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**BASIC**

# Nuclear Responsibilities

A New Approach for Thinking and  
Talking about Nuclear Weapons

Sebastian Brixey-Williams and Nicholas J. Wheeler

**The British American Security  
Information Council (BASIC)**

17 Oval Way  
London  
SE11 5RR

Charity Registration No. 1001081

T: +44 20 3488 6974  
[www.basicint.org](http://www.basicint.org)

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**The Institute for Conflict,  
Cooperation and Security (ICCS)**

Edgbaston  
Birmingham  
B15 2TT

T: +44 (0)121 414 8683

[https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/  
schools/government-society/centres/  
iccs/index.aspx](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/government-society/centres/iccs/index.aspx)

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## The Authors

**Sebastian Brixey-Williams** is Co-Director of BASIC and the Director of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities, which he co-founded in 2016. A nuclear weapons policy specialist and conflict mediator, he uses Track 1.5 dialogues to open up new possibilities for building trust and cooperation among states and non-governmental stakeholders. His work applies established and new conflict resolution ideas to a range of policy areas including nuclear risk reduction, disarmament, international law, emerging technologies, and UK nuclear weapons policy. Sebastian is an N Square Fellow (2020-21), a member of the Younger Generation Leadership Network, a former British Pugwash Executive Committee member, and the co-founder of the Inclusive Think Tanks breakfast series with Chatham House and the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. He was the recipient of the Postgraduate School's Prize at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

**Nicholas J. Wheeler** is Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham and Academic Lead of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities. His publications include: *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (2018); (with Ken Booth) *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (2008); and *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (2000). He is co-editor with Professors Christian Reus-Smit and Evelyn Goh of the Cambridge Series in International Relations, Associate Editor of the *Journal of Trust Research*, and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He was appointed as the first Director of the newly-created Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham in February 2012 and served in this role for its first eight years.

## BASIC

BASIC is a London-based think tank that promotes meaningful dialogue amongst governments and experts in order to build international trust, reduce nuclear risks, and advance disarmament. We have a global reputation for convening distinctive and empathic dialogues that help states overcome complex strategic and political differences. Our established networks and expertise, developed since 1987, enable us to get the right people in the room and facilitate effective, meaningful exchange between siloed and often hostile political communities.

## Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security

The Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security at the University of Birmingham adopts a multidisciplinary approach to global security challenges to create innovative research, education, and training in conflict and cooperation in world politics. Its key strategic priorities are: (i) to sustain and advance a culture that enables world-leading research; (ii) to generate impact with practitioner communities; (iii) to be the destination of choice for students seeking knowledge and skills about global security challenges; and (iv) to inspire meaningful engagement with real-world issues.

# Executive Summary

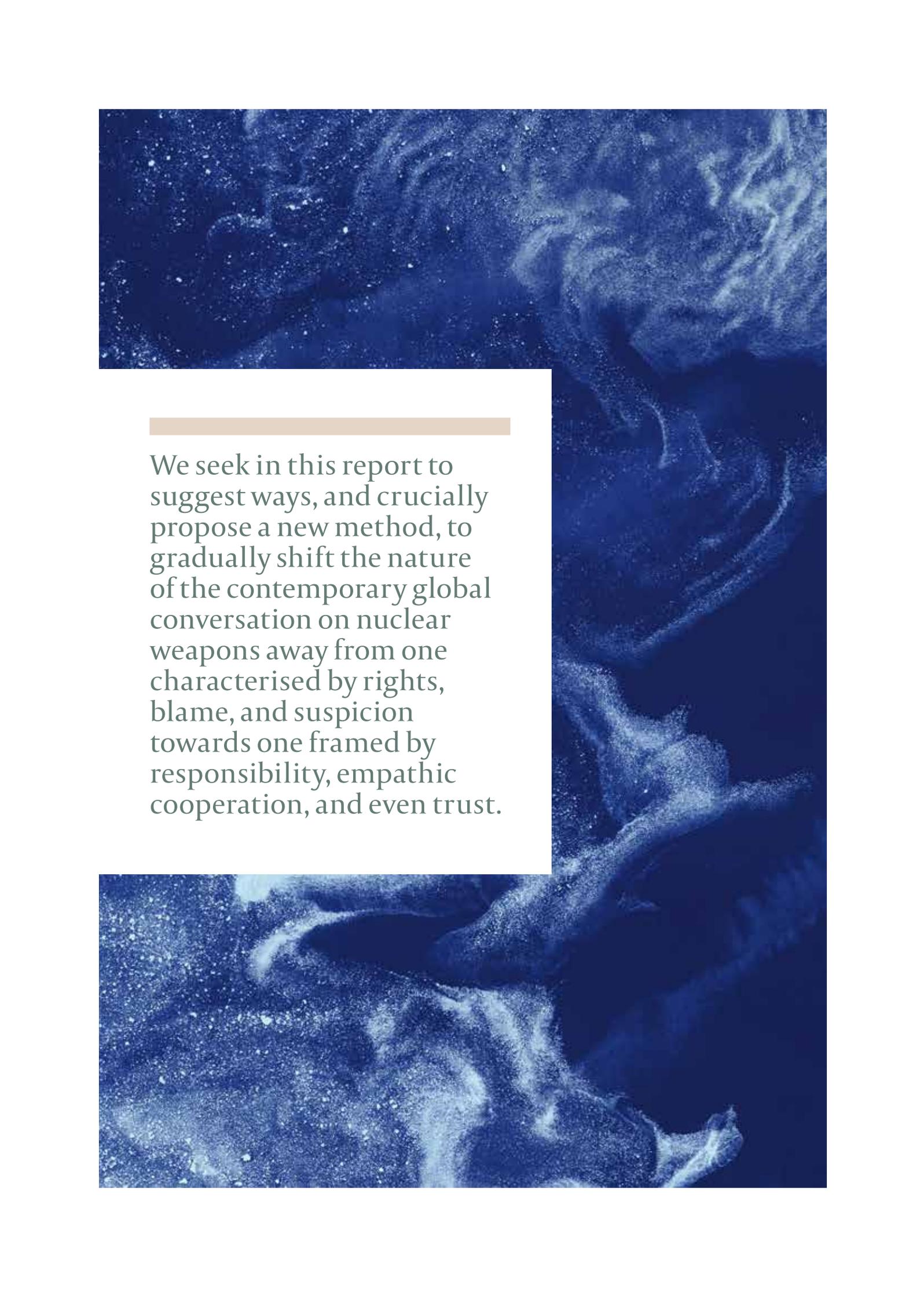
*Nuclear Responsibilities* responds to the heightening nuclear risks in the world today and the deep polarisation in global politics over how to reduce them. Strategic competition among the nuclear possessors is growing, while traditional risk reduction mechanisms like arms control have uncertain futures. Between nuclear possessors and non-possessor states, the polarisation is exemplified in the heated debate between those who support the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – which in October 2020 secured the 50 state ratifications necessary to come into force – and those who declare that nuclear weapons remain essential tools for deterrence.

This report, by the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham, makes the case for a new way of thinking and talking about nuclear weapons: the nuclear responsibilities approach. We argue that the dominant global conversation about nuclear weapons is characterised by a chronic culture of blame. This feeds dynamics of mistrust and distrust between states, holding back serious progress on nuclear risk reduction including, crucially, disarmament.

Reaching out to those of all perspectives, we seek in this report to suggest ways, and crucially propose a new method, to gradually shift the nature of the contemporary global conversation on nuclear weapons away from one characterised by rights, blame, and suspicion towards one framed by responsibility, empathic cooperation, and even trust.

The Nuclear Responsibilities Method we propose distills the approach into a facilitated two-stage process, designed to support officials, non-governmental experts, and publics to better understand their own responsibilities and those of others in relation to nuclear weapons. In the first stage, *critical introspection*, parties are invited to critically reflect on how they perceive and understand their own nuclear responsibilities. In the second stage, *empathic dialogue*, parties are brought together and given the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of others, and as a result, look to develop new shared understandings of responsibilities that can lead to policies and practices reducing the risks of nuclear conflict.

We ‘road-tested’ a prototype of the Method between 2018-2020 with diverse stakeholders in the capitals of five states with traditionally different perspectives on the legitimacy of nuclear weapons – Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – before bringing representatives together for a meaningful conversation in London in January 2020. The results suggested great potential for the nuclear responsibilities approach to promote a more constructive dialogue on nuclear weapons, as well as be adapted in the future to facilitate a cross-domain dialogue that incorporates space, cyber, and other strategic domains.



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We seek in this report to suggest ways, and crucially propose a new method, to gradually shift the nature of the contemporary global conversation on nuclear weapons away from one characterised by rights, blame, and suspicion towards one framed by responsibility, empathic cooperation, and even trust.

# Acknowledgements

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The Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities was founded by BASIC and the ICCS. Nicholas Wheeler is the Academic Lead on the Programme as an outgrowth of the project he led with Professor Anthony Burke (University of New South Wales) on 'Nuclear Ethics and Global Security' that was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

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# Glossary

## Critical Introspection

The first stage of Nuclear Responsibilities Method, during which parties are invited to look inwards at themselves with a critical eye and reflect on how they perceive their responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons.

## Conflicting Responsibilities

Responsibilities that are in tension with one another.

## Distrust

The active belief that another actor cannot be trusted because their past and current behaviour is perceived as untrustworthy.

## Empathic Dialogue

The second stage of the Nuclear Responsibilities Method brings parties together for a dialogue in which they have the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of others and as a result explore possibilities for reaching new shared understandings of responsibilities.

## Mistrust

Actors are uncertain about the motives and intentions of others. They lack the information and knowledge to decide that others should be distrusted, but nor do they have the positive expectations to take on the vulnerability required for trust.

## Nuclear Responsibilities

The responsibilities of states and other actors around nuclear weapons.

## Nuclear Responsibilities Approach

An approach to nuclear weapons policies and practices which foregrounds the perceptions of responsibility that underpin them and promotes respectful dialogue to develop shared normative understandings.

## Nuclear Responsibilities Method

The formalised two-stage method designed by the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities comprising processes of critical introspection and empathic dialogue, to facilitate thinking and talking about responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons.

## Security Dilemma Sensibility

An actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's actions may play in provoking that fear.<sup>1</sup>

## Special Responsibilities

Rights and duties conferred on particular states by virtue of their differentiated capacities to contribute to collective problems in a particular domain.<sup>2</sup>

## Responsibility Talk

Competing conceptions of responsible conduct that circulate in a particular domain of social interaction, and how actors put these different conceptions to work to legitimise their actions whilst de-legitimising those of others.

## Trust

The expectation of no harm in contexts where betrayal is always a possibility.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.7.
  - 2 Mlada Bukovansky, Ian Clark, Robyn Eckersley, Richard Price, Christian Reus-Smit and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
  - 3 Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies: Interpersonal Relationships in International Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.3.

