

# 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

7 December 2021

Original: English

---

New York, 4–28 January 2022

## Strategic risk reduction

### Working paper submitted by China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America

#### Preamble

The five Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty nuclear-weapon States, or “P5”, recognize their responsibility to work collaboratively to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict. This includes reducing the risk of armed conflict between nuclear powers and promoting strategic stability and predictability. In an increasingly complicated security environment, considering the topic of strategic risk reduction provides an opportunity to increase mutual understanding through dialogue and examine the options for additional practical measures that could reduce the likelihood of nuclear weapons use. This is complementary to the Treaty’s overarching goals and is consistent with the nuclear-weapon States’ long-term efforts towards disarmament and the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all.

#### Elements of strategic risk reduction

In the context of the strategic sphere and nuclear domain, risk reduction is fundamentally about reducing the risk of nuclear use and armed conflict involving States that possess nuclear weapons. It encompasses efforts to prevent or resolve conflicts and crises that might result from misinterpretations of a potential adversary’s policies, actions and intentions or through the failure to foresee the consequences of one’s own steps. It includes refraining from intentionally unsafe, hazardous or dangerous actions and making use of suitable instruments to rapidly resolve unintended incidents should they arise. It is also concerned with ensuring that States are aware of the risk of nuclear weapons use that could emanate from any armed conflict involving States that possess nuclear weapons, and that actions are taken to prevent these from occurring. Accordingly, the nuclear-weapon States share the desire to limit the risks that nuclear weapons could be used based on or as a result of incorrect assumptions, by reducing the potential for misperception, miscommunication and miscalculation. As a basis for these efforts, three major elements have been identified:



- **Building confidence and predictability through dialogue.** There is a continued need for a constructive relationship between States on strategic and nuclear issues. The nuclear-weapon States recall the need to engage in multilateral and bilateral dialogue among nuclear powers on threat perception and risk reduction. This aims to increase understanding of each other's concerns and deepen trust among the nuclear-weapon States. It can help to identify, develop and implement credible confidence-building measures and other mutually acceptable politico-military arrangements, as well as identifying, where applicable and appropriate, avenues for eventual arms control agreements.
- **Increasing clarity, communication and understanding.** Ambiguity is inherent in some strategies of nuclear deterrence, often with the aim of creating uncertainty in a potential adversary's decision-making. Simultaneously, transparency, predictability and dialogue are necessary to prevent or reduce the risk of miscalculation and misperception, and thus strengthen stability. Misunderstandings about military capability developments, doctrines, and the intentions underlying specific military activities are a common risk in security relations. Yet, they can be mitigated through formalized communication and dialogue in both multilateral and bilateral forums involving relevant diplomatic and military officials. For frank and sensitive exchanges on specific flashpoints and negotiated bilateral measures, bilateral channels provide clarity and understanding, as well as sharing information confidentially as needed.
- **Effective crisis prevention and crisis management tools.** To facilitate constructive and stable relations and to reduce the likelihood of military conflict and escalation, mechanisms and tools are needed that increase time for decision-making and dispute resolution that reduce the risk of crises. To this end, focus is required on crisis prevention mechanisms, including communication tools and protocols that can allow States to clarify the intent of other parties and enact preventive measures to avoid an incident or its escalation into a crisis. It is also important to have established procedures that drive diplomatic solutions to resolve a crisis, if one nevertheless erupts.

These elements are reinforced by concepts of safety and security of nuclear weapons and special nuclear material, which are essential to sustaining a credible and effective deterrent, and complement these risk reduction measures.

### **Strategic risk reduction and the P5 Process**

Multiple formal and informal risk reduction measures, focused around building confidence, increasing understanding and comprehension, deepening trust and retaining effective crisis prevention and management tools have been created and utilized among the nuclear-weapon States. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Formal risk reduction agreements and arrangements.** Some bilateral risk reduction agreements and arrangements already exist among nuclear-weapon States (such as hotlines and military to military channels, ballistic missile launch notification agreements and arrangements, etc.). They help to provide a robust framework to build confidence and ensure engagement, as well as to introduce and formalize crisis prevention tools. The nuclear-weapon States continue to recognize the value of crisis prevention and management mechanisms and the importance of their full implementation aimed at increasing predictability and transparency to avoid misinterpretation. The nuclear-weapon States intend to continue to engage in them, as well as pursue new opportunities.
- **Regular bilateral talks on strategic stability issues.** The nuclear-weapon States continue to recognize the value of bilateral discussions on strategic

stability, arms control and risk reduction as a way of increasing understanding of threat perceptions and relevant policies, identifying mutual security concerns and challenges, and discussing ways to resolve these through new agreements, arrangements and deepened relationships on these issues.

- **Continuation of the P5 Process.** The P5 Process represents a framework for continued P5 collective engagement and discussion, provides the opportunity to increase collective confidence, understanding and comprehension and supports collaborative endeavours instrumental to reducing risks.
- **Production of the P5 Glossary.** The process of developing the P5 Glossary was intended to increase mutual understanding and confidence among the P5 and facilitate discussions among the nuclear-weapon States and with non-nuclear-weapon States.
- **Nuclear-weapon States' discussion on doctrines and policies.** The introduction of a structured P5 Process discussion on nuclear doctrines and policies allows for the nuclear-weapon States to gather and present their nuclear doctrines and policies, helping to highlight the need for greater understanding and comprehension, as well as making nuclear-weapon States' policies clearer to others.
- **Political statements promoting restraint and reassurance.** The nuclear-weapon States seek to increase trust and identify common ground through political messaging. This may occur unilaterally, bilaterally or through group statements. This includes statements related to the recognition of risk and commitments to collective restraint.
- **De-targeting of nuclear weapons.** The nuclear-weapon States do not target their nuclear weapons at each other or any other State's territory and will continue to support this important step towards risk reduction.
- **Establishment and maintenance of bilateral crisis communication channels.** The nuclear-weapon States continue to recognize robust crisis communication mechanisms as a key element of effective crisis prevention and crisis management.

### **Strategic risk reduction and non-nuclear-weapon States and non-governmental organizations**

The nuclear-weapon States alone should not be the sole contributors to risk reduction. Non-nuclear-weapon States can, and should, contribute to this effort. Building a more secure environment is a collective responsibility. In this spirit, the nuclear-weapon States welcome the engagement of non-nuclear-weapon States in the ongoing global security discussion and note their continued openness to dialogue. The current work in these many different initiatives can help identify ways in which risks could be reduced, strategic stability increased, and allows for the sharing of best practices.

The nuclear-weapon States also support the useful contribution of non-governmental organizations and think tanks, and welcome the work conducted by these groups on risk reduction matters.

### **The future of strategic risk reduction and the P5 Process**

As we enter into the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon States recommit to taking appropriate measures to reduce strategic risks and promote strategic stability. The nuclear-weapon States consider this paper an important step in communicating their thinking on strategic risk reduction and

demonstrating their continued commitment. At the P5 2020 London and 2021 Paris Conferences, nuclear-weapon States committed to continue structured efforts to exchange views on doctrines and risk reduction measures beyond the upcoming Review Conference, through a working group on nuclear doctrines and policies and strategic risk reduction, as separate but related topics, attended by relevant military and diplomatic experts. As regards strategic risk reduction, the nuclear-weapon States will share ideas and best practices, as well as explore opportunities for practical measures. The nuclear-weapon States also remain open to deepening the discussions among themselves and with others and will seek to continue to engage on this topic in the future.

---