

## I. Bilateral and multilateral nuclear arms control involving China, Russia and the United States

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The process of nuclear arms control underwent both treaty extension and reconfigured engagement in 2021. At the start of the year, Russia and the United States agreed to an extension of the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) for another five years, during which they would observe the limits and provisions set out in the treaty.<sup>1</sup> They also agreed to further engage through a bilateral strategic stability dialogue, rather than traditional arms control negotiations. The US government also issued statements indicating China's willingness to participate in bilateral strategic stability talks, albeit at a different level from those with Russia. This section covers these developments and analyses the prospects for multilateral strategic stability dialogues.

### **Russia–USA New START**

#### *Extension of the treaty*

In January 2021, Russia and the USA agreed to extend their obligations under New START for another five years, until 5 February 2026.<sup>2</sup> This extension maintains the central provisions and limits of the treaty, which entered into force on 5 February 2011. It restricts Russia and the USA each to 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments; 1550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments; and 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments.<sup>3</sup> The two sides met these limits by 5 February 2018.

Since the entry of New START into force, the two parties have conducted 328 on-site inspections, exchanged more than 23 100 notifications, held 19 meetings of the Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC) and issued 42 biannual data exchanges on strategic offensive arms subject to the treaty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a summary and other details of New START see annex A, section III, in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Blinken, A. J., 'On the extension of the New START treaty with the Russian Federation', US Department of State, 3 Feb. 2021; and State Duma, Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 'The State Duma adopted the President's bill on ratification of the agreement on extension of the New START treaty', 27 Jan. 2021.

<sup>3</sup> New START (note 1).

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State, 'New START treaty', Updated 3 Mar. 2022.

**Table 11.1.** Russian and United States aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms under New START, as of 5 February 2011 and 1 September 2021

Category	Treaty limit <sup>a</sup>	Russia			United States		
		Feb. 2011	Sep. 2021	Change	Feb. 2011	Sep. 2021	Change
Deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers	700	521	527	+6	882	665	-217
Warheads on deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers <sup>b</sup>	1 550	1 537	1 458	-79	1 800	1 389	-411
Warheads on deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers <sup>b</sup>	800	865	742	-123	1 124	800	-324

ICBM = intercontinental ballistic missile; SLBM = submarine-launched ballistic missile.

<sup>a</sup> The treaty entered into force on 5 February 2011. The treaty limits had to be reached by 5 February 2018.

<sup>b</sup> Each heavy bomber, whether equipped with cruise missiles or gravity bombs, is counted as carrying only one warhead, even though the aircraft can carry larger weapon payloads.

Source: US Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, 'New START treaty aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms', Fact sheets, 1 June 2011 and 28 Sep. 2021.

Table 11.1 provides a comparison of Russian and US aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms under New START as of February 2011 and September 2021. While Russian reductions may be numerically less than those of the USA, this resulted from Russia having fewer strategic forces than the USA when the treaty entered into force in 2011.<sup>5</sup>

### *Compliance concerns and future challenges*

Despite the extent to which New START has limited Russian and US nuclear arsenals, the compliance process has had its challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic has complicated the verification process, with an April 2021 report suggesting that no on-site inspections had been conducted for a year and a statement in December 2021 by Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergey Ryabkov, noting that the 'practice of mutual inspection visits will resume as the sanitary situation improves'.<sup>6</sup> This has resulted in greater reliance on the BCC meetings and notification exchanges to enforce the treaty. Further, as emphasized by the US State Department, 'Each Party has the flexibility to determine for itself the structure of its forces subject to the central limits'.<sup>7</sup>

This is noteworthy in light of both countries' nuclear modernization programmes. While some newer systems may be covered under New START, including Russia's Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle and the Sarmat, a heavy ICBM equipped with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles

<sup>5</sup> Kristensen, H., 'First New START data after extension shows compliance', Federation of American Scientists, 6 Apr. 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's interview with Izvestia', 13 Dec. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> US Department of State (note 4).