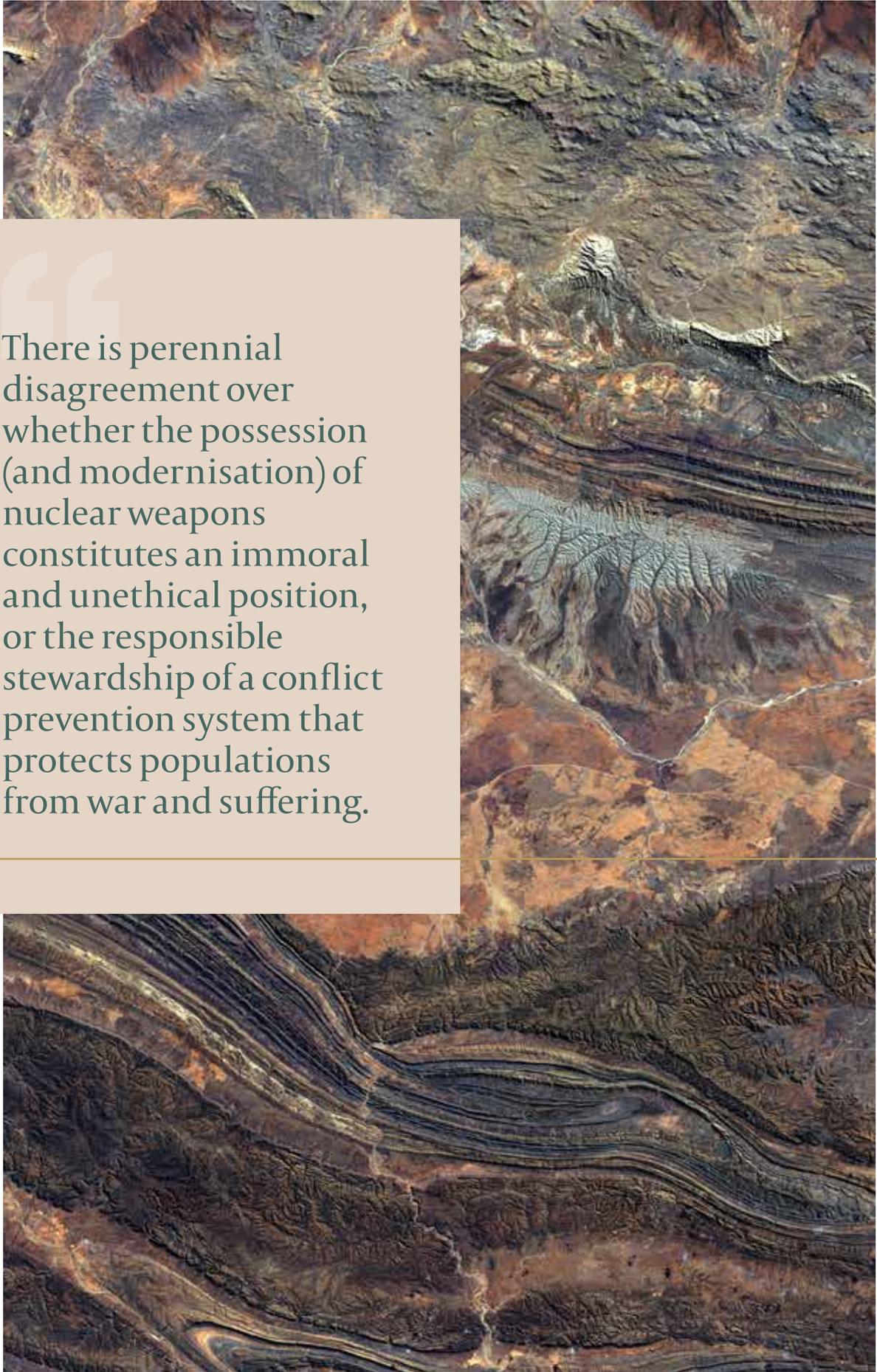
# Introduction

Between 2018 and 2020, BASIC and the Institute for Conflict, Cooperation and Security (ICCS) at the University of Birmingham developed and experimentally road-tested a new approach to facilitate thinking and talking about responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons: the nuclear responsibilities approach.

Our purpose in formulating this approach and method is threefold. First, we aim to offer the individuals and institutions managing security relations and nuclear risks a method by which they can better reflect upon and gain new insights about their own responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons. Second, we aim to provide a model for a more collaborative and respectful form of dialogue among stakeholders in global nuclear politics, allowing them to share how they conceive of their responsibilities, surface conflicting conceptions of responsibilities, and embed shared understandings of these responsibilities. Third, by practicing this approach, we hope to gradually shift the nature of the contemporary global conversation on nuclear weapons away from one characterised by rights, blame, suspicion, and varying degrees of distrust towards one built on responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and even trust.

This report introduces our approach, outlining its origins, two-stage method, road-testing process, reception amongst five pilot states, impact to date, and expected next steps. Our goal is for thinking and talking about nuclear responsibilities to become recognised as a valuable contribution to the existing diplomatic toolkit of officials, policy influencers, and publics that can allow them to engage with one another in a reflective, constructive, and at times playful, way. In reading this report we invite the reader to consider how the nuclear responsibilities approach could be employed in your own work (e.g. in national policy making processes; in bilateral, regional or multilateral fora in which you take part; and in a crisis situation etc).

The report advances in seven sections. **Section I** makes the case for putting consideration of responsibility at the heart of the way in which nuclear weapons are thought about and talked about. This guiding principle encapsulates the nuclear responsibilities approach. We start from the premise that existing nuclear risk reduction and disarmament agendas are held back by a systemic culture of blame that fuels mistrust, and in some cases, distrust between states. This culture is produced and reproduced out of highly-divergent conceptions of stakeholder's responsibilities around nuclear weapons. Two key fault lines are identified here. First, the existing nuclear possessor states that are in relationships of varying degrees of enmity with each other claim that they are behaving responsibly, whilst charging their opponents with acting irresponsibly.



There is perennial disagreement over whether the possession (and modernisation) of nuclear weapons constitutes an immoral and unethical position, or the responsible stewardship of a conflict prevention system that protects populations from war and suffering.

Second, there is perennial disagreement over whether the possession (and modernisation) of nuclear weapons constitutes an immoral and unethical position, or the responsible stewardship of a conflict prevention system that protects populations from war and suffering. This has been the principal focus of the BASIC-ICCS programme so far. This dynamic plays out as a long-running dispute as to which states are living up to their responsibilities under the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), a picture complicated by the fact some of the Non-Nuclear Weapon State (NNWS) parties to the Treaty depend on nuclear deterrence for their security as allies of the United States. Set against this, the NPT's five nuclear possessors refute the charge of irresponsibility, and that they are in breach of the spirit and letter of Article VI, arguing that it would be irresponsible for them to disarm until the security conditions are ripe for this to happen. Our key proposition is that the nuclear responsibilities approach opens up spaces for a dialogue that can avoid the recrimination and blame associated with the responsible/irresponsible binary that shapes contemporary debates and practices.

In **Section II**, we show how talking about nuclear weapons in terms of responsibility is not new, and has manifested itself in different forms during the nuclear age. All declared nuclear possessor states have referred to themselves as 'responsible' possessors of nuclear weapons and some have accepted that they have 'special responsibilities', while academia has introduced concepts such as 'responsible nuclear sovereignty' in order to try manage the tension between deterrence and disarmament. However, the way the language of responsibility has been employed in these cases has often provoked concerns or suspicions that the possessor states are trying to legitimise the indefinite possession of their nuclear weapons by defining responsibility in their own subjective way. Consequently, these earlier forms of 'responsibility talk'<sup>4</sup> have tended to shut down discussions about nuclear weapons and responsibility by provoking knee-jerk polarisation and entrenchment from other stakeholders, rather than enabling a meaningful and constructive dialogue. They have also tended to look only at the responsibilities of the nuclear possessor states (or alternatively, understandings of what it could mean, if anything, for a possessor state to be 'responsible'), but exclude the responsibilities of non-possessors and the wide range of other stakeholders that can influence nuclear weapon futures.

The broader nuclear responsibilities approach resulted in our creation of a more formalised Nuclear Responsibilities Method, which is set out in **Section III**. The Method is designed to draw the focus away from judgements about who is 'responsible' to an exploration of actors' plural 'responsibilities', and broadening the pool of stakeholders that can take part beyond the nuclear possessor states. Our purpose is not to judge between conflicting claims of responsibility themselves, but rather to contribute a method through Track 1.5 dialogues that helps officials, diplomats and other interlocutors to better understand the responsibility claims of others, and perhaps through this empathic process, arrive at a new shared understanding of *responsibilities* that can shape new practices of risk reduction.

As **Section IV** recounts, throughout the two-year period, we began to road-test the Nuclear Responsibilities Method in Track 1.5 roundtables in the capitals of five states – the United Kingdom (London), Japan (Tokyo), Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), the Netherlands (the Hague), and Brazil (São Paulo) – and iteratively developed it further based on their feedback. We then held a Five-Way Dialogue in London to enable the parties to exchange their perceptions about the framing and viability of the method.

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4 'Responsibility talk' is a term coined by Mary Ann Glendon to identify discourses on issues of collective responsibility that exists alongside 'rights talk' (*Rights talk: The impoverishment of political discourse*: New York: The Free Press, 1991), p.107. Extending Glendon, we define responsibility talk in this report as *competing conceptions of responsible conduct that circulate in a particular domain of social interaction, and how actors put these different conceptions to work to legitimise their actions whilst de-legitimising those of others*.

These five states are a representative sample of different positions on the legitimacy and utility of nuclear weapons in the global order: from the United Kingdom, a Nuclear Weapon State recognised under the NPT, to Brazil, one of the six 'Core Group' states that led the diplomatic process on a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).<sup>5</sup> We anticipated that if all five states affirmed the value of the Method then we could be confident that it would be equally well-received amongst the majority of states. We also held a Track 1.5 multilateral meeting of around 20 non-nuclear possessor states in Geneva for the same purpose, and a side event at the 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) to present our interim findings, as well as a handful of other accompanying activities.

In **Section V**, we outline the feedback we received on the nuclear responsibilities approach. The five-way dialogue identified a number of potential pathways by which the Method might be operationalised in the future, including crucially enlarging the scope to encompass nuclear possessor states both inside and outside the NPT. These next steps are considered in **Section VI**, alongside some of the modest but important ways that the nuclear responsibilities approach has already had an impact. The **Conclusion** summarises the essentials of the nuclear responsibilities approach and Method. We highlight its potential to shift the culture of blame that dominates contemporary global politics towards a culture of shared responsibilities that makes possible new policies and practices of strategic risk reduction.

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<sup>5</sup> It was decided to develop and rigorously test the nuclear responsibilities approach among the UK and a small pilot group of NNWS, rather than attempting to use it for the more challenging task of facilitating a dialogue among NWS engaged in relationships of active distrust from the outset. This is the challenge of the next stage of the project as discussed in Section VI.

## SECTION I:

# The Need for a New Approach for Thinking and Talking about Nuclear Weapons

Global society and the living planet has been threatened by the ‘perpetual menace’ of nuclear weapons since their first use in 1945.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to manage Cold War relations, and the nuclear armaments competition that this brought with it, took shape in the form of both the strategy of nuclear deterrence and the need to control the risks of nuclear conflict through nuclear arms control: a concept and practice developed in the early 1960s as a response to the failure of schemes for General and Complete Disarmament (GCD).

