

The Prague Agenda – Challenges and Prospects

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

6th September 2013

Czernin Palace, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague

Jiří Schneider, *First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic* officially opened the second day of the Prague Agenda conference. Holding the event for the third time following president Obama's speech in Prague in 2009, he considered it to be a forum for continuing important debates. However, while the basic question has remained the same he emphasized that the surrounding circumstances have changed. Whereas the 2009 speech was delivered in the aftermath of a North Korean missile launch, the chemical portfolio has become increasingly important today in light of the Syrian situation. He described the Prague speech as a good point of reference for all elements of the Prague Agenda, which should be considered as a whole. The venue and purpose of this conference implied the importance of the overall concept.

Prior to the first panel, **Camille Grand**, *Director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* summarized the outcome of a closed workshop held on the previous day. The participants had agreed that the issue of strategic weapons was currently in a stalemate. As a response, four options had been identified comprising negotiations, unilateral withdrawal, and modernization of the existing stockpile as well as no specific agreement at all in the absence of a threat of war. Mr. Grand considered the current situation of nuclear weapons to be a dynamic issue driven by domestic factors in NATO countries and Russia as well as by developments in Asia and the Middle East. Certain conditions for the engagement on strategic weapons had been suggested by the participants. These include, firstly, transparency on primarily bilateral basis rather than in public and, secondly, more modest measures which might be more likely to build confidence and generate progress. The NATO-Russia Council had been suggested as a potential forum for the process. Moreover, there was a significant agreement that a better understanding on cross-expectations between NATO and Russia would be required. Nevertheless, relations are complicated by hostility towards broader issues on the global disarmament agenda, Russian preconditions concerning missile defense for any engagement and the nature of the bilateral relationship with respect to external factors such as Syria. The participants had felt that there was a need and opportunity of a debate on NATO policy in the mid- to long-term, especially with respect to extended deterrence, as the situation was likely to evolve. Another question that arose from the debate was whether redeployment would be possible following nuclear weapons removal from Europe - if only constrained by budgetary reasoning. It was agreed that the debate was worthwhile to be continued on an academic and governmental level. Although little progress was foreseen in the short term, fresh ideas might at least emerge.

Panel I: Beyond the New START: The Prague Agenda after Berlin

Chair: Veronika Kuchyňová Šmigolová, Nuclear Suppliers Group Chair

Rose Gottemoeller, *Acting Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, USA*

Eugene Miasnikov, *Director of the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow*

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

Andreas Persbo, *Executive Director of the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), London*

Veronika Kuchyňová Šmigolová commenced the first panel with the observation that developments had not been very sympathetic to the non-proliferation agenda. She, nonetheless, evaluated the issue as crucial given the widely agreed need to prevent nuclear proliferation generally and in a terrorist context specifically. Moreover, weapons of mass destruction other than nuclear arms have become more widely discussed and, unfortunately, used thus adding another issue to the topic.

ROSE GOTTEMOELLER

Acting Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, USA

Rose Gottemoeller remarked that “a lot of water has gone under the Charles Bridge” since her last visit to Prague during which President Obama and President Medvedev signed the New START Treaty in 2010. Describing the times we live in as “interesting” she acknowledged the negative connotation this word usually bears. However, she declared that she did not accept the inevitability of uncertainty and danger. Instead, she affirmed her belief that challenges ahead could be faced and overcome. This had also been President Obama’s intention when referring to the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. Holding his speech in Prague in 2009, President Obama was following the path of all his predecessors in the nuclear age. From Ms. Gottemoeller’s experience, actors inside and outside the governments of the Soviet Union and Russian Federation have been equally engaged in stemming the nuclear threat and preventing nuclear war.

New and different threats have emerged, while, according to her, the likelihood of nuclear exchange had diminished through decades of cooperative, but also challenging disarmament work. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that dangers, for example the threat posed by the spread of nuclear technologies and materials, persisted. Non-state actors and terrorists could acquire nuclear arms leaving the nuclear “Sword of Damocles” hanging over us. She suggested that this threat could be mitigated by strengthening the non-proliferation regime. Yet, in his 2009 speech President Obama had already predicted the lengthy process required to achieve concerted reductions. She explained that success would depend on maintaining nuclear stability while simultaneously pursuing responsible reductions through various means.

While some measures are taken front and center on the world stage, such as the New START Treaty others are implemented quietly behind the scenes. Ms. Gottemoeller informed the audience that these quiet efforts were progressing and providing for mutual predictability and stability on the nuclear front. Nevertheless, further actions are required as the United States and the Russian Federation still possess over ninety percent of the nuclear weapons in the world.

