which failed to properly comply with the withdrawal requirement, is formally considered a party to this Treaty. All the countries that joined the NPT agreed voluntarily with all its provisions, including the assignment of the status of officially recognised nuclear states to five UN Security Council permanent members.

According to expert estimates, without the NPT, up to 50 countries could have theoretically acquired nuclear weapons by now. Even though it was not possible to completely preclude the emergence of new states with nuclear weapons capabilities, the Treaty significantly limited the political and economic opportunities for building or acquiring nuclear weapons.

The decision of the 1995 Review Conference on the indefinite extension of the Treaty made it possible to give the NPT a permanent character, to ensure that it operated in a predictable and sustainable way, to guard against the influence of fleeting political interests and to open up significant prospects for strengthening the Treaty.

Today, with the support of the NPT, the entire system of effective norms and mechanisms for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which together constitute an international regime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, is functioning successfully. This regime is constantly evolving and adapting to new realities, maintaining its relevance and ability to respond adequately to modern challenges and threats in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation.

The fifty years of the NPT's existence have convincingly demonstrated the efficacy of its balanced structure of commitments in three key areas: nuclear non-proliferation, peaceful use of atomic energy and disarmament. Practically all decisions within the NPT review process were based on this most important principle, including the 2010 Action Plan, and its preservation is the key to the successful functioning of the Treaty in the future.

Despite the undeniable success that the NPT has made possible, throughout the entire period of its existence, the Treaty has been subjected to major tests of its durability. Unfortunately, even as the NPT turns 50, difficulties remain. The international situation, which is characterised by growing strategic unpredictability, tension and conflict, mistrust among states, the renunciation of collective mechanisms of cooperation, and the erosion of the foundations of international law, negatively affects the state of the NPT.

Within the framework of the Treaty, we are witnessing deepening divides between nuclear and non-nuclear states, and growing disagreements within these groups of countries. The universally recognised norms and mechanisms in the sphere of nuclear non-proliferation are being thwarted and revised. Some states place their fleeting interests above the tasks of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This approach, in particular, caused the inconclusive end of the 2015 Review Conference, when the United States, Britain and Canada irresponsibly blocked the adoption of its final document.

At the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference in Geneva new hazardous trends emerged which caused the situation within the NPT framework to heat up. Thus, attempts were made to use the review process as a platform to exert opportunistic political pressure on some states, including Russia. Topics based on imagined pretexts are raised within the NPT which have nothing to do with the Treaty. Among them are chemical weapons issues.

All that considerably aggravates the situation within the NPT, with differences over certain agenda persisting and even deepening. One such topic is nuclear disarmament. This agenda is given priority within the review process, in part under pressure from a group of states calling for immediate and unconditional abandonment of nuclear arsenals. We understand the noble motives of those countries. However, such initiatives are premature and have a disorienting effect. Nuclear arsenals are reduced not in a vacuum but in the modern world which is becoming increasingly turbulent and unpredictable. This is why we call for a sober and realistic approach to nuclear disarmament. Nuclear disarmament is a much too serious, extremely complicated and exceptionally important process for emotions to be allowed in.

We proceed from the inviolability of Article VI of the NPT and its relation to corresponding parts of the Treaty's preamble. The cessation of nuclear weapons production, destruction of all existing stocks and exclusion of nuclear weapons and their carriers from the national arsenals by definition can not be achieved without signing a Treaty on universal and complete disarmament under strict international monitoring. The movement towards nuclear disarmament must be balanced and incremental, with a firm reliance on improving international security and stability as well as the fundamental principle of continuously raising the level of equal and indivisible security for all. All nations without exception should be engaged in corresponding efforts, while those countries which already possess nuclear capabilities must be the first to engage.

As for Russia, our country maintains strict compliance with its nuclear disarmament obligations. In line with Article VI, the Russian Federation has made an unprecedented contribution to the progress towards a nuclear-free world by cutting its nuclear capacity by 85 percent over the last thirty years. We also cut the number of non-strategic nuclear weapons by 75 percent and moved them into the non-deployed category, relocating them to central storage facilities within the national territory.

To further the nuclear disarmament process it is necessary to focus the international community's efforts on resolving urgent problems of international security and stability. One of them is the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty followed by unimpeded unilateral deployment of the US global missile defence systems, refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the development of high-precision offensive strategic weapons, and the possible deployment of offensive weapons in space, increasing quantitative and qualitative imbalances in conventional weapons. As the problems remain unresolved further, it will destroy trust between states and, in fact, nullify all disarmament efforts.

The CTBT plays an exceptionally important role in the efforts to limit and reduce nuclear weapons; it was designed as a reliable barrier to the proliferation and upgrading nuclear weapons. By rejecting the policy line for ratification and creating a domestic environment for the accelerated resumption of nuclear tests, the US is dealing a heavy blow to the treaty. Unfortunately, most countries shamefully hush up this problem today. Apart from a few perfunctory statements in support of the treaty, they pretend that the US's refusal to ratify the CTBT is not so catastrophic. The situation with the CTBT is actually much more serious. It needs to be analysed objectively and efforts should be made to determine an acceptable format for the country that is not going to ratify the treaty to be able to participate in the established organisations.

Another acute NPT issue is the process of establishing a Middle East WMD-free zone (WMDFZ). The Arab states are extremely concerned about the lack of progress on the 1995 Middle East Resolution. The situation is complicated by the fact that the United States, after making a review of its foreign policy, questions the possibility of continuing the WMDFZ-related work within the NPT, inventing a range of preconditions for further progress in this area, including things that have nothing to do with the Treaty or the Resolution. This policy, pursued by one of the co-authors of the 1995 Middle East Resolution, has caused an extremely negative reaction within the NPT. Three regional groups at the 2nd Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva (the Arab group, Africa and NAM) harshly criticised Washington's line on the WMDFZ.