The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the first landmark arms control treaty, was followed most importantly at the bilateral superpower level by the signing in 1972 of the SALT 1 and Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaties that sought to regulate the strategic nuclear arms competition. The entry into force of the NPT in 1970 promised not to just limit the spread of nuclear weapons, but to eliminate their menace forever. The NPT has been a remarkably successful instrument in containing the spread of nuclear weapons, with only North Korea announcing it was leaving the Treaty in 2003 and developing nuclear weapons three years later. Outside the Treaty, India and Pakistan became overt possessors in the late 1990s, and Israel has neither confirmed nor denied its nuclear status since the late 1960s, though is believed to possess an stockpile of some 90 nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> The end of the Cold War made possible, for the first time, radical reductions in the nuclear stockpiles of the United States and Russia (the successor state to the Soviet Union after its demise in 1991). Through the 1990s, it was widely – though not universally – accepted that the risks of nuclear conflict between the major nuclear powers were very low.

Yet today, there is widespread concern among officials, experts, and the general public that nuclear risks are rising.<sup>8</sup> Since the mid-1990s, and with alarming acceleration in the past decade, many of the diplomatic and normative gains made through arms control and other confidence-building measures have either been eroded or reversed. At the same time, many of the human and technical systems and protocols designed to

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6 William Walker, *A Perpetual Menace: Nuclear Weapons and International Order* (London: Routledge, 2007).

7 Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, ‘Status of World Nuclear Forces’, *Federation of American Scientists*, September 2020. <<https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>>, last accessed 23 September 2020.

8 Wilfred Wan, *Risk Reduction: A Framework for Analysis*, UNIDIR, <<https://unidir.org/publication/nuclear-risk-reduction-framework-analysis>> last accessed 25 September 2020; Marion Messmer, *Strategic Risk Reduction in the European Context* (London: BASIC, 2020).

mitigate crisis risks have atrophied.<sup>9</sup> The accelerated collapse of bilateral and multilateral arms control agreements – among them the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and most recently the Treaty on Open Skies – has been both a product and a cause of growing distrust between the United States and Russia. Meanwhile, distrust between the United States and China has grown sharply.<sup>10</sup> India, Pakistan, and China are also gripped in a triangle of distrust that is marked by a stalled India-Pakistan official dialogue and a notably absent trilateral one. Nuclear restraint has fallen out of fashion, with state leaders who possess the ultimate launch authority making loose nuclear threats in the media.<sup>11</sup> And it has been well documented that a plethora of emerging and new technologies, some as part of extensive nuclear modernisation programmes, are likely to make the field more complex to understand and difficult to manage.<sup>12</sup> As former US Secretary of Defence, Bill Perry, puts it: ‘Today, the danger of some sort of a nuclear catastrophe is greater than it was during the Cold War’.<sup>13</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic challenging the world at the time of writing has further undermined multilateral institutions and trust amongst the major powers with likely, albeit uncertain, spillover effects into the nuclear realm.<sup>14</sup>

On top of all this, recent scholarship has cast considerable doubt on the idea that, despite the extensive efforts of defence intellectuals and arms controllers, a stable nuclear order ever existed in the first place. Amongst other things, this scholarship has foregrounded many declassified accidents and near-misses of the Cold War, and the essential, but often unspoken, role of luck in preventing unintended nuclear escalation or detonations.<sup>15</sup> Such arguments have helped to revive a long-standing debate within academia and the policy community as to whether accidents are inevitable and therefore ‘normal’ in complex and tightly-coupled systems (such as nuclear command, control, and communication systems) or whether they can be controlled;<sup>16</sup> the balance has shifted further towards the former. Many nuclear accidents surely remain classified, and a number might have resulted in extensive humanitarian and ecological disasters in easily imagined circumstances, whether or not they inadvertently prompted further escalation. Perceptions today that nuclear risks are rising therefore stand on the already-unstable sands of extraordinary historic good fortune.

There is an urgent need for the international community to begin reversing the growth of global nuclear risks and the trend towards instability. However, we contend that a key obstacle standing in the way of achieving new risk-reduction practices – unilateral or multilateral – is a chronic *culture of blame* within the global

9 Messmer, *Strategic Risk Reduction in the European Context*.

10 Space precludes a full discussion of the factors driving this distrust, but a key factor is each side’s divergent beliefs about the others’ current and future nuclear intentions, affecting their beliefs in the efficacy of future strategic nuclear arms control agreements.

11 Heather Williams and Alexi Drew, *Escalation by Tweet: Managing the new nuclear diplomacy* (London: Centre for Science & Security Studies, King’s College London, 2020).

12 Christopher Chyba, ‘New Technologies & Strategic Stability’, *Daedalus*, 149: 2 (2020) pp.150-170; Susi Synder, ‘Nuclear weapons in the digital age, what now?’, *PAX for Peace*, February 2020 <[https://nonukes.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/202002\\_DigitalAge\\_Nuclear\\_weapons\\_final.pdf](https://nonukes.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/202002_DigitalAge_Nuclear_weapons_final.pdf)> last accessed 25 September 2020.

13 John Harris and Bryan Bender, ‘Bill Perry is Terrified. Why Aren’t You?’ *Politico Magazine*, 06 January 2017 <<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/01/william-perry-nuclear-weapons-proliferation-214604>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

14 Yanzhong Huang, ‘U.S. - Chinese Distrust Is Inviting Dangerous Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories’, *Foreign Affairs*, 5 March 2020 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-03-05/us-chinese-distrust-inviting-dangerous-coronavirus-conspiracy>> last accessed 25 September 2020; António Guterres, ‘Opting for Strategic Competition over Cooperation Makes Dangers Posed by Nuclear Weapons More Acute, Secretary General Says in Observance Message’, *United Nations Press Release* <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20277.doc.htm>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

15 Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety* (New York: Penguin, 2013); Patricia Lewis, Heather Williams, Benoît Pelopidas and Sasan Aghlani, *Too Close for Comfort. Cases of Near Nuclear Use and Options for Policy* (London: Chatham House, 2014), p.1; Benoît Pelopidas, ‘The unbearable lightness of luck: Three sources of overconfidence in the manageability of nuclear crises’, *European Journal of International Security* 2:2 (2017), pp.240-262.

16 Scott D. Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton: Princeton Studies in International History and Politics, 1993).



We need a new approach to thinking and talking about nuclear weapons in relation to responsibility: one that transforms the chronic culture of blame into a sustained culture of responsibility, by shifting the focus away from who is or is not being responsible, towards a shared exploration of responsibilities that is more naturally conducive to mistrust and distrust reducing forms of cooperation.

nuclear order. Those nuclear possessor states trapped in mutual distrust and enmity blame their adversary's strategic policies for the fear and insecurity they perceive, believing that it is the other side's policies and strategies that stand in the way of progress on nuclear disarmament. At the same time, non-possessor states, particularly those that do not rely on US extended nuclear deterrence for their security, blame the possessor states (albeit to varying degrees) for not fulfilling their Article VI commitments under the NPT. Possessor states, in turn, blame non-possessor states, especially supporters of the TPNW, for making what they view as unrealistic demands for nuclear elimination, for failing or refusing to recognise areas of progress, and crucially, for making insufficient efforts themselves to create a security environment conducive to radical cuts in nuclear weapons.<sup>17</sup>

The culture of nuclear blaming is characterised by actors on both sides frequently invoking '*rights talk*' to defend their diametrically opposed positions.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, there are fundamental disagreements about what those rights are. This is especially true in relation to Article VI of the NPT, whose precise interpretation remains an open legal question. On this matter, scholarship is divided as to whether the obligation on states parties is only to 'pursue negotiations in good faith', or actually achieve, nuclear elimination itself.<sup>19</sup> Taking the former position, the five Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) recognised under the NPT have argued that Article VI grants them the right to possess nuclear weapons indefinitely, subject to them pursuing nuclear

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17 Scott D. Sagan, 'Shared Responsibilities For Nuclear Disarmament', *Daedalus*, 134/4, Fall 2009, pp.157-168. Nick Ritchie argues that there is a deep fault line between two distinct worldviews within the global nuclear order, which he terms the 'hegemonic nuclear control order' and 'diverse anti-nuclearism', notwithstanding the heterogeneous perspectives that exist within these broad groupings. The former, advanced principally by officials and experts within the nuclear possessor states and their allies, depicts nuclear weapons as useful instruments of (inter)national security and prestige, and privileges practices of nuclear deterrence as a means of war avoidance over nuclear disarmament. By contrast, the diverse anti-nuclearism worldview – advanced by the majority of non-possessor states and a diverse transnational advocacy network – privileges nuclear disarmament over nuclear deterrence, foregrounding humanitarian, postcolonial, gender, and environmentalist arguments and associated with the phrase framed by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, that 'there are no "right hands" that can handle these "wrong weapons"'. For Ritchie, the global politics of nuclear weapons can be understood as a Hegelian 'dialectic' between these two apparently irreconcilable positions (Nick Ritchie, 'Trident and British Identity: Letting Go Of Nuclear Weapons', *University of Bradford*, September 2008. <[https://www.york.ac.uk/media/politics/documents/research/Trident\\_and\\_British\\_Identity.pdf](https://www.york.ac.uk/media/politics/documents/research/Trident_and_British_Identity.pdf)> last accessed 25 September 2020).

18 Glendon, *Rights talk*, p.107.

19 Dan Joyner, *Interpreting the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.69-74 and 95-108.

disarmament negotiations in good faith.<sup>20</sup> This position is disputed – at times vehemently – by those states that gave up the right to develop and possess nuclear weapons by signing the NPT, in the expectation and understanding of a right to a world free of nuclear weapons that would follow within a reasonable timeframe. The unsuccessful legal challenge brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2014 by the Marshall Islands against the nuclear possessors had hoped – among other goals – to secure greater legal clarity in relation to the interpretive controversies over Article VI.<sup>21</sup> However, the case was dismissed by the ICJ on issues of jurisdiction before the merits were heard. The NNWS may yet be able to force the interpretation question onto the international legal agenda by referring the question directly to the Court via a resolution of the UN General Assembly, as happened with the 1996 Advisory Opinion on the legality of using nuclear weapons.<sup>22</sup> Yet until this question is resolved, the ambiguity surrounding Article VI, and the lack of an explicit prohibition on nuclear modernisation programmes, will continue to mean that the NWS feel safe in interpreting Article VI as enshrining their right to possess nuclear weapons until they – and they alone – judge that the security conditions are right for them to divest themselves of nuclear weapons.

Our purpose is not to address who is failing to live up to their responsibilities in global nuclear politics. Instead, it is to draw attention to the chronic culture of blame that fuels distrust and contracts the potential for empathy between those who hold different perceptions of their nuclear responsibilities. The effect is a well-trodden tendency within the policy community to the following dysfunctional attitudes and practices: speaking rather than listening; confirmation bias; groupthink; and the attribution of ‘enemy images’<sup>23</sup> to the other that leads to ‘violent’ rather than ‘non-violent’ communication.<sup>24</sup> This division plays out from the micro to the macro level – from students right up to the rigid coalitions of states with unshifting demands at the international level<sup>25</sup> – and in recent years in particular, has been a major source of the growing mistrust, and even distrust, between nuclear possessor states and non-possessor states.<sup>26</sup>

We need a new approach to thinking and talking about nuclear weapons: one that transforms the chronic culture of blame into a sustained culture of responsibility, by shifting the focus away from who is or is not being responsible towards a shared exploration of responsibilities that is more naturally conducive to mistrust and distrust reducing forms of cooperation. Such an approach would view the goal of nuclear risk reduction as something that depends on stakeholders committing to viewing it as a collectively shared responsibility. It requires them to ‘sit on the same side of the table’ and place a common value on each other’s security. Those practicing such an approach would commit to suspending blame and approach nuclear risk reduction by looking at their own actions before those of others.