(MIRVs), adjustments to the nuclear forces of both countries have raised some compliance concerns. For example, in May 2021 Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated that the number of US launchers and bombers exceeded the limit outlined by New START, claiming it was unable to confirm that 56 launchers and 41 heavy bombers were no longer nuclear-capable, nor could it verify the removal of four underground missile silos.<sup>8</sup> Russia has also criticized the US procedures used to convert B-52H heavy bombers and Trident II SLBM launchers, which the USA maintains are compliant with treaty provisions.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, questions remained as to whether the five-year extension of New START will yield a replacement agreement before 2026, as well as the extent to which both old and new weapon systems would be covered in a follow-on treaty. US officials have cited concerns over Russia's 'novel nuclear weapons of intercontinental range' and '1,000 to 2,000 "non-strategic" nuclear weapons' that are not limited under New START.<sup>10</sup> Russian officials have also expressed misgivings about the lack of inclusion of US long-range precision-guided conventional systems under the treaty.<sup>11</sup> In terms of newer systems, some experts suggest that Russia's Poseidon uncrewed underwater vehicle and Burevestnik nuclear-powered ground-launched cruise missile would be 'unlikely to upset the strategic balance in the foreseeable future'.<sup>12</sup> However, others have cited the development of these novel weapon platforms as challenges that must be addressed by future arms control agreements.<sup>13</sup>

## Russia–USA strategic stability dialogue

### *Communication channels*

Given the uncertainty about whether an arms control agreement will follow New START, the Russia–USA strategic stability dialogue has come to play a central role in maintaining communication channels between the two

<sup>8</sup> Loughrin, C., 'Russia raises concerns over US compliance with nuclear threat', Organization for World Peace, 18 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup> US Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, *Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation and Disarmament Agreements And Commitments*, Report, 15 Apr. 2021; and US Department of State (note 4).

<sup>10</sup> Jenkins, B., 'Nuclear arms control: A new era?', Remarks of the US Under Secretary, NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control, Disarmament, and Nonproliferation, Copenhagen, 6 Sep. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Antonov, A. I., 'Long-range precision-guided conventional weapons: Implications for arms control and strategic stability', Joint meeting of members of the Centre russe d'études politiques and the Trialogue Club International, PIR Center.

<sup>12</sup> Kristensen (note 5).

<sup>13</sup> Acton, J. M., MacDonald, T. and Vaddi, P., *Reimagining Nuclear Arms Control: A Comprehensive Approach* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, 2021); and Wright, T., 'New START extension and next steps for arms control', International Institute for Strategic Studies, 19 Feb. 2021.

countries.<sup>14</sup> This format was created in 2017 under the administration of US President Donald J. Trump and carried forward following a June 2021 meeting between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin from which they released a joint statement proclaiming that ‘a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought’, echoing a 1985 declaration from then leaders Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev and preceding a similar joint statement by China and Russia.<sup>15</sup> Convened in July and September 2021, with a session scheduled for January 2022, the Russia–USA strategic stability dialogue featured the formation of two inter-agency expert working groups on ‘principles and objectives for future arms control’ and on ‘capabilities and actions with strategic effects’.<sup>16</sup> Among the overall aims of this dialogue, led by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov and US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, are maintaining engagement between Russia and the USA and laying the groundwork for a follow-on treaty to New START. The broader coverage of these strategic stability talks, in comparison with traditional arms control negotiations, reflects some of the longer-term aims of both countries.

#### *US statements and aims*

The US under secretary of state for arms control and international security, Bonnie Jenkins, has stated the USA is determined to use the extension period to ‘pursue a new dialogue with Russia on what nuclear arms control measures should follow’ New START, with discussions to include ‘new kinds of intercontinental-range nuclear delivery systems’ and ‘all nuclear warheads, including those which have not been limited previously, like so-called non-strategic nuclear weapons’.<sup>17</sup> The US national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, has designated this five-year period as ‘the beginning of the story on what is going to have to be serious, sustained negotiations around a whole set of nuclear challenges and threats that fall outside of the New

<sup>14</sup> A US Department of State report defines crisis stability as ‘the absence of incentives for either side to believe it would benefit from initiating war in a crisis’, and defines arms race stability as ‘the absence of any reason to believe that building additional or different strategic forces by either side would alter this situation’. International Security Advisory Board, ‘The nature of multilateral strategic stability’, 27 Apr. 2016, pp. 1–2.