In the 2013 speech in Berlin, President Obama laid out the next steps in the Prague Agenda. In her following remarks, Ms. Gottemoeller focused on the element of nuclear reductions. She quoted President Obama who had announced in Berlin that “we can ensure the security of America and our allies, and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent, while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third.” He had further stated that bold steps to reduce non-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe would be sought. This would require not only the United States and Russian engagement but consultations with NATO and other allies as well.

Ms. Gottemoeller identified reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategies as another important issue. President Obama’s new nuclear employment guidance envisions the restriction of nuclear weapons deployment to extreme circumstances in order to defend the vital interests of the United States and its allies. Additionally, it instructs that non-nuclear capabilities should be strengthened and the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks reduced. This

development is based on the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review stating that it is in the interest of the United States and all other countries that nuclear weapons would never be used again.

Although successes had been achieved together with Russia in the Cold War and afterwards contributing to a safer world, Ms. Gottemoeller acknowledged the slow progress of the efforts taken. She predicted that when the New START Treaty would be fully implemented in 2018, the lowest levels of deployed strategic nuclear warheads would be attained since the 1950s. Due to mutual interest in political, security and budgetary terms, she declared that further steps would have to be taken.

She concluded with a quote by President Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz commenting on how and why the United States should conduct negotiations. According to him, the problems we face are dealt with more intelligently when considered as "expressions of mankind's basic dilemma". He affirmed that the United States was prepared to "try to solve the problems of our time —to overcome chaos, deprivation, and the heightened dangers of an era in which ideas and cultures too often tend to clash and technologies threaten to outpace our institutions of control." Ms. Gottemoeller asserted that the words remained true today and could serve as guidance.

EUGENE MIASNIKOV

Director of the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow

Eugene Miasnikov emphasized that working for a non-governmental organization his contribution to the conference did not represent the Russian government's position. Instead he offered his understanding of the Russian attitude and an assessment of the current situation considering what was realistic to be achieved. Initially, he explained that from the Russian perspective a world without nuclear weapons did not equal the current world minus nuclear weapons. Nuclear reductions need to be conducted in a manner not rendering the world less stable at the same time. From the Russian point of view, strategic stability is rather regarded as being determined by a multitude of factors, ballistic missile defenses being one of them.

Mr. Miasnikov illustrated important aspects of the New START Treaty using a graph that showed a forecast of strategic systems in the case that the United States and Russia adhere to the international instrument. He acknowledged that the numbers might appear unfamiliar at the first glance since, unlike the graphs, dynamics are usually demonstrated by reference to the numbers of deployed warheads not delivery systems. He considered the numbers of deployed warheads as misleading inter alia due to the fact that changes in numbers of warheads had empirically not necessarily indicated irreversible reductions whereas numbers for delivery systems had been more stable. Furthermore, a comparison of United States and Russian numbers would show a rough parity of warheads but not delivery systems. According to him, this explained the Russian concern over the survivability of its arsenal. He continued with more detailed comments on the graphs by listing various measures intended and implemented by the United States and Russia as well as the states' respective capabilities.

Mr. Miasnikov further elaborated the prospects for further reductions. Recently in Berlin, President Obama had made a proposal to reduce strategic weapons by up to one-third. However, public statements had been unclear about his meaning, for instance whether warheads as well as launchers were contemplated. Although the implementation of the New START Treaty as regards delivery systems has thus far not been clarified, he suggested that if the United States would offer to reduce launchers Russia might have an incentive to open the next round of negotiations on cuts. He advised that progress on reductions would likely be inhibited unless three major issues, namely non-strategic nuclear weapons, ballistic missile defenses and strategic conventional arms, were appropriately addressed. If the latter two were advanced, Russia might also reconsider its attitude on non-strategic nuclear weapons. This might serve as a prerequisite on discussing transparency.

Russia has positively accelerated the implementation of START as it has fulfilled some of its obligations. The reduction of its non-deployed strategic nuclear weapons remains to be done. He explained that accelerated implementation might call for some additional course not covered in budgetary plans thus creating financial burdens for the US and Russia. Indeed, he argued that Russia had not been rushed to phase out its strategic systems for financial reasons.

He concluded by stating that the New START Treaty was dangerous in so far as it was extremely flexible on elimination options. It leaves the choice of elimination procedures and their reversibility to the parties. Moreover, states might be tempted to simplify them when time is short for implementation. Consequently, reductions might prove to be only formal in nature. Instead of being an instrument for building confidence, accelerated implementation may have the entirely opposite effect.