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20 Christopher A. Ford, ‘Debating Disarmament: Interpreting Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons’, *Nonproliferation Review* 14/3, November 2007, pp.401-428.

21 Nina Sofie Pedersen and Sebastian Brixey-Williams, ‘Implications of the Marshall Islands Case for nuclear disarmament’, *BASIC*, <<https://basicint.org/news/2016/implications-marshall-islands-case-nuclear-disarmament>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

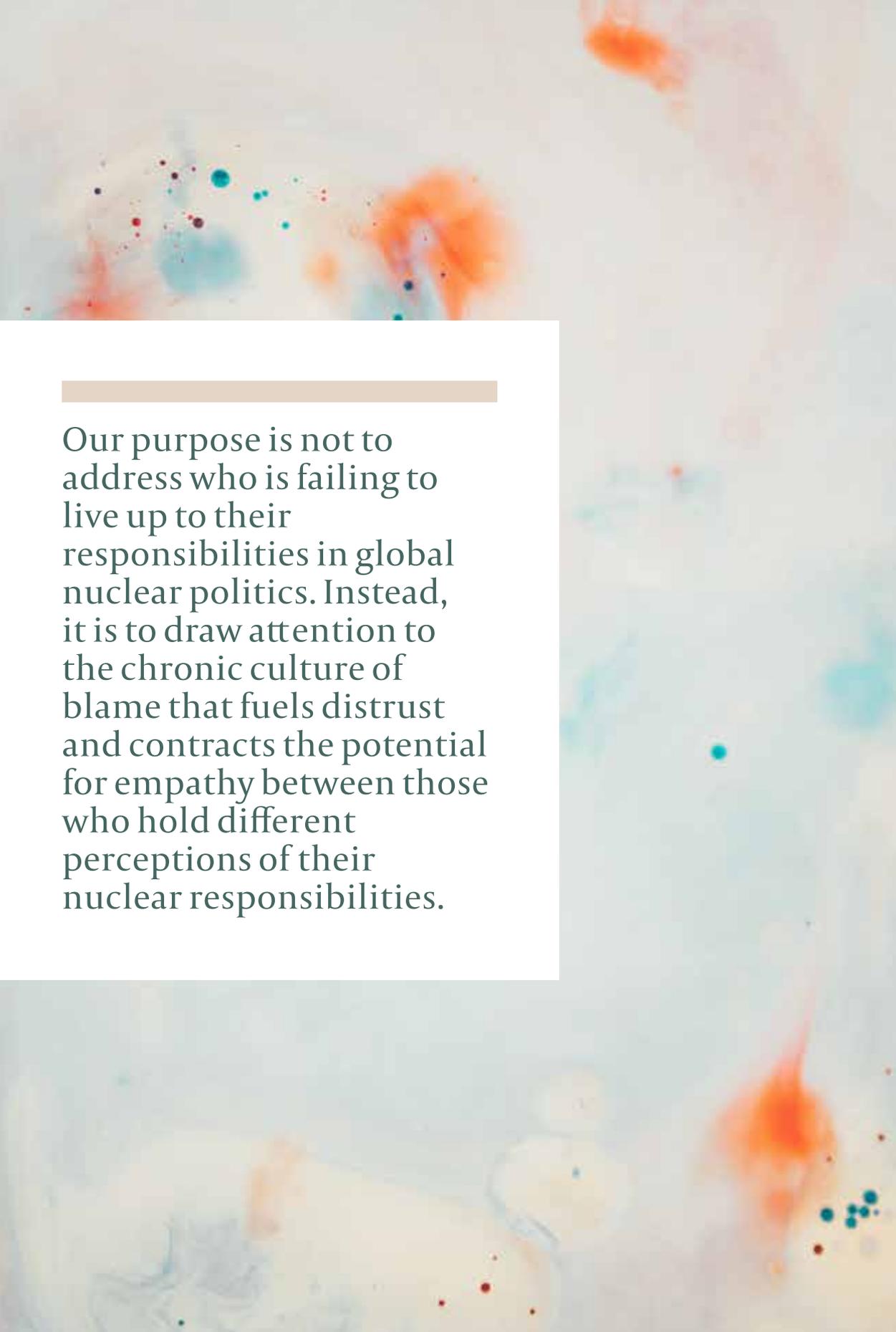
22 Dan Joyner, *International Law and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.67.

23 The concept of enemy images is discussed in Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 2018, pp.75-100.

24 Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life. Third Edition* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

25 A social network analysis of state coalitions within the NPT by Michal Onderco shows that the topography of state coalitions has become increasingly stable since the end of the Cold War, concluding that ‘when it comes to nuclear nonproliferation, diplomatic negotiations are becoming increasingly stuck in established patterns [which] may cast a shadow on the regime’s ability to generate new solutions to the (old and) new problems’ (Michal Onderco, ‘Collaboration Networks in Conference Diplomacy: The Case of the Nonproliferation Regime’, *International Studies Review* <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vizo36>, 20 September 2019, p.15).

26 The concepts of mistrust and distrust are frequently conflated. However, we make an important distinction between the two (see the Glossary for our definitions).



Our purpose is not to address who is failing to live up to their responsibilities in global nuclear politics. Instead, it is to draw attention to the chronic culture of blame that fuels distrust and contracts the potential for empathy between those who hold different perceptions of their nuclear responsibilities.

Why choose to focus on responsibility talk? Because thinking and talking about responsibilities in an open, curious, and collaborative way has the natural effect of refocusing attention on one's own values and behaviours, which stands at the opposite end of the spectrum to blame. Responsibility talk 'calls us to be adults', as one participant in the Programme put it, and in a world that seems to function on a balance of rights and responsibilities, it provides a suitable counterpart to rights talk. As the next section shows, the language of shared responsibilities in the nuclear field is not new, but the existence of responsibility talk has not prevented states and other actors falling into a poisonous culture of mutual blaming. Our purpose is to reawaken responsibility talk in the context of the two-stage Method that we advance here – one that we hope can open up possibilities for arriving at new shared conceptions of nuclear responsibilities that can promote new risk reduction practices. By thinking and talking about our responsibilities around nuclear weapons, we give them life and sustain them, and so shape and structure what is – and is not – acceptable behaviour at both the psychological and emotional level.

## SECTION II:

# Nuclear Weapons and Responsibility: A Short History

The act of invoking ‘responsibility talk’ in relation to nuclear weapons is not a new phenomenon. Since before the negotiation of the NPT, states advanced claims that the nuclear possessors had a ‘special responsibility’ to reduce nuclear risks by making progress on nuclear disarmament.

Another recurring feature of global nuclear politics spurred by the NPT’s entry into force has been the claim that ‘all states’ have shared responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons. In the last quarter century, all declared nuclear possessor states have increased their efforts to signal – by their words, their deeds, or both – that they should be considered ‘responsible’ possessors of nuclear weapons, differentiating themselves from their rivals with varying degrees of success. In turn, this has prompted a line of academic inquiry around the conditions that would need to be satisfied for a possessor state to achieve ‘responsible nuclear sovereignty’, and a counter-movement that has sought to contest the principle.

This patchwork of examples demonstrate an ongoing interest within global nuclear politics in the principle of promoting and incentivising ‘responsible’ policies and practices in relation to nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, despite having rhetorical grandeur, such invocations are often thin on detail, making it difficult to see how they should be operationalised. Moreover, declarations by possessor states about who is or is not ‘responsible’ are plagued by the issue of subjectivity, and in consequence have provoked recurrent concerns among the majority about the legitimacy of such self-imposed standards and suspicion about the intent of their issuers. At worst, perceptions that governments are attempting to impose their own normative visions of responsibility have been interpreted as cynical attempts to legitimise positions and de-legitimise opponents, and have only served to deepen the culture of blame and distrust. In the absence of shared agreement of what stakeholders’ responsibilities are – or failing that, a process through which to agree them that is accepted as legitimate – invocations of responsibility talk seem likely to continue to exert a negative systemic impact (or at best, no more than a limited positive impact) on global nuclear politics.

In this section, we give a short account of some of the key endeavours in diplomacy and academia to invoke responsibility talk in relation to nuclear weapons, before going on in Section III to explain how we have built upon, and where necessary departed from, these earlier endeavours in order to design a method that can overcome their limitations.



## ‘Special Responsibilities’

One recurring theme in international relations in the last two centuries has been the idea that some states carry *special responsibilities* that set them apart from others and confer on them specific rights and duties. In their 2012 book on this topic, Bukovansky et al. articulate that the act of states accepting, voluntarily or after some convincing, special responsibilities becomes crucial in situations where the principle of sovereign equality or the inequality of material power is unable to limit security competition and promote cooperation.<sup>27</sup> In this view, the shared acceptance of special responsibilities can both enable and constrain actors by specifying the limits of permissible behaviour in a particular domain. As a result, such responsibilities can shape how stakeholders conceive of their identities and interests, serve as normative resources in arguments over where responsibility resides for addressing collective challenges, and play a key role in how power is both enacted and constrained.<sup>28</sup>

The use of the language of special responsibilities became a common feature of the diplomatic dialogue in the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament (ENCD) in the 1960s, and was invoked both by nuclear possessor states to legitimise their positions and by non-nuclear powers to hold the nuclear powers accountable. For example, responding to a Soviet proposal for disarmament in February 1964, the Romanian delegate ascribed a ‘special responsibility’ to the ‘great nuclear powers in connexion with the consolidation of peace and security, the accomplishment of nuclear disarmament, and the disarmament process in general’.<sup>29</sup> The United States and Soviet Union, the possessors of the greatest number of nuclear weapons,

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27 Bukovansky et al., *Special Responsibilities*, pp.5-11.

28 Bukovansky et al., *Special Responsibilities*, pp.51-78.

29 Statement by Mr V. Dumitrescu of Romania to the 165th meeting of the Eighteen Nation Committee on Disarmament, 11 February 1964, ENDC/PV165, p.31.

long recognised that their overwhelming material capabilities impose a special responsibility on them for managing and reducing nuclear risks. Fifteen days after the signing of the NPT in July 1968, the head of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, William Foster, read out to his fellow delegates in the ENCD a statement from US President Lyndon B. Johnson that said: 'The United States and Soviet Union have a special responsibility to head off a strategic arms race. The fate of mankind could well depend on the manner in which our two nations discharge that responsibility'.<sup>30</sup>

The entry into force of the NPT in 1970 enshrined the principle (though not the language) that states have special responsibilities in relation to the Treaty's three pillars stemming from whether they are categorised as NWS or NNWS. By signing and ratifying the NPT, the two superpowers, and the United Kingdom (the only nuclear powers to join the Treaty under the provisions of Article IX(3)) legally recognised a series of special responsibilities as possessor states in Articles I, II, and IV for reducing nuclear risks, strengthening non-proliferation, and achieving disarmament.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the non-nuclear possessors recognised a series of special responsibilities related to their non-nuclear status in the legal rules of the NPT (e.g. the specific provisions in Articles I, II, and IV, and related safeguards arrangements).