<sup>15</sup> White House, ‘US–Russia presidential joint statement on strategic stability’, Briefing Room statement, 16 June 2021; White House, Joint Soviet–United States statement on the summit meeting in Geneva’, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, 21 Nov. 1985; and Russian Embassy in the UK, Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China, 28 June 2021’, 29 June 2021.

<sup>16</sup> White House, ‘US–Russia presidential joint statement on strategic stability’ (note 15); and US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Joint Statement on the outcomes of the US–Russia strategic stability dialogue in Geneva on September 30’, Press release, 30 Sep. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins (note 10).

START agreement, as well as other emerging security challenges'.<sup>18</sup> US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has also stressed that the USA should use this extension to pursue with Russia, 'in consultation with Congress and US allies and partners, arms control that addresses all of its nuclear weapons'.<sup>19</sup>

### *Russian statements and aims*

Russia's ambassador to the USA, Anatoly Antonov, stated that the September 2021 meeting featured discussion of 'not only specific types and classes of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons capable of performing strategic missions, but also the actions of the Sides that have a "strategic effect"', highlighting 'hypersonic and other high-precision non-nuclear weapons, including unmanned systems, with an emphasis on those that can be used for strategic missions', as well as 'quantitative and qualitative aspects of the balance of power between the two countries and their allies in terms of both nuclear and conventional weapons'.<sup>20</sup> Ambassador Antonov also noted Russia's interest in the 'nexus between strategic offensive and strategic defensive arms' and creation of the 'next agreement to replace the New START treaty'.<sup>21</sup> However, he emphasized that, while Russia aims for legally binding agreements on arms control, it does not rule out other formats. Further, Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov has stated that enlarging the dialogue framework to include more nuclear powers would be inevitable, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom and France given the former's 'recent decision to increase the maximum level of nuclear warheads by 40 percent—to 260 units'.<sup>22</sup>

## **Prospects for a China–USA strategic stability dialogue**

### *US engagement of China*

From the Trump administration's efforts to establish trilateral talks among China, Russia and the USA to the Biden administration's interest in incorporating China in bilateral and potentially future multilateral strategic stability talks, there is continuity, even if the approach differs. Moreover, much like former US administrations, US official statements and documents continue to link China and Russia by pairing their advances.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while the

<sup>18</sup> Reif, K. and Bugos, S., 'US, Russia extend New START for five years', Arms Control Association, Mar. 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Blinken (note 2).

<sup>20</sup> TASS, 'Russian–US dialogue on strategic stability develops in right direction—envoy', 25 Oct. 2021.

<sup>21</sup> TASS (note 20).

<sup>22</sup> Radio Free Europe, 'Russia wants Britain, France to join wider nuclear talks with US', 29 July 2021. On the changes in the British nuclear weapons posture see chapter 10, section III, in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> US Department of Defense (DOD), *Nuclear Posture Review Report* (DOD: Washington, DC, Apr. 2010), p. iv; and Saalman, L., *China and the US Nuclear Posture Review*, Carnegie Papers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, Feb. 2011), p. 3.