JAMES M. ACTON

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

James M. Acton considered the necessary next steps for the Prague Agenda. Although reductions on part of Russia are a central component, he announced at the outset that his speech would not focus on this aspect alone. Global actions are required to be more transformative, involving actors beyond the United States and Russia. His intention was to regard the bigger picture to identify the relevant determinant.

Mr. Acton proposed thinking about deterrence relationships between states as being situated within two triangles: the United States of America, Russia and China on the one hand and India, Pakistan and China on the other. Although these complexes are not operating in isolation, the former stood at the center of his analysis. He argued that according to the official Russian position the next round of arms control should be multilateral. Nevertheless, he described the prospects for a new arms control treaty between the United States and Russia as being poor, particularly in the short term, despite its mutually beneficial nature. The persisting asymmetry between the states' objectives was one reason for the stalemate. Whereas the United States focus primarily on tactical and strategic nuclear weapons, Russia is mainly concerned by the United States' conventional weapons, for example ballistic missile defenses. He admitted that "in more cynical moments" he would start to believe that Russia was not serious about the making progress on the arms control treaty. He suggested that the absence of a Russian official representation at the present conference offered such an indication.

Mr. Acton proposed that if one failed to succeed, one should try again deploying an alternative. He stated he had thus far not seen any sign of success in cooperation. Yet, he acknowledged that the Russian fear of conventional attacks was very real and should be dealt with. As a response, Russia has shown interest in developing systems similar to the ones it had criticized in the United States. He remarked that this might offer opportunities for cooperative confidence building that is reciprocal and thus easier seen as mutual beneficial. Technical studies, for example, might improve understanding. Moreover, he argued that although a treaty was not seen as a bad idea, more informal confidence building measures with a stabilizing effect appeared more feasible. These might also have a beneficial impact on a treaty making process.

Mr. Acton highlighted parallels between the Russian and Chinese nuclear position. China has often been criticized for being very opaque over its nuclear posture. However, its opaqueness is due to its concern, similar to Russia's, that increasing transparency decreases the survivability of nuclear capabilities. At the same time, the United States regards the strategic modernization in China as not only following defensive aims but potentially changing the status quo in Asia thus interfering with its deterrence commitments in the region. He explained that he did not think we could ignore the dynamics between United States and China as in the long run they were probably going to be as important for the path to global zero as the current relations between the United States and Russia. Yet, he warned that it would not be tenable to simply call for China to join the negotiation process. He described the P5 dialogue as a first indication for some progress. It still remains more difficult in the context of China compared to Russia, according to him. Ultimately not only dialogue but also practical

measures would be needed. While the process involving the United States and Russia is critical, it alone is not sufficient. He further emphasized that the conventional strategic dimension should not be ignored. Personally, he stated his belief in avenues for cooperation to advance progress.

ANDREAS PERSBO

Executive Director of the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), London

Andreas Persbo described President Obama's speech in Prague in 2009 as an important initiation for thoughts and actions on a world without nuclear weapons. Although participating in a session on practical steps in the Prague Agenda, he confessed his uncertainty whether this focus was more important given the need for a vision. The President's vision in the Prague speech had been criticized for promoting ambitious, yet unachievable idealistic goals. While not going as far as describing the speech as hollow, Mr. Persbo acknowledged that this condemnation might result from idealistic goals without continuation. The Berlin speech in 2013, however, demonstrated that President Obama's vision has essentially remained unchanged. He considered nuclear weapons to be the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War and considered that as long as they existed the world would not be safe.

Mr. Persbo described the Prague speech with its ambitious and enthusiastic nature as characteristic for the first administrative term of President Obama. In contrast, the Berlin speech bears the marks of four years recognizing that some goals are easier to achieve than others.

One result of the Prague Agenda has been the Nuclear Security Summit comprising governments, non-governmental organizations and the International Atomic Energy Agency working on making nuclear material more secure. Mr. Persbo asserted that nuclear security was here to stay. Although he acknowledged that it would take many more years to implement the regime fully, the process was accelerating. Furthermore, the New START Treaty has readopted verification as an issue and the United States and Russia are on track to cut nuclear weapons to the lowest level. Nevertheless, he identified two principles repeated in the Berlin speech which remain to be achieved: a fissile material cut-off treaty and a comprehensive test ban treaty. He observed that not only had there been a deadlock for more than a decade, but they are indeed more muted today than at the time of the Prague speech. According to him, they have become the victim of political expediency. Indeed, one might regard them as a sign of the limitation of the President's power and the boundaries of the United States' influence. In light of the difficulties facing the ratification of the CTBT, Mr. Persbo suggested that a provisional entry into force should be considered one day.