The language of special responsibilities continues to be invoked today. In his 2018 *Securing Our Common Future* report, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged action on the CTBT by asserting that: 'the States whose ratifications are required for the Treaty to enter into force have a special responsibility to lead, without waiting for any other State'.<sup>32</sup> In a working paper on nuclear disarmament to the 2019 NPT PrepCom that was heavy on responsibility talk, China used the concept to state that 'countries possessing the largest nuclear arsenals bear special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament and should continue to make drastic and substantive reductions in their nuclear arsenals in a verifiable, irreversible and legally binding manner while faithfully implementing their existing nuclear arms reduction treaties'.<sup>33</sup> In early 2020, Russian President Putin proposed a summit of the NWS on the basis that the five states bear 'a special responsibility for the preservation of civilization'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the category of special responsibilities has not been deeply excavated and actors disagree over which states are living up to their special responsibilities under the NPT. In short, whilst the conceptual category provides a normative framework to hold state actors accountable, it is too fuzzy to provide a basis for a new consensus on responsibilities that can be translated into policy and practice.

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30 Statement by Mr W. Foster of the United States to the 381st meeting of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee, 16 July 1968, ENDC/FPV.381.20, p.20.

31 China and France, the only other eligible powers to join the NPT as a 'nuclear-weapon State Party' under the NPT's definition of a 'nuclear-armed State' in Article IX, would not join until 1992.

32 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament* (New York: UNODA, 2018). p.22

33 'Nuclear Disarmament', working paper submitted to the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 29 April 2019, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.III/WP.40.

34 Henry Meyer, 'Trump Backs Putin's Nuclear Powers' Summit, U.S. Envoy Tells IFX', Bloomberg, 6 May 2020 <[https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-06/trump-backs-putin-s-nuclear-powers-summit-u-s-envoy-tells-ifx?utm\\_source=AM+Nukes+Roundup&utm\\_campaign=147c83bc88-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_07\\_25\\_12\\_19\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_547ee518ec-147c83bc88-391862377](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-05-06/trump-backs-putin-s-nuclear-powers-summit-u-s-envoy-tells-ifx?utm_source=AM+Nukes+Roundup&utm_campaign=147c83bc88-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_07_25_12_19_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_547ee518ec-147c83bc88-391862377)> last accessed 15 October 2020.

Officials from every declared nuclear possessor have at one time or another described their state as a ‘responsible nuclear weapons state’ or with an equivalent form of words.

### ‘Shared Responsibilities’

Although the NWS were attributed special responsibilities in the NPT to limit the danger of nuclear war, the Preamble to the Treaty expresses a recognition by all state parties that they ‘need to make every effort to avert the danger of ... a [nuclear] war’ which requires ‘the co-operation of all States in the attainment of this objective’.<sup>35</sup> The result is that the reduction of nuclear risks, including the advancement of disarmament, is framed as a joint endeavour between the NWS and the NNWS founded on *shared responsibilities*.<sup>36</sup> As we noted in an earlier report co-authored with Alice Spilman, this point was reinforced at several points in the outcome document of the 1978 Special Session to the General Assembly on Disarmament (SSOD-1).<sup>37</sup> This document stated that ‘while disarmament is the responsibility of all States, the nuclear weapon States have the primary responsibility ... [although an] acceptable balance of mutual responsibilities and obligations for nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States should be strictly observed’.<sup>38</sup> The introduction of the word ‘primary’ was an attempt to bridge the notions of shared and special responsibilities, although (as with special responsibilities), it remains unclear how to translate this into a new consensus on responsibilities that can provide the basis for common actions.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the centrality of the principle of shared responsibilities in the NPT, successive Review Conferences (Rev Cons) have been characterised by a culture of blame in which NWS and NNWS have accused each other of failing to live up to their responsibilities under the Treaty. In his study ‘Shared Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament’ (2009), Scott Sagan responds to this tendency by reminding nuclear policy makers of the shared nature of nuclear responsibilities. He laments ‘that framing ... NWS ... as responsible for

35 *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, 1 July 1968, <<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/>>, last accessed 11 October 2020.

36 The report of the Secretary-General’s 2004 UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, expresses a similar notion in its call for a UN approach to collective security in the context of a shared intellectual commitment to the idea of ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ on the part of the panel members. For the Panel, ‘The collective security we seek to build today asserts a shared responsibility on the part of all States and international institutions’ to defend and uphold the values set out in the UN Charter, and they recommended a series of steps that possessor states should take to reduce the risks of nuclear conflict (United Nations, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*. New York: United Nations, 2004, pp.22, 38-43).

37 Alice Spilman, Nicholas J, Wheeler, and Sebastian Brixey-Williams, *Common Security through Nuclear Responsibilities* (BASIC: London, 2019), p.4.

38 ‘Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its Tenth Special session,’ United Nations, September 1978, <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/unoda-web/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-S10-4.pdf>> last accessed 29 April 2019, p.6.

39 Spilman et al., *Common Security*, p.5.

disarmament and NNWS responsible for accepting nonproliferation safeguards on their nuclear power programs ... is historically inaccurate and politically unfortunate ... because both Article IV and Article VI were written to apply to both the NWS and the NNWS'.<sup>40</sup> Instead, he advocates that, 'the current nuclear disarmament effort must be transformed from a debate among leaders in the NWS to a coordinated global effort of shared responsibilities between NWS and NNWS'.<sup>41</sup> The nuclear responsibilities approach explored in this report builds upon, and owes a debt of gratitude, to this call.

## 'Responsible Nuclear Weapon States'

Officials from every declared nuclear possessor have at one time or another described their state as a 'responsible nuclear weapons state' or with an equivalent form of words.<sup>42</sup> Through this rhetorical act, officials have sought to legitimise policies and practices (and in some cases counteract claims of irresponsibility), in order to set their state apart from others and mollify demands for disarmament.

The source of this kind of responsibility talk appears to have come from outside the NPT. Karthika Sasikumar traces India's conscious and largely-successful rhetorical 'strategy of constituting itself as a responsible nuclear power' to enable it to deflect some of the criticism of its 1998 nuclear tests.<sup>43</sup> This powerful framing was legitimated by the United States, which was previously highly critical of India's nuclear tests, in the 2005 US-India Nuclear Deal. The framework of the Deal was outlined in a joint statement by both leaders at a White House state banquet on 18 July 2005, which declared that 'as a responsible state with advanced nuclear technology, India should acquire the same benefits and advantages as other such states'.<sup>44</sup> Pakistan adopted a similar strategy; its 2004 *Export Control on Goods, Technologies, Material and Equipment related to Nuclear and Biological Weapons and their Delivery Systems Act* begins by declaring that Pakistan 'is determined to safeguard its national security and foreign policy objectives and to fulfill its international obligations as a responsible nuclear weapon State'.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the revelations about A.Q. Khan's illegal nuclear smuggling network in the same year and concerns about the security of Pakistan's nuclear assets from terrorist attacks have troubled the state's prospects for achieving a similar status to this day. The recognition that non-NPT possessor states were describing themselves as 'responsible' possessors in some ways left the NPT-recognised NWS, as well as the other possessors outside the Treaty, with little choice but to do the same, although they have done so with varying degrees of commitment.<sup>46</sup>

Of these, the United Kingdom has demonstrated a notable interest in the responsible nuclear weapon state framing, a brief history of which is given here. The United Kingdom has sought to substantiate its claims to

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40 Scott Sagan, 'Shared Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament', *Shared Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament: A Global Debate* (Cambridge MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences), pp.3-4.

41 Sagan, 'Shared Responsibilities', p.3.

42 Oliver Meier and Elisabeth Suh, *Reviving Nuclear Disarmament: Paths Towards a Joint Enterprise* (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2016), p.8.

43 Karthika Sasikumar, 'India's emergence as a "responsible" nuclear power', *International Journal* 62(4), 2007, pp.825-829.

44 Sasikumar, 'India's emergence as a "responsible" nuclear power', p.826. Nicola Leveringhaus and Kate Sullivan de Estrada note some of the ways in which India has sought to strengthen this framing by complying with key non-proliferation norms, while remaining outside of landmark nuclear treaties such as the NPT and CTBT (Nicola Leveringhaus and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, *Between Conformity and Innovation: China's and India's Quest for Status as Responsible Nuclear Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Research Archive, 2018, pp.17-19).

45 'Pakistan's national legislation entitled: "Export Control on Goods, Technologies, Material and Equipment related to Nuclear and Biological Weapons and their Delivery Systems Act, 2004", Information Circular for the IAEA, 23 November 2004, INFRIRC/636, p.111 <<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/infircs/2004/infirc636.pdf>> last accessed 15 October 2020.

46 This includes the DPRK which, as Duyeon Kim notes, has used responsibility talk extensively in order 'to portray [Kim Jong-un] as a leader of a normal, peace-loving country and a responsible, advanced nuclear power' (Duyeon Kim, 'The Panmunjom Declaration: What it wasn't supposed to be', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* <<https://thebulletin.org/2018/05/the-panmunjom-declaration-what-it-wasnt-supposed-to-be/>> last accessed 25 September 2020).

be a 'responsible' possessor since the mid-2000s, though its early invocations appear to have been more tactical and motivated by domestic political concerns. The 2006 White Paper, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, introduced the idea of the United Kingdom as 'a responsible steward of nuclear weapons, reducing our capability as circumstances have allowed'.<sup>47</sup> The question of replacing Trident was a politically complex issue for the New Labour Government (1997-2010), which took the decision in 2006 to table a vote in Parliament on whether to renew the system. Whilst Prime Minister Tony Blair and much of the Cabinet supported renewal,<sup>48</sup> the Labour Party was split and the price of securing the support of some of the key members of the government was a renewed commitment to multilateral disarmament. As Nick Ritchie observes, part of the government's strategy was to frame 'Britain as a responsible nuclear power deploying solely defensive and therefore benign nuclear arms'.<sup>49</sup> The 'responsible steward' framing was new, with no precedent in either the 1998 Strategic Defence Review or the 2003 Defence White Paper *Delivering Security in a Changing World*.<sup>50</sup>

The tensions within Labour Party nuclear weapons policy-making amidst the challenge of how to manage the conflict between deterrence and disarmament responsibilities was evident in a number of high-profile ministerial interventions into the debate following the Trident decision. The first was a keynote address to the Carnegie Non-Proliferation Conference in 2007 by Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who spoke candidly about the UK's deliberations 'to resolve the dilemma between our genuine commitment to abolition and our considered judgement that now was not the time to take a unilateral step to disarm'.<sup>51</sup> A year after Beckett's speech, Des Browne became the first sitting Defence Minister from a NWS to address the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, inviting states to take part in new multilateral verification efforts.<sup>52</sup> Following this, the United Kingdom initiated in collaboration with Norway (an NNWS) research into the technical means of verifying that nuclear warheads had been securely dismantled.<sup>53</sup> In doing so, the New Labour Government in its later years sought to mitigate the retention decision by leading by example on new programmes of work and moral leadership at the multilateral level. Nevertheless, the concept of what it

