

# **“Breaking the Impasse on Disarmament and Implementing Article VI Obligations”**

NGO Statement for the Second Preparatory Meeting for the 2026 NPT Review Conference

July 23, 2024

*Delivered by Daryl G. Kimball of the Arms Control Association*

The success of the global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament system and our collective efforts to avert nuclear catastrophe have always relied on effective dialogue and diplomacy between the nuclear-weapon states to reduce the role and number and salience of nuclear weapons, combined with effective leadership and pressure from non-nuclear weapon states to achieve action on key NPT nuclear disarmament initiatives.

But for more than a decade, the NPT’s five nuclear-armed states have failed to engage on disarmament and meet their key NPT Article VI commitments, and they are spending [tens of billions of dollars each year](#) to modernize, upgrade, and, in some cases, to expand their deadly nuclear arsenals as if they intend to keep nuclear weapons indefinitely.

Today, while non-nuclear-armed states are actively engaging to promote nuclear disarmament, including through the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, there is no serious dialogue between nuclear-armed states, all appear to be increasing reliance on nuclear weapons with some even threatening potential nuclear use. Nuclear dangers are growing. None of the NPT’s nuclear-armed states can credibly claim they are meeting their NPT disarmament obligations. As a result, the viability of the NPT regime and global peace and security are at severe risk.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a [special message on June 7](#): “Humanity is on a knife's edge. The risk of a nuclear weapon being used has reached heights not seen since the Cold War. States are engaged in a qualitative arms race. Nuclear blackmail has reemerged with some recklessly threatening nuclear catastrophe.”

"Meanwhile," he said, "the regime designed to prevent the use, testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons is weakening. [We] need disarmament now. All countries need to step up, but nuclear weapons states must lead the way."

We agree. If we are to repair the NPT regime and avert a new nuclear arms race, or worse, the time for action is here and now.

## **The Disarmament Deficit and the Risk of a New Arms Race**

Since 2013, when Russia refused talks on deeper nuclear cuts with Washington, the two governments with the largest nuclear arsenals -- [which constitute approximately 90 percent of the global total](#) -- have dithered and delayed on new disarmament talks and failed to resolve disputes on successful arms control agreements that have helped ease tensions and reduce nuclear risks.

The 1987 INF Treaty is gone and the last remaining treaty limiting the world's two largest nuclear arsenals, the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, will expire in less than 561 days.

Sadly, Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has become the Kremlin's cynical excuse to short-circuit meaningful channels of diplomacy that could reduce nuclear risk and enhance mutual cooperation on the common threats posed by nuclear weapons.

To date, Russian President Vladimir Putin has refused to engage with U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on [its 2023 offer to discuss, "without preconditions," a new nuclear arms control framework](#) to prevent an unconstrained nuclear arms race.

Without some kind of new understanding by the United States and Russia not to build up their arsenals beyond the current New START limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads on long-range missiles and bombers, each side could, in theory, [double the size of their currently deployed strategic nuclear arsenals](#) within about two years by uploading additional warheads kept in reserve on existing missile and bomber systems.

Meanwhile, China has engaged in an effort to rapidly build up the size of its smaller but still deadly nuclear force, which [independent researchers estimate to consist of some 310 warheads on long-range missiles and perhaps 500 in total](#), and there is open-source information indicating that the size of China's nuclear force may grow significantly in the coming years. Unfortunately, [China has formally and publicly rejected U.S. offers for follow-up discussions](#) on nuclear risk reduction and arms control issues.

Senior U.S. officials have said that: "... we do not need to increase our nuclear forces to match or outnumber the combined total of our competitors to successfully deter them."

But a [senior White House official also said on June 7](#) that: "Absent a change in the trajectory of adversary arsenals, we may reach a point in the coming years where an increase from current deployed numbers is required." We disagree and reject such talk as counterproductive and unnecessary.

The use of just a fraction of today's nuclear arsenals would lead to mass destruction on an unprecedented, global scale. Halting the cycle of spiraling nuclear tensions is in every nation's interest.

Furthermore, under Article VI of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), Russia and the United States, along with China, France, and the United Kingdom, have a legal obligation to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament." The treaty does not excuse them from their Article VI obligations because they feel disrespected or unfairly treated for some reason or another.

Refusing to engage at the negotiating table, combined with building an even greater nuclear destructive capacity, is a violation of this core NPT tenet.

Other crucial nonproliferation and disarmament agreements are being ignored or taken for granted. For example, the 1996 CTBT has effectively ended nuclear testing, but China, the United States, and six other states have failed to ratify and have held up the treaty's formal entry into force. And now Russia, in a counterproductive and cynical attempt to mirror the United States' stance, has de-ratified the treaty.