This issue will obviously become one of the highlights at the 2020 Review Conference. If the participants fail to agree on further steps on this track, the consequences could be most serious. As a co-author of the 1995 Middle East Resolution, Russia is committed to the unconditional fulfillment of its obligations under that resolution and is ready to work with all interested parties to resume a dialogue to convene a Conference on the WMDFZ. The proposals on working towards convening the WMDFZ Conference that Russia submitted in Vienna last year, which were broadly supported by the parties to the Treaty, could serve as a good framework for this decision.

Furthermore, non-proliferation, IAEA safeguards and the peaceful use of nuclear energy are being shifted to the backburner in the NPT review process, given the increased attention to the issues of nuclear disarmament. Yet, these topics are no less significant and complex, and require careful consideration and decision-making.

The IAEA safeguards system has always served, and still serves, to verify the fulfilment of the states' obligations under the NPT. The participating states' confidence in the IAEA's monitoring mechanism is a key factor in the sustainability of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The IAEA system of safeguards needs to be consistently strengthened, primarily through a gradual universalisation of the

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Additional Protocol, which remains a strictly voluntary matter for each NPT party to sign. At the same time, reforms, modifications and an "evolution" of these safeguards would be justified only if the system itself remains objective, depoliticised, technically sound, understandable for the member states and based on the rights and obligations of the parties in accordance with the agreements they signed with the Agency. Any new subjective elements in the application of the safeguards will inevitably make the IAEA control mechanism vulnerable to fleeting political interests, and hence lead to the erosion of the fundamental principle of non-interference in the member states' internal affairs. This could result in detrimental consequences for both the system of safeguards and the NPT as a whole.

The reform poses the risk that information at odds with reality supplied by open sources and so-called "third parties" (intelligence agencies of different countries) will be inserted into the process of assessing states' compliance with their non-proliferation commitments. Meanwhile, conclusions on the countries' compliance with non-proliferation obligations are drafted, just like before the reform, by international bureaucrats in the IAEA Secretariat, and the practice is not going to change. In this case the nature of very important conclusions on safeguards would depend on the biased opinions of those bureaucrats, on their confidence or mistrust of a certain information source. In other words, what had been a technical process may turn into a political one.

We are confident that the tightest political oversight on the part of the IAEA member states over the reform of the safeguards system is beneficial and a down payment on the long-term sustainability of the non-proliferation regime based on the NPT. Transparency of the Agency's Secretariat on all significant parameters of the reform is critically important for maintaining trust in the safeguards system. In our view, any conclusion on safeguards must be made exclusively on the basis of the information the Secretariat is ready to defend in an open discussion in the Agency's managing bodies. Data which cannot be verified in such manner, as well judgments of the "very likely" or "highly likely" variety, may not be taken into consideration when conclusions on safeguards are made.

Nuclear non-proliferation goes hand in hand with peaceful exploration of nuclear technologies and underwrites further progress in nuclear science and energy. The increasing interest in peaceful nuclear energy, especially for power, is a pronounced and objective trend of our time. Over 450 power-generating units are currently operating in the world, 55 more are under construction. There is also increasing interest in technical cooperation projects as well as in non-energy uses of nuclear technologies.

Russia is the most consistent advocate of the widest possible use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We are confident that the mechanisms needed to overcome related proliferation risks are already in place and working fairly well. This is why our country is one of the most active participants in international cooperation in peaceful nuclear energy. At present, the Rosatom State Corporation is pursuing projects outside Russia to build 33 new nuclear power generating units. We supply our partners with completely safe light-water nuclear power reactors that are proliferation-proof. We are actively developing a closed-loop nuclear fuel cycle. We are also the largest producer of enriched uranium and a large supplier of radioactive isotopes.

What distinguishes the Russian approach is that our country not only supplies nuclear or any other kind of radioactive material or nuclear power equipment; we help our partners build a complete nuclear industry including research, nuclear safety and related physical safety, as well training national personnel. We place special emphasis on interaction with non-nuclear states parties to the NPT and proper accounting of the needs of the world's developing regions. By doing so, Russia does the most for the practical implementation of Article IV of the NPT.

A serious challenge to the NPT regime can be seen in the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme, which was unanimously acknowledged by all the parties to the JCPOA as a key achievement in nuclear non-proliferation, and an example of resolving complicated non-proliferation challenges through the NPT. The measures under the JCPOA, including verification and control, as well as the mechanisms of information exchange, are unprecedented and give a reliable guarantee that Tehran's nuclear programme is entirely peaceful in nature.

It must be understood that Washington's cavalier attitude to international agreements, including unilateral amendment of its own commitments when they no longer suit its interests, can lead to most dramatic consequences for the non-proliferation regime. The situation with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) may have a negative impact on the nascent possibility of settling the Korean nuclear problem and may add elements of concern, mutual mistrust as well as suspicion to contacts between parties to the conflict.

Russia is aware of its responsibility as a founding and depositary state of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Ensuring the integrity and sustainable operation of the NPT calls for consistent efforts to improve the spirit of constructive cooperation within the framework of the NPT, to bring about a rapprochement in the parties' positions on various aspects of the review process, to avoid unnecessary politicisation, and to act with utmost discretion with regard to the NPT and any other international agreements based on it.

Russia will continue to steadily work with all states that care about the future of the NPT so as to ensure the treaty consistently functions and gains strength.