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- 47 Ministry of Defence, 'The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent', GOV.UK, December 4, 2006. <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-of-the-united-kingdoms-nuclear-deterrent>> last accessed 25 September 2020.
- 48 Blair, speaking in the House of Commons on the replacement of Trident, justified the United Kingdom's continuation of a strategic nuclear power into the second half of this century on the grounds that it would be imprudent to divest (irreversibly he assumed) the country of nuclear weapons given the United Kingdom had no assurances now, or in the future, that future powers might not threaten it with nuclear coercion or attack. Blair said, 'the one certain thing about our world today is its uncertainty . . . Our independent nuclear deterrent is the ultimate insurance . . . when every decade has a magnitude of difference with the last, and when the consequences of a misjudgment on this issue are potentially catastrophic, would we want to drop this insurance, not as part of a global move to do so, but on our own? I think not' (Tony Blair, 'Trident', *Hansard* [21], 4 December 2006, <<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2006-12-04b.21.0&s=vanguard+speaker%3A10047>>, last accessed 11 August 2020). Blair went on to write in his memoir that giving up the UK's strategic nuclear weapons capability was 'in an uncertain world, too big a risk for our defence'. However, he also recognised that the decision was not a straightforward one, and that there were good arguments the other way, focusing on the opportunity costs of the nuclear force on Britain's future conventional military preparedness. But in the final analysis, it was a combination of inertia and caution, and a strong sense that the UK nuclear deterrent would not be scrapped on his watch that drove him to renew Trident (Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Hutchinson, 2010), pp.635-6).
- 49 Nick Ritchie, 'Trident and British Identity: Letting Go Of Nuclear Weapons,' September 2008. <[https://www.york.ac.uk/media/politics/documents/research/Trident\\_and\\_British\\_Identity.pdf](https://www.york.ac.uk/media/politics/documents/research/Trident_and_British_Identity.pdf)> last accessed 25 September 2020.
- 50 Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998. <[https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172816/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/o/sdr1998\\_complete.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172816/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/o/sdr1998_complete.pdf)> last accessed 16 October 2020; Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper*, December 2003. <<http://archives.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/2008/IMG/pdf/whitepaper2003.pdf>> last accessed 16 October 2020.
- 51 Margaret Beckett, 'Keynote Address: A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2007/06/25/keynote-address-world-free-of-nuclear-weapons-event-1004>> last accessed April 24, 2019.
- 52 Des Browne, 'UK Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne Speech to the Conference on Disarmament', February 2008, Acronym Institute <<http://www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive/docs/0802/doco4.htm>> last accessed 25 September 2020.
- 53 'The United Kingdom - Norway Initiative: Research into the Verification of Nuclear Warhead Dismantlement' working paper submitted by the Kingdom of Norway and the United Kingdom to the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, May 2010, NPT.CONF.2010/WP.41.

## Excerpt of the UK's Official Statement on Pillar 1 of the NPT at the 2017 Preparatory Committee to the NPT delivered by Ambassador Matthew Rowland:

As a responsible Nuclear Weapons State the UK is committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We play a leading role on disarmament verification. We continue to press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament, including the entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and for successful negotiations in the CD on a fissile material cut-off treaty. And, in our shared effort to strengthen international peace and security and to address further prospects for nuclear disarmament, we will continue to work to build trust and confidence amongst the P5.

Our Negative Security Assurances regarding the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, our commitment to maintain only the minimal credible deterrent, and our transparency about our arsenal and declaratory policy all contribute to the UK being a responsible NWS. There are other factors too:

The UK maintains a minimum credible level of deterrence, with a single Trident submarine on patrol, normally on several days 'notice to fire'. For over twenty years, UK nuclear weapons have been de-targeted;

- We have had a voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive nuclear devices since 1995, and have declared the amount of fissile material produced prior to the onset of that moratorium;
- We are a strong supporter of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, which enhance regional and international security;
- We have strict accountancy and control measures for military nuclear material which are based on UK legislation and industry best practice and take our responsibilities for protecting our military nuclear material very seriously;
- And we have a well-established and on-going programme of activity to protect defence networks and the information they hold from cyber attack.



It is hard to see how continuing assertions on the part of individual possessors that they are responsible nuclear sovereigns will ever achieve the kind of legitimacy that would be needed to reinvigorate a broader sense of shared responsibility in global nuclear politics.

would mean to be a 'responsible steward of nuclear weapons' was nowhere explicitly spelled out by the government.

By the beginning of the Review Cycle leading up to the Tenth NPT Review Conference, the domestic political debate around Trident replacement had largely been settled. The last major debate about Trident – which took place in 2016 and concerned the (delayed) start of manufacturing the *Dreadnought*-class SSBN to replace the aging *Vanguard*-class after completion of the preparatory design process – passed more easily than that the 2006 vote.<sup>54</sup> During this period, the United Kingdom has looked to take on more of a norm entrepreneurial role,<sup>55</sup> albeit always without upsetting the apple cart, as evidenced by its attempts to set out what conditions should be met if a state is to be recognised as a 'responsible Nuclear Weapons State'. The United Kingdom has sought to tie these conditions directly to the NPT, a move that can be seen as partially negating legitimising claims by possessor states outside the treaty like India and Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> The UK's Official Statement on Pillar 1 of the NPT at the 2017 Preparatory Committee to the NPT, delivered by Ambassador Matthew Rowland, is particularly noteworthy for its long list of policies and practices that the United Kingdom ascribes to be normatively-desirable (see box).<sup>57</sup> In a talk to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and Non-Proliferation, the UK's Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, Aidan Liddle, cited 'championing a global discussion on the responsibilities of states around nuclear weapons' as one of the state's three priorities in the Tenth NPT Review Cycle.<sup>58</sup> What appears to be underway is a gradual shift in UK official statements, in which responsibility talk transitions from a politically convenient adjective

54 Sebastian Brixey-Williams, 'Monday's Trident Debate: What was mentioned, what was left out?' BASIC, 19 July 2016. <<https://basicint.org/news/2016/mondays-trident-debate-what-was-mentioned-what-was-left-out>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

55 Cass Sunstein, 'Social Norms and Social Roles', *Columbia Law Review* 96:4 (1996), pp.903-968; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization* 52:4 (1998), pp.887-917; Carmen Wunderlich and Harald Müller, 'Not lost in contestation: How norm entrepreneurs frame norm development in the nuclear nonproliferation regime', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 39: 3 (2018), pp. 341-366.

56 Sasikumar, 'India's Emergence as a "Responsible" Nuclear Power', pp. 825-844.

57 United Kingdom, '2017 Preparatory Committee to the 2020 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Pillar I,' presented at the 2017 Preparatory Committee to the 2020 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 2-12 May 2017. <<http://statements.unmeetings.org/media2/18559243/uk-prepcom-general-uk-statement-2018-final.pdf>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

58 Maxwell Downman, 'The United Kingdom's Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Diplomacy', BASIC, 20 February 2019. <<https://basicint.org/the-united-kingdoms-non-proliferation-and-disarmament-diplomacy/>> last accessed 16 October 2020.

towards a more fleshed-out position and advocacy strategy. This has both inspired and been inspired by the development of the notion of 'responsible nuclear sovereignty'.

## 'Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty'

Recognising and responding to the tendency of possessor states to adopt the label 'responsible' without also detailing what that entails, William Walker ventured to answer this question in his seminal 2010 article, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty'.<sup>59</sup> Inspired by the 'sovereignty as responsibility' idea,<sup>60</sup> and critically appraising the UK Government's claim to be a 'responsible steward', Walker asked: 'what are the responsibilities of a nuclear sovereign, the government of a state that possesses nuclear arms?'<sup>61</sup> He navigated this question by developing the concept of 'responsible nuclear sovereignty' (RNS), a *via media* (middle way) between two extremes, each of which he found unsatisfactory. At one extreme he located the realist position, which holds that the primary responsibility of a state is to protect the security of its citizens; in the nuclear age, the ultimate means of this protection are nuclear weapons. At the other extreme, he located the common humanity position where 'all states have a paramount responsibility to abolish nuclear weapons for ethical and prudential reasons'.<sup>62</sup> Walker's normative conception of what it is to be a responsible nuclear sovereign, and the moral conditions that have to be satisfied before a state can be judged a 'responsible' state, borrows from both of the above extremes. He described his intermediate conception of RNS in the following terms:

*Although 'nuclear sovereigns' have a responsibility to protect themselves and their citizens from attack or intimidation, nuclear weapons must be used politically and militarily with the utmost restraint, and nuclear-armed states have an exceptional duty of care over the capabilities that they have acquired. Furthermore, they have a responsibility to move themselves and others towards nuclear disarmament – to create the conditions in which it can happen safely, verifiably, and without unduly endangering international order.*<sup>63</sup>

In Walker's conception, possession of the material capability of nuclear weapons is not sufficient to warrant a state claiming to be, or being recognised by others, as a legitimate nuclear sovereign. Rather, such recognition is conditional upon a state living up to a set of agreed, though potentially changing, set of responsibilities.

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59 William Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty,' *International Affairs* 86:2 (2010), p.449. See also: Kate Sullivan, *'Is India a Responsible Nuclear Power?'* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2014); Amelia Morgan and Heather Williams, *Nuclear Responsibility: A New Framework to Assess U.S. and Russian Behaviour* (London: European Leadership Network, 2018); John Gower, 'Improving Nuclear Strategic Stability Through a Responsibility-Based Approach: A platform for 21st Century Arms Control', *Council on Strategic Risks*, 14 January 2019 <<https://councilonstrategicrisks.org/2019/01/14/nuclear-strategic-stability-the-arms-control-in-the-21st-century/#:~:text=Second%2C%20Gower%20sets%20a%20common,Responsible%20Nuclear%20Weapon%20Capable%20States.&text=He%20offers%20a%20trajectory%20for,lowering%20reliance%20on%20nuclear%20weapons>> last accessed 15 October 2020.

60 And its related offspring, the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), which was unanimously endorsed by Heads of State and Governments in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 UN World Summit Outcome Document (United Nations, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005, A/RES/60/1, 16 September 2005). The original concept of R2P was developed by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in its 2001 report entitled *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: IDRC, 2001).

61 Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty,' p.449.

62 Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty,' p.449.

63 Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty,' pp.449-450. See also William Walker and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'The Problem of Weak Nuclear States', *The Nonproliferation Review*, 20:3 (2013), pp.411-31.

## The Drawbacks of Existing Responsibility Talk in Global Nuclear Politics

The above examples show that responsibility talk is not new to global nuclear politics. However, while the principles of shared, special, or primary responsibilities assert important normative declarations, their deployments often feel tactical and they have yet to transition into actionable and accountable policies and practices that drive action. Meanwhile, the comparatively more recent narrative about who might or might not be a 'responsible' state, or exhibit 'responsible' sovereignty, remains contested as illegitimate. This sentiment is succinctly captured in the widely-cited words of the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon: 'There are no right hands for wrong weapons'.<sup>64</sup> The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), the civil society body that drove the TPNW, has been forthright in trying to counter the idea of the responsible nuclear sovereign: 'The nuclear-armed states' mantra-like assertions that they are "responsible nuclear-weapon states" are in fact grossly irresponsible. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk remains that they could be used, whether by accident or design'.<sup>65</sup> Equivalent statements have been heard in UN fora on multiple occasions, particularly among states of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the heart of this counter-movement is the concern that the 'responsible' label could be wielded as an argument for indefinite retention, thereby subverting the objective of disarmament. Although Walker sees RNS as including a responsibility to disarm, he is cognisant of the 'disconcerting' prospect that possessor states (and potentially their allies) could co-opt or manipulate the concept 'as a pretext for not crossing the threshold into disarmament'.<sup>66</sup> Quite what shape this co-option might take is unpredictable and experts have advised caution about letting the genie out of the bottle. Nina Tannenwald has argued that a state should only be able to claim the mantle of a 'responsible nuclear state' if that 'oft-used label [is only applied] to those states that have demonstrated a concrete commitment to disarmament'.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, although she makes some recommendations, Tannenwald does not provide clear criteria by which to judge what counts as a 'concrete commitment', and the ambiguity of the formulation could itself be open to co-option by possessor states – perhaps even putting aside their own conflicts to collectively hold the line that the security conditions are not ripe for greater steps towards multilateral nuclear disarmament.