Biden administration did not make US–Russian negotiations on New START extension contingent on Chinese participation, Under Secretary Jenkins has similarly referred to how the USA ‘will apply and tailor the lessons we’ve learned in the Russia–US arms control process when possible to US–[China] discussions’.<sup>24</sup>

As part of this, the USA has taken a bilateral focus to establishing a US–China strategic stability dialogue, with National Security Advisor Sullivan stating that President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden, during a meeting on 15 November, had agreed that they ‘would look to begin to carry forward discussions on strategic stability’ under a format ‘guided by the leaders and led by senior empowered teams on both sides that cut across security, technology and diplomacy’.<sup>25</sup> While both Sullivan and a US National Security Council spokesperson have stressed that these talks would not be at the same level or formality as those between Russia and the USA, their statements suggest that there may be some traction for the USA to engage with China to ensure that their competition ‘does not veer into conflict’.<sup>26</sup>

Secretary Blinken has made it clear that the USA will ‘pursue arms control to reduce the dangers from China’s modern and growing nuclear arsenal’.<sup>27</sup> Under Secretary Jenkins has also emphasized that China remains at the forefront of US formulation of a ‘new era’ of arms control, stating that ‘both Russia and China are engaged in extensive, destabilizing nuclear buildup that poses new threats to collective security and endangers the international rules-based order’.<sup>28</sup> In arguing for engagement with China, she has stressed a ‘hope that China will come to see that arms control is in its security interests’ and ‘not a trap designed to weaken China’s defenses’.<sup>29</sup> This statement again reveals a relatively bipartisan view in the USA that, for future arms control to be effective, China must be part of this ‘mechanism to reduce risk and the chance of unnecessary arms races’.<sup>30</sup>

### *China’s response*

In contrast with statements from US officials, China’s response has been more muted. On the extension of New START, China’s MFA spokesperson expressed support, stating that the ‘two sides should follow the international

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, M. R., ‘Trump administration weighs extending New START nuclear treaty’, *Wall Street Journal*, 23 June 2020; and Jenkins (note 10).

<sup>25</sup> Brookings Institution, ‘Readout from the Biden–Xi virtual meeting: Discussion with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’, Webinar transcript, 16 Nov. 2021, p. 11; and Sevastopulo, D. and Mitchell, T., ‘US and China agree to hold talks on nuclear arsenals’, *Financial Times*, 16 Nov. 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Sevastopulo and Mitchell (note 25); and ‘US says it is not engaged in formal arms control talks with China’, Reuters, 17 Nov. 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Blinken (note 2).

<sup>28</sup> Jenkins (note 10).

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins (note 10).

<sup>30</sup> Jenkins (note 10); and Rose, F., ‘Bringing China into the fold on arms control and strategic stability issues’, Brookings Institution, 25 Sep. 2019.

consensus, fulfil their special and primary responsibilities on nuclear disarmament, and further drastically and substantively reduce their nuclear stockpile in a verifiable, irreversible and legally-binding manner, so as to create the conditions for realizing general and complete nuclear disarmament'.<sup>31</sup> However, this statement was more circumspect on the subject of China's participation in strategic stability talks, emphasizing that 'China will continue to participate in discussions on issues related to strategic stability within such framework[s] as the cooperation mechanism of the five nuclear-weapon states, the Conference on Disarmament and the [United Nations General Assembly] First Committee'.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the spokesperson also noted China's willingness 'to maintain communication with all parties on issues relating to nuclear arms control through bilateral channels', not entirely closing the door on the potential for bilateral strategic stability talks between China and the USA.<sup>33</sup>

This being said, the precise format of China's involvement in dialogues remains unclear. Following the November 2021 meeting between President Biden and President Xi, official statements in Chinese were oblique as to the nature of future talks between China and the USA, stating that 'The two sides should enhance their understanding of each other's intentions through open and frank dialogue, and ensure that the competition between the two countries is fair and healthy and does not turn into a conflict' without directly referencing the term 'strategic stability'.<sup>34</sup> While a working paper released by the Chinese MFA in December 2021 referred to a desire 'to prevent a nuclear arms race and maintain strategic stability' and used the term 'constructive dialogue' multiple times, it noted that the nuclear disarmament process 'cannot be divorced from the realities of international security' and criticized US pursuit of 'overwhelming military superiority', 'global missile defence systems' and the potential deployment of 'intermediate missiles in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe'.<sup>35</sup> While these statements did not rule out China's participation in bilateral or multilateral strategic stability dialogues—instead reinforcing the need for such engagement—they still reflected some of China's ambivalence and the issues that would need to be addressed in such talks.

