

The Prague Agenda – Challenges and Prospects

The Global Zero and Beyond: Theory, Politics and Regional Perspectives

5th September 2013

Czernin Palace, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague

Nik Hynek officially opened the conference on the Prague Agenda which has become an annual tradition. He pointed out the novel format of this year's event since two conferences were held on two days encompassing one section gathering experts and one more policy-making oriented. While he acknowledged that the entire Prague Agenda was driven by policy-making processes, the section entitled "The Global Zero and Beyond: Theory, Politics and Regional Perspectives" provided space for intellectual exchange concerning key concepts and dynamics. As a collaboration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Institute for International Relations, the Metropolitan University Prague and the Charles University Prague synergies were created for good intellectual output. The expert conference per se was held with the additional ambition to eventually publish an academic book on the issue at stake.

Panel I: Conceptual Foundations

Chair: Nik Hynek, Associate Professor, Metropolitan University Prague, Charles University in Prague

Linton Brooks, *Senior Adviser, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington*

Nina Tannenwald, *Senior Lecturer, Brown University, Providence*

Oliver Thränert, *Head of Think Tank at the Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zürich*

James M. Acton, *Senior Associate in the Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington*

LINTON BROOKS

Senior Adviser, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington

Linton Brooks noted the gloomy nature of his contribution at the beginning of the conference highlighting adverse results of the Prague Agenda. President Obama's speech in Prague in 2009 electrified the world, hardened the disarmament movement in the United States of America and resulted in his winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet, four years later, unintended, unanticipated and unwelcome consequences have become apparent. Mr. Brooks wanted to draw attention to these as a basis for further action.

Firstly, he explained the polarization in the United States political process. Historically, the country has experienced fundamental agreement on the basic elements of nuclear policy despite disagreement on details. However, at the time of the Prague speech, the country had been becoming more divided on almost all questions. Supporters of the Prague Agenda believe in the possibility of a better world should the agenda be realized. Moreover, they are convinced that even efforts toward this objective

alone would significantly improve the prospects for non-proliferation. In contrast, opponents warn that disarmament would make the world safe for conventional war. They question Russian engagement in disarmament negotiations and related activity on part of the international community more generally, fearing that President Obama might resort to dangerous strategies, such as unilaterally reducing force. This division complicates policy-making on nuclear issue in the United States, as was shown by the New START Treaty ratification process. While Mr. Brooks described the treaty itself as uncontroversial, he suggested that votes against it were a cautious measure not to imply consent with the Prague Agenda.

The second unintended consequence he criticized was the confusion in the United States and in the International Community as regards international goals. The prevalent focus on the West has led to a disregard for states' motivation to maintain or acquire nuclear weapons. The cases of Pakistan, Russia and Israel, however, illustrate why states might be unwilling to relinquish nuclear capabilities in view of the respective political and historical context. He cautioned that, given the current international order, the assumption that the absence of nuclear weapons increases security and creates peace might be a fallacy. Disarmament might have a destabilizing effect making the world safe for conventional war. Instead, it might be preferable to establish a sustained, effective international order within which states do not feel the need to retain nuclear force for security purposes. This would require universal efforts. In this respect, Mr. Brooks emphasized that President Obama did not envision an exclusive focus on the P5.

His final point of critique was the distortion of the research agenda outside the United States government. He noted that it was commonly agreed that nuclear arms are fundamentally different from other weapons. Yet, the overshadowing focus of many non-governmental analysts on solely abolition has had the unintended outcome of capturing intellectual space. Consequently, attention has been diverted from other pressing problems. For example, no answers exists to the questions what should be done in case of the failure of non-proliferation or how to create a right balance between peaceful use of nuclear power and the imperative of non-proliferation. While these issues would benefit from sustained thought, the most capable people for this task have been consumed by the idea of abolition, according to Mr. Brooks.