The endeavours to sketch out more responsible nuclear policies and practices are likely not all made with bad intent. However, it is hard to see how continuing assertions on the part of individual possessors that they are responsible nuclear sovereigns will ever achieve the kind of legitimacy that would be needed to reinvigorate a broader sense of shared responsibility in global nuclear politics. Such a claim excludes other voices – state and non-state – who reject the notion of responsible nuclear statehood as a dangerous contradiction in terms. For those who are more sympathetic to the idea of responsible nuclear sovereignty, such unilateral claims will, nevertheless, always involve in Walker's words, 'an unavoidable element of subjectivity'.<sup>68</sup> The question remains: 'responsible for whom?' and 'from whose perspective?'

It is at this impasse that we advocate for an inclusive dialogue-based approach in which perceptions of responsibility can be collectively discussed and shared understandings be realised. To this end, our Programme of work aims to make a modest contribution here by developing a method in the next section through which conceptions of responsibility might be intersubjectively agreed, making possible new practices of nuclear risk reduction that can promote mutual security.

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64 Ban Ki-moon, 'There Are No Right Hands That Can Handle These Wrong Weapons', Resolution 1540 event remarks, 22 April 2013, <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sgsm14968.doc.htm>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

65 ICAN, 'Will the "responsible states" please stand up?' ICAN <<http://www.icanw.org/campaign-news/npt-2018-responsible-states-please-stand-up/>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

66 Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty', p.451. One of the authors had also highlighted this concern in an earlier paper, writing that 'the framing of responsible nuclear sovereignty . . . might be used to underpin the status quo. It is conceivable that states could co-opt the phrase to justify their continued possession of nuclear weapons in well-managed stockpiles'. See: Sebastian Brixey-Williams and Paul Ingram, *Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty and the Future of the Global Nuclear Order* (London: BASIC, 2017) p.12. See also Laura Considine and James Souter, 'State Responsibilities and International Nuclear Politics' (copy on file with the authors).

67 Nina Tannenwald, 'The Vanishing Nuclear Taboo?' *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2018, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-10-15/vanishing-nuclear-taboo>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

68 Walker, 'The UK, threshold status and responsible nuclear sovereignty', p.451.

### SECTION III:

# The Nuclear Responsibilities Method

The Nuclear Responsibilities Method comprises a facilitated two-stage process to support officials, non-governmental experts, and publics in thinking and talking about their responsibilities, and the responsibilities of others, in relation to nuclear weapons.

In producing the Method, we have sought to contribute a tool that can help facilitate more empathic and values-driven policy making and dialogue, and move global nuclear politics away from its current culture of blame. In doing so, we intend for this shift to help reduce nuclear risks (including the achievement of disarmament) in the service of mutual security.

The Method has been developed between 2018-2020 through an iterative and interactive Track 1.5 process involving governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from a range of states. An early prototype of the Method provided the framework for the Programme's activities during the proof of concept period, as explored in Section IV. In this section, we offer the results of that process: a distilled and honed explanation of the Method that is intended to clearly explain its underlying structure and rationale. It is expected that the Method will continue to evolve as it is practiced, but below we explain how it is presently conceived and how it will guide future work.

Section II explored whether earlier diplomatic and academic attempts to bring together nuclear weapons and responsibility was fit for the purpose of facilitating a meaningful and respectful dialogue on this subject. Our conclusion was that the subjectivity and fuzziness of those attempts demanded a new approach. Therefore, before explaining the Method's two-stage process, it is important to outline the two main shifts that differentiate our approach to these earlier attempts.

**First, we advocate a broad shift in focus away from asking who or what is 'responsible' or 'irresponsible', and instead towards asking what a given stakeholder's 'responsibilities' are.** This shift may not seem a dramatic one, but language matters because it enables and constrains state policies. While 'responsible' (an adjective) and 'responsibilities' (a plural noun) share an etymological root, they are used in quite different ways. To call someone *responsible* is to make a value judgement about them that is immediately vulnerable to the problem of subjectivity. By contrast, our experience has shown that to ask open questions (in a safe environment for dialogue) about what an actor's plural *responsibilities* are invites creative thinking and collaborative discussion. Experience shows that it also opens up the discourse to consider 'softer' normative



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One important implication of our position is that we would encourage possessor states and their allies to discard the language of ‘responsible nuclear weapon state’ in its various forms.

responsibilities, many of which are not codified within domestic or international law.<sup>69</sup> These non-binding responsibilities were often the most interesting to discuss, because they underpin existing norms (and may in time harden into more formalised legal obligations) or because they may end up taking on more weight if legal restraints erode.

One important implication of our position is that we would encourage possessor states and their allies to discard the language of ‘responsible nuclear weapon state’ in its various forms. The concept’s evident divisiveness within the policy community and the risk that it could be cynically misused renders it limited, and perhaps even counterproductive, as a way of fostering an inclusive and pluralistic conversation on responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons. It is likely that such claims by possessor states are unlikely to disappear completely, and it can be true that such claims sometimes open a space for dialogue by prompting fruit-bearing questions and answers that explore what ‘responsible’ means to them. Nevertheless, we would generally advocate that an exploratory focus on stakeholders’ plural responsibilities is a more appropriate starting point for dialogue than the subjective question of who is or is not responsible.

**Second, we take the perspective that any stakeholder with the capacity to influence nuclear weapons futures has responsibilities around nuclear weapons and is therefore important to engage.** This assumption contrasts to narrower approaches that principally focus on the responsibilities (or ‘responsibility’) of states, most usually the nuclear possessor states, but which paint an incomplete picture of the responsibilities of non-possessor and non-state stakeholders. Indeed, global nuclear politics comprises a far broader set of individuals and institutional stakeholders that include international organisations, alliances, militaries, think tanks and civil society organisations, universities, defence contractors, private sector consultancies, science and technology bodies, political parties, and the media.

To reinforce this idea and to help order these stakeholders’ responsibilities, we have taken inspiration from international environmental law, where the principle that every stakeholder should be allocated fair and appropriate responsibilities is widely-accepted. Specifically, the 1992 *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* enshrined the idea that ‘the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions’,<sup>70</sup> and this principle has since been repeated in later texts including the 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement.<sup>71</sup>

Transplanting this concept, the Nuclear Responsibilities Method is underpinned by the principle that stakeholders have ‘common but differentiated responsibilities, and respective capabilities’ (CBDR-RC) in relation to the management of nuclear weapons and nuclear risks.<sup>72</sup> Akin to the idea of ‘shared responsibilities’ discussed in the previous section, CBDR-RC frames this objective as a collective (rather than competitive) endeavour. However, it is a preferable form of words because it draws attention to the fact that some responsibilities need to be universally upheld (‘common’) and that others should be distributed in an equitable and transparent manner (‘differentiated’). Just as the acceptance of the CBDR-RC principle provided a framework for differentiated responsibilities in the climate change regime, so we hope that it might play a similar role in relation to nuclear weapons.

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69 The Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities has tended to reserve the word ‘obligations’ to refer to legal duties, and use the word ‘responsibilities’ to refer to the parent category that captures both obligations and normative (non-legal) duties.

70 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, FCCC/INFORMAL/84 GE.05-62220 (E) 200705, adopted 9 May 1992.

71 UNFCCC, Conference of the Parties, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, 12 December 2015, p.21.

72 Sebastian Brixey-Williams, *Common but Differentiated Nuclear Responsibilities: Perspectives from Tokyo* (London: BASIC, 2019).

Crucially, by framing responsibilities as differentiated, we seek to avoid being drawn into contested debates about whether some stakeholders' responsibilities are greater or more important than others. Experience has shown that this debate has a tendency to reopen the door to blame between possessors and non-possessors, and adds justification to stalemate-driving declarations by some non-possessors that they will not take on additional 'lesser' responsibilities (such as signature of the Additional Protocol) until the possessor states have lived up to their 'greater' disarmament responsibilities under Article VI of the NPT. Instead, in our view, the phrase encourages actors to consider how their own roles and responsibilities sit within a complex system of interdependent parts. As one participant succinctly put it, the invocation of CBDR-RC means that the Nuclear Responsibilities Method 'is predicated on the notion that we all live in an ecosystem whose sustainability depends on collective efforts, with due consideration of the distinctive capacities and roles of each of the participants'.

There is no set of universally-agreed indicators that can be used to determine which stakeholders have which responsibilities in a *top-down* manner. As a result, as explained below, the Nuclear Responsibilities Method's two-stage process embraces a *bottom-up* approach in which the stakeholders involved – who in most cases can be expected to be the experts on their own responsibilities – are encouraged to propose their own conceptions of their responsibilities and have those understandings deliberated by others in a process of reciprocal dialogue.

Connected to this, we also embrace the idea that stakeholders' responsibilities can and should evolve to meet new strategic and normative environments. History shows that what counted as a legitimate perception of responsibilities in one age may change in another, and in some cases, fully reverse the previous conception. For instance, the norm of underground nuclear testing up until the early 1990s moratoria by the NWS has given way to a widespread sense that states have a responsibility not to indulge in explosive testing of nuclear weapons, even in the absence of a functional Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty.<sup>73</sup> The reason that norms around nuclear weapons change is because the conceptions of nuclear responsibilities that underpin them evolve over time in the context of wider political and social changes. This calls for a dynamic and open-ended approach.

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73 Stephen Herzog, Benoît Pelopidas, and Fabrício Fialho, 'Donald Trump Could Lose the Election by Authorizing a New Nuclear Weapons Test', *National Interest*, 23 June 2020, <<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/donald-trump-could-lose-election-authorizing-new-nuclear-weapons-test-163328>>last accessed 25 September 2020; Michael Krepon, 'Where are we? And where do we go from here?', *Arms Control Wonk*, 9 February 2020, <<https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/1208780/where-are-we-and-where-do-we-go-from-here/>>last accessed 25 September 2020.

## The Method's Facilitated Two-Stage Process

The Nuclear Responsibilities Method is composed of a facilitated two-stage process to assist stakeholders to think and talk about their responsibilities and the responsibilities of others in relation to nuclear weapons. The first stage is designed to aid the thinking dimension (which we call 'critical introspection'), while the second stage is designed to structure the talking dimension (which we call 'empathic dialogue').

### Stage One: Critical Introspection

During the critical introspection stage, each party to the process is invited to look inwards at themselves with a critical eye, and consider key questions about their perceptions of their responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons. These include (a) what they understand their own responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons to be and why; (b) what the sources of their responsibilities are; (c) who or what the beneficiaries of their responsibilities are; (d) whether they have responsibilities that conflict with one another, and how they are or could be managed; (e) whether they are fulfilling their conceptions of their responsibilities; (f) how their understandings of their responsibilities may be perceived by others; and (g) how their responsibilities may interact with those of others. The purpose of the exercise is to enable each party to develop greater conceptual clarity around the conceptions of responsibility that they hold, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to nuclear weapons, and generate new insights that could enrich decision making and signalling. Indeed, it is only by first identifying one's own responsibilities that one can begin to ask whether one is fulfilling them.

