

Session 8: Evaluating the 2010 NPT Review Conference

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Summary

Panel moderator Sharon Squassoni, Director of the Proliferation Prevention Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, opened the discussion by noting the widespread assessment of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference as a success, particularly since the conference was able to balance the priorities of a variety of different state actors and produce a consensus document.

The final document included action items in each of the treaty's three pillars (disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy) that were lauded by the panelists as important achievements. Scott Davis, Deputy Director of the Office of Multilateral Nuclear and Security Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, highlighted the conference's identification of the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons as the primary objective of disarmament and the call on the P-5 nuclear weapons states to engage in a plan of action for disarmament. Hossam Eldeen Aly, Counselor on Disarmament and International Security at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called attention to the importance placed on encouraging additional state parties to conclude additional protocols and strengthening the capacity of the IAEA. Advocation for the resolution of cases of noncompliance with the NPT and for a substantive conference on the establishment of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East by 2012 were other significant actions mandated by the consensus document.

There were also some disappointing aspects of the conference. Abe Nobuyasu, Director of the Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-proliferation at the Japan Institute

of International Affairs, noted the rather weak stance on non-proliferation taken in the conference's final document; while the additional protocol was mentioned, there was not strong pressure to sign and implement these agreements. Similarly, the language on nuclear disarmament could have been more meaningful; many of the action items were "cushioned in careful expressions," which could be read as not placing strong obligations on the nuclear weapons states. Mr. Davis appreciated the debate regarding potential abuses of the NPT's withdrawal provision but was dissatisfied with the lack of statement about this issue in the final document. Many of these weaknesses were largely viewed as byproducts of the review conference's consensus rule, which makes the production of strong, universally supported statements virtually impossible. In sum, the panel considered the conference a modest success that provided, as Mr. Aly described, "a solid basis to bring about the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world, should the international community have the patience to move collectively down that road."

Looking ahead to the next NPT review conference, Peter Crail, a Non-proliferation Analyst at the Arms Control Association explained that replicating the positive atmospherics in 2015 that characterized the 2010 meeting will hinge on a variety of factors, including implementation of many of the disarmament- and non-proliferation-focused action items from 2010; a successful regional conference on establishing a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East; and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

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