He concluded that it was too early to judge whether the Prague speech had been the first step in the elimination process of nuclear weapons or whether it had merely been an eloquent speech. Nevertheless, he stated his conviction that it was not too soon to recognize the unintended consequences of the 2009 Prague speech. He warned that if they were not considered, the result would be disappointing for both supporters and opponents of the Prague Agenda.

JAMES M. ACTON

Senior Associate in the Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington

James M. Acton pursued a more theoretical approach to transparency, deterrence and stability in a world without nuclear weapons. Within this framework, he focused on the sub-questions of how to prevent rearmament, and in particular how security threats interplay with incentives for reconstitution. He first argued that a world without nuclear weapons did not mean the absence of nuclear deterrence. This is due to the lasting possibility to rebuild nuclear arms hence creating a so-called “virtual” deterrence as a fact, not a choice. States, however, retain a choice on the period of time required for potential rearmament. Mr. Acton considered a spectrum of disarmed worlds which vary between a high salience and low salience worlds depending on the time needed to reconstitute nuclear weapons.

He mentioned as an unsolved yet interesting matter the relationship between the time period of rearmament and its probability.

As a second issue, Mr. Acton regarded the hypothetical situation in which states retained production facilities for nuclear weapons thus establishing a high salience world. He identified four conditions for a stable arrangement preventing rearmament races: low rearmament rates, basically equal rearmament rates, early detection of rearmament and survivability of rearmament capabilities. Thomas Schelling and Charles Glaser had made these arguments before. In his contribution, Mr. Acton pursued the analysis further deliberating states' preference for a high salience world. He argued that, firstly, states might maintain rearmament capabilities to hedge against cheating. Nonetheless, the ability to reconstitute weapons quickly would produce instability since it defies the need for low rearmament rates. As an alternative, the survivability of rearmament capabilities ensured by ballistic missile defenses or relocation inland might be advantageous. Secondly, nuclear weapons production capabilities might have the function to deter non-nuclear aggression.

Mr. Acton further discussed the relationship between transparency and stability. He deemed transparency to be clearly critical for the entire model of "virtual" deterrence. Three challenges persist in this regard comprising 1) technical possibilities for transparency in nuclear weapon production complexes, 2) the dual nature of transparency as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor depending on the context, and 3) the intricate relationship between transparency and survivability. In conclusion, he admitted that he did not know an answer to these questions and whether a high or low salience world would be preferable. However, he maintained that nuclear weapon states would likely insist on the former making stability more precarious.

NINA TANNENWALD

Senior Lecturer, Brown University, Providence

Nina Tannenwald contributed an analysis of normative strategies to the disarmament discussion. Referring to the title of the conference "Global Zero and Beyond", she pointed out that normative strategies more accurately concern the process toward "global zero" and thus the time period "before". Drawing on her one-year experience in the Department of State, she argued that the development of normative strategies were in the interest of the United States of America.

At the outset, Ms. Tannenwald defined normative strategies in disarmament as focusing on ideational factors, primarily changes in norms and doctrines rather than on eliminating physical weapons. She noted that while President Obama had covered nuclear reductions in his recent speech in Berlin, he had not referred to normative strategies. According to her, this is an unfortunate negligence given the grim prospects for reductions, also observed by Mr. Linton. Conversely, she suggested that normative strategies might lead to potential progress in disarmament and, therefore, ought to be pursued by states as well as civil society. She argued that, empirically, the normative approach had been more effective. It has been easier to ban the use of weapons rather than the physical objects themselves. In light of obstacles constraining the Obama administration and low interest in disarmament within other relevant states, the campaign raising humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons might fill in gaps in the meantime.

A virtual abolition scheme focusing on changes in norms and ideas could be a potential tool to render nuclear weapons increasingly marginal and eventually irrelevant. Various mechanisms could be employed for de-legitimizing and devaluing nuclear weapons. This approach has been followed in many studies and commissions with the 2010 Action Plan under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) being a case in point. Ms. Tannenwald also referred to Great Britain as

exemplary in devaluing nuclear arms trying to establish the most minimum nuclear system it can have without foregoing its status as a nuclear weapon state.