Our civil society organizations, representing millions of voices around the globe, call on every delegation at this conference to press the NPT's nuclear five to fully respect and accelerate the implementation of their NPT disarmament commitments and to make good on your joint commitment, issued at the [1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference](#), to achieve the “complete elimination of nuclear weapons.”

Specifically, as you prepare for the 2026 Review Conference, we urge all states parties to come together around the following priority action steps:

**1. Demand that the United States and the Russian Federation immediately return to the nuclear arms control and disarmament negotiating table, fully implement their obligations under New START and agree on new arrangements to cap and reduce their nuclear arsenals before New START expires.** At a minimum, Moscow and Washington should conclude a simple bilateral understanding that says that neither side shall increase the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons beyond the New START ceiling of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads until such time as they can conclude a more comprehensive framework agreement or set of agreements to limit and reduce their deadly nuclear arsenals.

So long as Russia and the United States agree to cap their strategic deployed nuclear arsenals and work to negotiate a new nuclear arms reduction framework, the NPT's other nuclear-armed states, China, France, and the UK, should pledge to a nuclear freeze of the overall size of their nuclear arsenals and a fissile material production halt.

Such an arrangement would lessen dangerous nuclear competition and create space for more intensive and wide-ranging arms control and disarmament negotiations not only between the United States and Russia, but also involving China, France, and the UK.

**2. Call upon all five of the NPT's nuclear-armed states to engage in a serious high-level dialogue that leads to a joint commitment not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons and to agree that none will be the first to use nuclear weapons for any reason.**

We note that earlier this year, [senior Chinese officials proposed](#) that the five should “negotiate and conclude a treaty on no first use of nuclear weapons against each other,” and we note that China published a [working paper on the topic](#) earlier this month. In response to the idea, a [senior U.S. official said in April](#) that “If they want to engage in a conversation of the many questions raised by their no-first-use proposal, we would engage.”

In addition, the five NPT nuclear-armed states should consider how to update, implement, and multilateralize the 1973 U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War, which pledges they will “refrain from the threat or use of force against the other party, against the allies of the other party and against other countries, in circumstances which may endanger international peace and security.” It requires that “if at any time there is the risk of a nuclear conflict [each side] shall immediately enter into urgent consultations...to avert this risk.”

Such a dialogue would be an overdue way to operationalize the January 2022 joint statement from the NPT's five nuclear-armed states that a “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” However, these and other nuclear risk reduction measures cannot erase the tensions that can lead to nuclear war, they cannot remove the inherent dangers of nuclear deterrence policies, nor can they prevent dangerous forms of qualitative and quantitative nuclear arms racing.

**3. Condemn threats of nuclear use as "inadmissible" and illegal.** We condemn the recent threats from leaders of some nuclear-armed states underscoring their readiness to use nuclear weapons. Any threat to use nuclear weapons, at any time and under any circumstances, is extremely dangerous and totally unacceptable.

We call on this conference, as the first meeting of states parties to the TPNW did in their 2022 [consensus political statement](#) to declare that "...any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is a violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations," and to "condemn unequivocally any and all nuclear threats, whether they be explicit or implicit and irrespective of the circumstances."

**4. We also urge all NPT states-parties to constructively engage with the TPNW and if they have not already done so, to join the TPNW,** which is a complementary approach that reinforces the taboos against nuclear weapons, bolsters the NPT, and creates additional pathways to verifiably cap, reduce, and eventually eliminate nuclear arsenals.

**5. Call upon all members of the Conference on Disarmament to agree to a work plan that allows for negotiations** on a comprehensive fissile material cutoff treaty and on legally binding negative security assurances against nuclear attack for non-nuclear-weapon states. The June 14 decision to establish subsidiary bodies on these and other topics was a positive but small step forward that is not sufficient.

**6. Jointly reaffirm their support for the *de facto* moratorium on nuclear testing and call upon the remaining nine NPT hold-out states to take concrete action before the 2026 NPT Review Conference to ratify the CTBT.** The last such statement from the five NPT nuclear-armed states in support of the CTBT was issued in the form of UN Security Council Resolution 2310 from September 2016. In the meantime, NPT states parties should demand that the nuclear-armed states refrain from threats to resume nuclear testing and actively press them to agree on new technical measures to build confidence that any ongoing nuclear experiments at their former test sites are fully compliant with the zero-yield CTBT.

Work to advance these and other disarmament goals must continue well beyond this meeting and be pursued at the UN General Assembly, at the UN Security Council, and at the highest levels in bilateral and multilateral meetings, and beyond.

All nuclear weapons make us all less secure. Embarking on a safer path through disarmament diplomacy is imperative. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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