<sup>31</sup> Chinese State Council Information Office, 'China welcomes extension of New START nuclear treaty, responds to US accusation', Xinhua, Press release, 7 Feb. 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Chinese State Council Information Office (note 31).

<sup>33</sup> Chinese State Council Information Office (note 31).

<sup>34</sup> Chinese Embassy in the USA, [Xi Jinping and US President Biden hold a video meeting], 23 Nov. 2021 (in Chinese).

<sup>35</sup> Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Working paper submitted by the Chinese delegation on nuclear disarmament], 28 Dec. 2021 (in Chinese).

*Track-1 and track-1.5 precedents*

In terms of format, there is a history of both track-1 and track-1.5 strategic dialogues and nuclear dialogues between China and the USA. At the track-1 level, the ‘US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue’ was established in 2009 by US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao.<sup>36</sup> This dialogue expanded the coverage of previous high-level China–USA dialogues that focused on economic affairs to include strategic issues between both countries. US Secretary of State John Kerry and Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi co-chaired the strategic track, which dealt with such issues as international security, non-proliferation and counterterrorism, regional security and stability, climate change, energy and environment, military-to-military relations, among others.<sup>37</sup> However, while the inclusion of non-proliferation resulted in a pledge ‘to work collaboratively to strengthen global non-proliferation and arms control regimes’, as well as discussion of the review conference of the 1968 Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Conference on Disarmament and the Global Nuclear Security Summit, there was no mention of bilateral nuclear forces and strategic stability.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, by 2017 the dialogue had been renamed as the ‘US–China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue’, reorienting its focus away from strategic relations and again towards economic affairs.<sup>39</sup>

At the track-1.5 level, the biannual ‘China–US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics’ dialogue was initiated in 2004 and assembled Chinese and US academics, think-tank experts, retired officials and military leaders, as well as government officials and active military personnel attending in their private capacity.<sup>40</sup> This dialogue featured such issues as strategic stability, mutual vulnerability, no first use, ballistic missile defence, extended deterrence, escalation and crisis management, arms control, transparency, non-proliferation and nuclear security. However, by 2019 US interlocutors had decided to suspend the dialogue for several reasons. First, there was a determination that Chinese interlocutors would not conduct a transition

<sup>36</sup> Shear, D. B., ‘US–China relations: Maximizing the effectiveness of the strategic and economic dialogue’, US Department of State, 10 Sep. 2009; and National Committee on American Foreign Policy, ‘New report: US–China strategic and economic dialogues’, 13 Sep. 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Shear (note 36).

<sup>38</sup> Shear (note 36).

<sup>39</sup> Shear (note 36).

<sup>40</sup> These talks were supported by the US Department of Defense and US Department of State, and funded almost entirely by the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency. The Center for Strategic and International Studies ran the talks during the first few years, followed by the Pacific Forum in collaboration with the Naval Postgraduate School and in partnership with the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies and the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, which are Chinese think tanks affiliated with, respectively, the People’s Liberation Army and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Santoro, D. and Gromoll, R., ‘On the value of nuclear dialogue with China: A review and assessment of the track 1.5 “China–US Strategic Nuclear Dynamics Dialogue”’, *Issues and Insights*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Nov. 2020).

from track-1.5 to track-1 dialogue, despite repeated US requests.<sup>41</sup> Second, Chinese interlocutors were unable to hold the dialogue in China in 2018 and 2019, and Chinese delegates demonstrated a marked decrease in seniority at sessions held abroad.<sup>42</sup>

These experiences at both the track-1 and track-1.5 levels illustrate some of the challenges that are likely to arise as China and the USA discuss the potential of holding future bilateral strategic stability dialogues. The expectations of US interlocutors already appear to be tempered by the understanding that dialogues with China would be less formal than those with Russia, given that the latter talks with Russia ‘are mature and have history’.<sup>43</sup> While echoing this sentiment, Under Secretary Jenkins has still emphasized that the lessons learned from the Russia–US arms control process will be factored into any dialogues with China.<sup>44</sup> Further, the work and meetings being conducted at the track-2 level—in the relative absence of talks at track-1 and track-1.5 levels—indicates that there is an extensive array of topics that could be addressed during a China–USA strategic stability dialogue, including but not limited to nuclear weapons, missile defence, weaponization of space, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, dual-capable systems, precision-guided conventional strike advances and their impact on strategic stability.<sup>45</sup>