She further defined de-legitimization as the process of diminishing or destroying the acceptability, prestige and authority of a particular idea or object; in the case of nuclear weapons this entails their stigmatization as unacceptable arms. According to her, the most likely outcome of the disarmament process would be reducing the role of nuclear weapons while still considering them as highly valuable for an extremely small set of extreme contingencies.

Ms. Tannenwald outlined two sets of normative strategies in particular. Firstly and in her view perhaps most importantly, nuclear weapons can be de-legitimized by developing an increasingly robust prohibition of their use. She argued that the inhibition today could already be described as a relatively widespread taboo. Beyond the general normative prohibition, a no-first-use policy could be declared. She praised Scott Sagan's 2009 article on this issue, highlighting the underlying idea that more credible extended deterrence could be created by employing conventional deterrence to conventional threats. This policy would be beneficial for the larger non-proliferation context. De-legitimization would be hard to uphold when implying the usefulness of nuclear weapons for extended deterrence. The second strategy involves the campaign addressing humanitarian consequences. Its attempt to de-legitimize nuclear weapons might generate the necessary support for an eventual international convention banning nuclear weapons. Although Ms. Tannenwald expressed her doubts on the accomplishment of such an instrument, the progress towards it might be beneficial itself. It creates tension between the values assigned to nuclear weapons and the self-identity as supporters of international humanitarian norms claimed by nuclear weapon states such as the United Kingdom and France.

Ms. Tannenwald recognized the key question of balancing de-legitimization efforts on the one hand and the reliance on nuclear weapons as deterrent, on the other. However, she did not deem it a contradiction. Indeed, she referred to the NPT regime that assumed the P5 status possessing nuclear arms as transitional while simultaneously reducing the legitimacy of these weapons.

Furthermore, she contended that the United States should be interested in the de-legitimization process as it would render nuclear weapons less appealing for other states. It would strengthen the non-proliferation regime which cannot be enforced through coercion but needs actors to internalize the belief in the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons. The engagement of all affected states would be required to address a larger audience. Besides the United States, all states possessing nuclear arms or acting under a nuclear umbrella, as well as states with a latent interest in acquiring nuclear weapons should also be engaged. Ms. Tannenwald even envisioned a potential role for the Czech Republic concerning normative strategy. It could function as a guardian for the continuing progress on disarmament cultivating discourse as achieved in the Prague Agenda conference.

OLIVER THRÄNERT

Head of Think Tank at the Center for Security Studies (CSS), Zürich

Oliver Thränert began his contribution by presenting the historical framework of abolition efforts on nuclear weapons since 1945. While the main purpose of military establishments prior to the invention of nuclear arms had been victory in war, he pointed out that the situation had changed since then. Beginning in the 1950s, United States academics have developed the concept of arms control. Indeed, the United States and the Soviet Union shared a common interest in avoiding nuclear war. As a consequence, security perceptions of the opponent played a role in national security planning, for example in calculating the likelihood of first strikes.

Mr. Thränert identified strategic stability as the overall objective of arms control. Two schools of thought have advocated survivable second strike capabilities and nuclear abolition respectively as means for achieving strategic stability. However, according to him, the criteria for this task had become ever more complicated. The verification of dismantlement faces the challenge of hard to detect modern technology and fissile material. At the same time, access to nuclear technology has become easier.

Furthermore, he observed that an increasing number of states were developing an interest in the use of nuclear technology increasing the risk of proliferation. Not only are peaceful and non-peaceful programs hard to distinguish, but states with “virtual” arsenals, such as Japan, would have the capability to build nuclear arms on the basis of peaceful programs in a relatively short period of time. He further highlighted, that not all these states would be democracies showing the openness of Japan that is necessary for transparency and verification. Instead, these concepts would remain fragmented. Although verification technologies have improved, state action under the NPT and the implementation of the Additional Protocol of the International Atomic Energy Agency still indicate that intrusive programs are often rejected on the grounds of national sovereignty. Yet, in a world free of nuclear weapons even stricter verification systems would be required.