He identified the unilateral reduction by one-third on part of the United States and bold reductions of tactical weapons by the United States and Russia in Europe as the two central elements of developments. He agreed that there appeared to be little appetite for these measures by the latter state. According to him, marginal utility of weapons in the United States and Russia was almost zero. He saw this as optimistic since if nuclear weapons had more value there would be no incentive to eliminate them. He predicted a downward trend in numbers until stockpiles had reached an optimal level. At that point little movement would be expected without fundamental change in value assigned to them.

Mr. Persbo concluded that although the combined Berlin - Prague agenda has shown some promise, it has been tempered by reality. He described President Obama's nuclear policy as similar to a good wine, having matured without losing vision and taste.

Open debate

Hans Kristensen started the round of questions by enquiring the differences between the Prague and Berlin speech. He wanted to know to what extent bold reductions were realistic in non-strategic nuclear weapons, and what the hopes and aspirations were in Russia. In this respect, he asked whether transparency and confidence building measures were an aspiration in the far future or realistic. In her response, **Ms. Gottemoeller** emphasized that the Berlin speech was not limited to unilateral undertakings by the United States but entailed further negotiated actions along with Russia. She

explained that all three elements of the New START Treaty are deliberated, not only deployed warheads. She admitted that at the time, no one had understood the implications and complexity of bold reductions of non-strategic nuclear weapons with respect to NATO and other allies of the United States. Boldness, therefore, not only characterizes the nature of the reductions but also the intellectual challenges for appropriately structuring future actions.

Bernd Kubbig asked Ms. Gottemoeller how the current East-West situation could be described and at what point the relations went astray? Using the metaphor of darkness as pertaining to the Cold War, he wondered whether circumstances during that period of time had been facilitating arms control treaties as opposed to today's world in grey. **Ms. Gottemoeller** asserted that the current East-West situation was not precarious but various. While differences existed between the states, for example with respect to Syria, cooperation and positive developments can be seen at the quiet, pragmatic front where they had not been predicted before.

Linton Brooks remarked with respect to Mr. Kubbig's question that negotiations did not appear easier during the Cold War.

Alyn Ware's question concerned the implementation of the United States Nuclear Posture Review and whether this entailed doctrinal changes to the role of nuclear weapons in the United States policy. **Ms. Gottemoeller** confirmed that the implementation had begun to develop in United States doctrine outlining the relevant process.

One person in the audience was interested in Mr. Acton's opinion on the role of Great Britain and France in the process. **Mr. Acton** clarified he did not intend to imply using the triangle model that the United Kingdom and France had no responsibilities in nuclear weapon issues. However, in the short to medium-term the process would not primarily depend on those states, and they are not Russia's predominant concern. At the moment, negotiations and discussions pertain to the P5 level and are far away from multilateral discussions. Yet, good faith could be promoted in the case of the UK and France adopting New START Treaty measures on a voluntary basis.

Another person enquired whether President Obama was going to personally participate in the upcoming United Nations high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in New York and confirm the Prague Agenda. **Ms. Gottemoeller** revealed that she was going to represent the United States at the high level meeting in New York.

Mr. Sokov asked Ms. Gottemoeller whether the Senate would allow discussions on conventional assets in the ratification of the New START Treaty. **Ms. Gottemoeller** stressed that the executive determined United States national security interests initiating the ratification process involving Capitol Hill. She, therefore, denied that the Senate shaped security interests.

Mr. Miasnikov stated that discussions among the United States and Russia covered a wide range of conventional systems in strategic stability talks. He emphasized that two aspects should be taken into account. According to him, Russia believed in the survivability of strategic conventional systems against conventional strikes assuming that some of them might have counterforce capabilities. While previous START agreements had taken such systems into account, he observed a trend to taken out of counting and inspection regimes.

The last question referred to past initiatives for the creation of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East. Respective efforts had been part of the action plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference and implementation is hoped for in the near future. The current situation in the Middle East complicates efforts but they are not generally pessimistic. Under the New START Treaty it might be necessary to clarify the categories of weapons that fall under the constraint regime of the treaty.

Ms. Šmigolová came to the conclusion that a lot of work remained to be done and that the future of the conference was, therefore, secured.