## Prospects for multilateral strategic stability dialogues

### *Interest in multilateral engagement*

Beyond bilateral talks, Chinese, Russian and US reports and statements indicate that there may be interest in the longer term in engagement on multilateral strategic stability. The International Security Advisory Board of the US Department of State issued a report in April 2017 that sought to extend ‘strategic stability beyond the US–Russia Cold War construct to include nuclear weapons–possessing states’, with the aim of reducing the deliberate or unintended escalation that can lead to nuclear war.<sup>46</sup> The report defined ‘multi-national strategic stability [as] largely the sum of stability between

<sup>41</sup> Cossa, R., Glosserman, B. and Santoro, D., ‘US–China strategic nuclear relations: Time to move to track-1 dialogue’, *Issues and Insights*, vol. 15, no. 7 (9–10 Feb. 2015); and Santoro and Gromoll (note 40).

<sup>42</sup> Santoro and Gromoll (note 40).

<sup>43</sup> ‘US says it is not engaged in formal arms control talks with China’ (note 26).

<sup>44</sup> Jenkins (note 10).

<sup>45</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, ‘CISAC security dialogues’, [n.d.]; Santoro, D., ‘What should Washington expect from US–China strategic stability talks?’, *Pacific Forum PacNet* no. 53, 17 Nov. 2021; Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, ‘Code of conduct on artificial intelligence in military systems’, 18 Aug. 2021; Kim, P. (ed.), *Enhancing US–China Strategic Stability in an Era of Strategic Competition: US and Chinese Perspectives* (United States Institute of Peace: Washington, DC, 26 Apr. 2021); and Levite, A. E. et al., ‘China–US cyber–nuclear C3 stability’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Shanghai Institutes for International Studies*, Working paper, Apr. 2021.

<sup>46</sup> International Security Advisory Board (note 14), p. 1.

many pairs of nuclear weapons states', 'using the Cold War definition, with the understanding that in the modern world all nuclear weapons should be regarded as strategic'.<sup>47</sup> In doing so, it provided a draft list of characteristics and practices that can enhance multilateral strategic stability under the headings of policy and doctrine, force structure and posture, safety and security.

Two years later, Russia's Higher School of Economics University published a report—with the support of the Russian MFA and State Duma Committee on International Affairs—on strengthening multilateral strategic stability, mirroring the US official report in some content.<sup>48</sup> The report offered its own definition of multilateral strategic stability as 'a state of relations between nuclear powers which enables them to prevent any military clash between them, including intentional and unintentional ones, because any such clash may develop into a global nuclear war', while listing factors that strengthen strategic stability.<sup>49</sup> Much as in the US report, the Russian report focused on such topics as channels of military-to-military communication, Russia–USA and China–USA dialogues on nuclear doctrines and military strategies, nuclear multipolarity shaped by dyadic interactions, escalation caused by nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, and expansion of China's nuclear arsenal. Nevertheless, on the primary driver of strategic shifts, this Russian report also reflected views held in China on US threats to strategic stability, including the latter's development of ballistic missile defence and potential plans to deploy intermediate-range ballistic missile systems in the region.<sup>50</sup>

When these two reports are juxtaposed with a statement in June 2021 by China's state councillor and foreign minister, Wang Yi, entitled 'Uphold multilateralism to promote common security', it becomes evident that all three are in support of multilateral processes.<sup>51</sup> In the Chinese case, the emphasis is on multilateral 'comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security' that advances 'international arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation processes'.<sup>52</sup> Given that the same sentence in Foreign Minister Wang's statement advocates for a multilateral strengthening of cooperative strategic risk reduction and deepening of strategic dialogue, this indicates China's potential openness to multilateral engagement on strategic stability on such topics as 'observing international arms control treaties,

<sup>47</sup> International Security Advisory Board (note 14), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Karaganov, S. and Suslov, D., 'The new understanding and ways to strengthen multilateral strategic stability', Higher School of Economics University, Sep. 2019; and International Security Advisory Board (note 14).