Additionally, finding an answer to the question what to do in the case of detection of non compliance would become more urgent. Mr. Thränert pointed to the case of North Korea as an example for the international community’s failure to prevent nuclear proliferation. Consequently, he suggested that quick nuclear arms races could occur leading to a first strike premium. The overall aim of strategic stability would be undermined in light of possible rearmament. He claimed that nuclear war could become more not less likely.

For this reason, he considered various responses for establishing strategic stability in a world without nuclear weapons. In particular, he focused on missile defenses as a possible, although not comprehensive measure, since they could inter alia be used to hedge against the breakout of hostile states. The advantage of the relevant systems would be their defensive nature. He claimed that missile defenses would result in increased crisis stability. Moreover, he regarded them as an important precondition for the engagement of current nuclear weapon states in further reduction efforts ultimately leading to a world without nuclear arms.

Nevertheless, Mr. Thränert acknowledged that at this point of time reductions were inhibited rather than facilitated by United States’ missile defenses, especially on part of Russia and China. He, therefore, proposed to establish missile defenses shared by more states possessing nuclear weapons. While this idea is illusive at the moment, he pronounced his hopes for improving step-by-step US-NATO-Russia confidence building as regards missile defenses. He also suggested that the establishment of additional missile defenses could be coordinated with nuclear disarmament steps.

In conclusion, he described it as a challenge of giant proportions that is, however, worthwhile to think through further. He admitted that missile defenses could not solve the multiple problems of organizing strategic stability in a world without nuclear weapons and they could not prevent conventional wars. Yet, according to him, they would establish some stability in a world free of nuclear weapons.

Open debate

Following a brief summary of the central arguments brought forward by the speakers, Mr. Hynek opened the floor for discussions.

To begin with, **Camille Grand** related Mr. Acton’s analysis to a debate on nuclear disarmament in the 1990s. During these discussions, only Japan showed interest in the concept of “virtual nuclear arsenals”. He enquired whether Mr. Acton’s concept of “virtual“ deterrence would not create further

instability by blurring lines and opening the way for further proliferation. **Mr. Acton** responded by clarifying that he was neither advocating nor arguing against “virtual” nuclear weapons. He merely intended to define the conditions for “virtual” deterrence. Indeed, he highlighted that he did not believe a “global zero” can be achieved, inter alia due to the unpromising prospects for United States’ ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

The second question from the audience asked whether de-legitimization of nuclear weapons could be achieved on a global scale since nuclear arms were considered an attractive deterrence measure by certain states. **Ms. Tannenwald** explained that as long as nuclear deterrence was an accepted response to conventional threats, nuclear weapons would likely continue to be seen as a necessary protection from the United States. Yet she suggested that drawing on religious values, as done in the human rights discourse, could strengthen norms against nuclear weapons. She referred to the Iranian fatwā as one example that would signal the contribution of values to the discourse.

Nikolai Sokov voiced his concern over crisis stability, preventive rearmament and peacetime deployment of nuclear weapons in relation to Mr. Acton’s statement on the timeline of crises and rearmament. Moreover, he commented that, albeit obvious, one would need to take the size of affected countries into account in the analysis of reconstitution probabilities and timescale. He similarly pointed out that the utility of nuclear weapons differed among the various states. He asked which international structure would be necessary to enable the objective. **Mr. Acton** suggested that although a crisis might not happen overnight, states would, nonetheless, worry and accordingly retain fast rearmament capabilities. He referred to Israel as an example. If the state was afraid of a large scale conventional attack, it would be unlikely to relinquish its nuclear weapons. In the longer term, however, he envisioned lower reconstitution rates. **Mr. Sokov** responded that it was problematic to observe the situation in part since almost any state would want to reconstitute. For this reason, he proposed to address traditional stability in crises instead.