<sup>49</sup> Karaganov and Suslov (note 48), p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Karaganov and Suslov (note 48), p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Wang, Y., 'Uphold multilateralism to promote common security', Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 June 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Wang (note 51).

resolving non-proliferation issues through negotiations and improving global security governance'.<sup>53</sup>

### *Multilateral formats and discussions*

Even if not under the label of strategic stability dialogues, multilateral engagement has already been underway. Reflecting the continuation of a process begun in 2007, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5)—China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA—released a 'Joint Communiqué of the Non-Proliferation Treaty P5 Nations' in December 2021 on their joint obligations and aims under the NPT.<sup>54</sup> While the statement emphasized the importance of 'strategic stability', it was primarily as a by-product of their reaffirmations of (a) the importance of negotiations on nuclear disarmament; (b) the centrality of the NPT and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); (c) updates on their respective nuclear doctrines and policies; (d) collaboration to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict; (e) review of the P5 glossary of key nuclear terms; (f) commitment to the objectives of nuclear weapon-free zones, (g) ongoing negotiation of the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) and (h) the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.<sup>55</sup> Further, while efforts have been made to expand this grouping beyond NPT parties under the 'P5 Plus' format, there have been analyses that suggest this has exacerbated stalemates at such forums as the Conference on Disarmament on such initiatives as the FMCT.<sup>56</sup>

The intersection of these various formulations of multilateralism and strategic stability suggests that there is a foundation for future strategic stability talks that extend beyond Russia and the USA. However, the Russian and US reports still have a tendency to examine these dynamics as pairs or dyads, while US efforts to engage China in trilateral arms control negotiations have been met with resistance from the latter. This indicates that bilateral strategic stability dialogues will probably need to precede any multilateral strategic stability talks.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the format and membership of any expanded grouping will have to be well thought out to minimize the chance of eliciting more stalemates or tensions, as encountered with the P5 Plus process.

<sup>53</sup> Wang (note 51).

<sup>54</sup> French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 'P5 conference joint communiqué', 2–3 Dec. 2021.

<sup>55</sup> For a summary and other details of the CTBT and the NPT see annex A, section I, in this volume.

<sup>56</sup> European Leadership Network, 'The P-5 Plus talks and prospects for progress on a fissile material cut-off treaty', 9 Jan. 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Logan, D. C., 'Trilateral arms control: A realistic assessment of Chinese participation', 9 Aug. 2021, Stimson Center; Standish, R., 'The art of the trilateral deal? US nuke agreement with Russia, China proving difficult', Radio Free Europe, 28 June 2020; Fan, J., 'Trilateral negotiations on arms control? Not time yet', *China-US Focus*, 13 Sep. 2019; and Kroenig, M. and Massa, M. J., 'Toward trilateral arms control: Options for bringing China into the fold', Atlantic Council Issue Brief, 4 Feb. 2021.

## **Conclusions**

While some scepticism remains as to whether the Russia–USA strategic stability dialogue will generate a follow-on agreement to New START by 2026, this five-year window provides an opportunity for the two countries to maintain official communication channels. The dialogue also offers a potential template for future engagement of China in bilateral official talks with the USA, even if at a different level. If a China–USA strategic stability dialogue occurs alongside that between Russia and the USA, these two sets of bilateral talks may further the chances of an eventual multilateral strategic stability dialogue. This future expansion of strategic stability dialogues could, much like the P5 Plus, also engage other countries that possess nuclear weapons, including France, India, Pakistan and the UK. However, for this to occur, bilateral strategic stability dialogues between Russia and the USA must endure and those between China and the USA must begin.