Alyn Ware wanted to know how Ms. Tannenwald saw the process of especially involving nuclear weapon states in delegitimizing nuclear arms and whether there would be scope for the respective steps in the second Obama administration. He further questioned whether the de-legitimization discourse was sufficient in connection with the Iranian situation. More generally he was wondering which terms, conditions and approaches were required to move away from nuclear weapons in the political environment of the 21st century. **Ms. Tannenwald** acknowledged the difficulties in the P5 conduct as regards obligations under the NPT Action Plan, since it implied that the process was limited to this “privileged club”. Yet, she emphasized that, in her view, non-nuclear weapons states had an important role to play as well.

Bernd W. Kubbig recommended that Ms. Tannenwald’s and Mr. Brooks strategies should be designed in a supplementary and complementary manner upon which the international community should act. He considered normative strategy to be an implicit assumption in Mr. Brook’s argumentation. **Ms. Tannenwald** agreed that de-legitimization could be arranged in the political context needed for physical reductions. Since disagreement is likely to continue, implementing reductions would probably take a long time. However, she noted that changes not requiring formal approval, by for example the United States Congress, would be more likely to succeed.

Mr. Kubbig suggested that “virtual” deterrence might look different in the future. He questioned whether the same model can be used for real and emerging nuclear powers, especially whether it can be applied to the Middle East and Iran more specifically. **Mr. Acton** responded by contradicting two myths pertaining to the concept of “virtual” nuclear deterrence. Firstly, states may choose how long

reconstitution takes, but not whether it was possible. Secondly, he emphasized that “virtual” deterrence already existed today among even nuclear weapon states as they have the possibility to extend the infrastructure and their arsenals if geopolitical circumstances deteriorate. With respect to the Iranian case, he did not advocate nuclear weapons as a tool for crisis stability but suggested missile defenses instead.

Mr. Kubbig claimed that nuclear and conventional weapons had evolved in destructiveness as well as potency and that, as a result, nuclear weapons had lost some of their unique characteristics. **Mr. Thränert** strongly disagreed with the assumption that nuclear and conventional weapons were increasingly alike, despite the destructiveness of the latter. He stressed that nuclear arms were different in devastation and would remain so in the foreseeable future. **Mr. Brooks** also firmly denied any benefit of blurring lines between nuclear and conventional weapons. He pointed to their respective status in the deterrence context in Asia and Europe. Deterrence appears only possible in its extended form by United States’ nuclear weapons as opposed to local conventional arms. **Mr. Acton** equally made known his conviction in the existence of a big difference between nuclear and conventional weapons.

Another question enquired further information on the relationship between missile defenses and nuclear deterrence. In response, **Mr. Thränert** asserted that a world with low numbers of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence would be rendered instable when only one of two sides holds an effective missile defense system. He further argued that even if states would forego nuclear arms peaceful use of nuclear power was likely to persist. For this reason, missile defense would continue to play an important role.

Jan Ruzicka concluded the question round with his summary of the speeches and discussion. He remarked that the objective of a global zero would not be achieved and problems would remain caught up in a world of sovereign states. He, therefore, wanted to know from the speakers whether they considered a different form of international organization as more forthcoming. In response, **Mr. Brooks** voiced his skepticism about a world government. **Ms. Tannenwald** stated that she was agnostic about whether a global zero or minimum numbers of nuclear weapons were required. Yet, she considered the process to achieving this goal as important. **Mr. Acton** suggested that a discriminate regime between non-nuclear and nuclear weapon states might be unsustainable. Nevertheless, he was not in favor of disarmament for its own sake. Lastly, he conceded that it was unknown whether a world without nuclear weapons would indeed be safe, but he regarded it as an important question to get an answer to. As a representative from Switzerland, **Mr. Thränert** pointed to the state’s general rejection of foreign rule which is why a world government would be greatly debated.