When a party is a collective entity, this process first starts with individual representatives using questionnaires and facilitated interviews, before the group is brought together to consider the question as a collective in a facilitated session.<sup>74</sup> It is essential that a wide range of voices are included in such discussions to ensure demographic and cognitive diversity of opinion, thereby safeguarding against groupthink. In the case of states, for example, such collective discussions should take place at the track 1.5 level, including stakeholders from across the political spectrum (i.e. from defence officials to anti-nuclear civil society advocates). Our expectation is that having taken part in the critical introspection process, participants will come to discover that their perceptions of their responsibilities have become clearer, or may have even shifted from what they thought they were.

There are several reasons for starting the Method with the critical introspection process. Firstly, this stage helps ensure that all parties understand the objectives of the overall process and have an opportunity to explore their ideas about responsibilities in a safe environment on their own or with others in their network. Secondly, doing the initial 'back-end' thinking work is intended to ensure that parties come to the dialogues with well thought-out understandings of their own perceptions. Thirdly, it is intended to disrupt the tendency towards blame within policy debates, by encouraging parties to first think about – and take radical ownership of – how they understand their own responsibilities and whether they are fulfilling them. The intention here is to challenge head-on the presumption that blockages in the risk reduction agenda are primarily (or even exclusively) caused by a failure of others to live up to their responsibilities. For these reasons, it seems likely that parties that can demonstrate that they have spent the time looking at themselves first in good faith before seeking to engage with the responsibilities of others will do so with greater insight and legitimacy in the eyes of others.

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<sup>74</sup> The facilitators' role here is to ask appropriate questions that enable the parties to develop their answers themselves, rather than make substantive contributions to the discussion.



The Nuclear Responsibilities Method’s two-stage process embraces a bottom-up approach in which the stakeholders involved are encouraged to propose their own conceptions of their responsibilities and have those understandings deliberated by others in a process of reciprocal dialogue.

The critical introspection process can help parties surface conflicting responsibilities – two or more responsibilities that are in tension with one another – and recognise the trade-offs that exist between them. For example, possessor states and allies that continue to rely on nuclear deterrence for their security frequently reference a conflict between the responsibilities to ensure national security (which is seen by many to be most effectively fulfilled through the practice of nuclear deterrence) and to achieve nuclear disarmament. Another example exists in relation to the responsibilities to increase the safety of nuclear weapons facilities through greater transparency measures, and to ensure that the same facilities remain secure from a state-based or terrorist attack (which may become more vulnerable through more transparency measures). By becoming more aware of the conflicting responsibilities that inhabit parties’ thinking, practitioners may come up with new ways of thinking about how to manage and perhaps even resolve these conflicts through the adoption of new policies and practices. These ideas can then potentially be further explored in the second stage of the process.

### **Stage Two: Empathic Dialogue**

Although the critical introspection process can help parties develop greater conceptual clarity about their own perceptions of their responsibilities, the subjective nature of this kind of inquiry cannot assist parties in knowing whether their perceptions are shared or considered legitimate by *others*. Indeed, given the absence of any objective standard of responsibility, legitimate and shared understandings of the parties’ nuclear responsibilities can *only* be agreed through an intersubjective dialogue between the parties themselves: the second stage of the Method.

The empathic dialogue stage therefore brings parties together in one or more facilitated meetings and is designed to enable a constructive and meaningful conversation about responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons between parties who may hold highly divergent normative perspectives. During the dialogues, parties share the perceptions and insights they each generated in the critical introspection stage with one another, in order to (a) build up a shared baseline of understanding as to how the different parties conceive of their responsibilities; (b) understand whether their perceptions are considered to be legitimate by others; (c) identify areas of convergence and divergence, as well as conflicting responsibilities that are relevant to the



other parties; (d) discuss opportunities to manage or overcome conflicts and areas of divergence in a collective and participatory approach; (e) discuss opportunities to better fulfil their responsibilities towards one another; (f) consider reciprocal responsibilities that each party could agree in relation to the other; and (g) consider whether existing perceptions can be revised (by imagining new responsibilities together) that could better serve a mutual security agenda. Although the facilitators provide guidance and structure, to a large extent the parties lead the discussion by selecting the areas they would like to progress collectively.

The Method depends upon parties engaging with genuine good intent, answering honestly, allowing some vulnerability, and embracing pluralism by being willing to sit down and listen to parties who may hold alternative, but no-less legitimate, perceptions of their and others' responsibilities. Central to the endeavour is the practice and development of empathy, defined by Roman Krznaric as 'the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions'.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, thinking and talking about nuclear responsibilities can be understood as an entry point to a more empathic understanding of each other's policies and practices, that can put one's own perceptions into perspective. Throughout both stages, the facilitators will use prompts and role-reversal techniques to enable parties to take alternative perspectives in order to awaken the empathy response.

Empathy can vary, ranging from 'cognitive empathy' wherein parties seek to adopt each other's perspectives at the intellectual level, to 'affective empathy' which involves sharing the feelings of others, and the empathic

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75 Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why it Matters, and How to Get It* (London: Rider, 2014), p.x.

dialogue looks to explore both to varying degrees.<sup>76</sup> The importance of empathy in international relations is increasingly recognised in academic scholarship, and has an even longer history in the field of conflict resolution.<sup>77</sup> Claire Yorke explained the importance of empathising with others in the context of challenging the binary between reason and emotion that has characterised much strategic theorising in international relations. She wrote:

*ideas of reason and emotion cannot, indeed should not, be easily or neatly separated. People are inherently emotional beings, responding not only to ideas of reason or logical interests, but to feelings such as pride, grief, shame, or hope, and to recognition by others of these experiences. Emotions, such as fear or joy, tend to govern what it is one values and the decisions that follow.*<sup>78</sup>

One form of empathy that is particularly relevant in the context of conflictual relationships is what has been called 'security dilemma sensibility' (SDS). This is defined by Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler as:

*an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's actions may play in provoking that fear.*<sup>79</sup>

We are not arguing that all conflicts are generated by 'security dilemma dynamics' (i.e. reciprocal fears on the part of actors who believe they are responding defensively to the provocations of others) which can be corrected by increased empathy.<sup>80</sup> However, by generating respectful and structured discussions that help surface divergent or conflicting understandings of responsibilities, the Method is designed to help parties explore the possibilities for developing SDS so that there is increased awareness of how their perceptions of their responsibilities (and the fulfilment thereof) give rise to policy and practices that in turn, feed the dynamics of fear and distrust, among others.

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76 Claire Yorke, The Significance and Limitations of Empathy in Strategic Communications, *Defence Strategic Communications 2*, 2017, p.142.

77 Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution (Third Edition)* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p.60.

78 Yorke, The Significance and Limitations, pp.140-141.

79 Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.7.

80 The classic text on the security dilemma and its dynamics is Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

# Summary of the Nuclear Responsibilities Method

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## Stage One: Critical Introspection

The facilitated critical introspection process is designed to enable parties to:

1. Develop greater clarity and insights in relation to what they understand their own responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons to be, where they come from, and whom they benefit.
2. Surface conflicting responsibilities, which can then be better managed or perhaps transcended.
3. Step out of a mindset of blame by taking possession of their own responsibilities, and considering how they can be better fulfilled.
4. Explore the possibility for unilateral measures that they can take in the short-term to fulfil their responsibilities in their policies and practices.
5. Consider how their own perceptions of their responsibilities might be interpreted by, and interact with the perceptions of, others.

## Stage Two: Empathic Dialogue

The empathic dialogue process is designed to enable parties to:

1. Communicate their conceptions of their responsibilities with each other, thereby building up a shared understanding that can help contextualise their policies and practices to reduce misperceptions.
  2. Collectively identify areas of convergence and divergence and look for joint opportunities to balance the inherent tensions of conflicting responsibilities.
  3. Discuss opportunities to better fulfil responsibilities to one another.
  4. Agree upon reciprocal responsibilities that reduce both mistrust and distrust contributing to the goal of building mutual security.
  5. Create opportunities to revise existing conceptions of responsibilities, by imagining new ones together.
  6. Cultivate the exercise of 'security dilemma sensibility' on the part of participants as to how their own government's actions might affect the security of others.
  7. Explore the possibilities for new unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral risk-reduction measures.
  8. Create a safe space in which to develop interpersonal trust such that participants in the process believe each is sincerely committed to the process of dialogue.
  9. Take back new ideas to an ongoing critical introspection process.
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# Prospective Outcomes

The broader purpose of practicing this Method is to help parties better understand each other and provide them with a new vocabulary that can gradually shift the nature of the contemporary global conversation on nuclear weapons away from one characterised by rights, blame, suspicion, and varying degrees of distrust, towards one built on responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and even trust.

This process is intended to ‘start in the room’ through the reduction of interpersonal mistrust and distrust and, over time, the development of interpersonal trust between the participants going through the process together. The Method is designed to enable parties to reflect on and address the reasons why their governments may mistrust or distrust one another. Where these conflicts are driven by misperceptions and misunderstandings, it offers a safe space to explore the possibilities of reducing nuclear risks through new policies – unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral – that promote mutual reassurance.

The two stages are designed to take place sequentially, and it should be easy to see how the back-end critical introspection process can serve as important preparatory work for each of the parties before they engage in the empathic dialogue process. The critical introspection process alone may yield important and impactful outcomes if it enables the parties to identify unilateral risk reduction measures. However, it is preferable that such measures are discussed with the group before implementation to ensure that there are shared understandings of their interpretation. It is likely to be more challenging to hold an empathic dialogue without first having been through the preparatory critical introspection process.

After the first run through both stages, the two processes are intended to generate a virtuous cycle that can power an iterative loop. Following an empathic dialogue between states, for instance, the hope is that officials will return to capitals and continue the critical introspection process at the domestic level, the products of which will then emerge in later dialogues both inside and outside the Programme. Over time, we hope that the habits of critical introspection and empathic dialogue may start to structure thinking, or even become institutionalised, within global nuclear politics. To this end, we would suggest that parties look to develop ‘habits of introspection’, inspired by – and as a natural partner to – what Lewis Dunn has called ‘habits of cooperation’.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, while in the first instance, these dialogues will be facilitated by professionals directly involved in the Programme, other practitioners may be accredited through training programmes in the longer term. Sustainability and scalability were important factors in the design of the Method from the outset.

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81 Lewis Dunn, ‘The strategic elimination of nuclear weapons: an alternative global agenda for nuclear disarmament’, *The Nonproliferation Review* 24:5-6 (2017) pp. 401-435.

## SECTION IV:

# Road-Testing the Nuclear Responsibilities Method

Between 2018 and 2020, the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities held a series of one-on-one and group dialogues with officials and experts from a range of states to develop our ideas and road-test a prototype form of the Nuclear Responsibilities Method.

We conceived of this as a 'proof of concept' stage, with the intention of gathering a full spectrum of views that would help make the method as inclusive, robust, and non-polarising possible. This is essential to achieve the Programme's overall mission of eliminating the culture of blame through new mistrust and distrust-reducing forms of cooperation that reduce nuclear risks (including the advancement of nuclear disarmament). The Programme works predominantly through dialogue, and in this stage used two principal types, each with its own objective: five national roundtables, followed by one five-way strategic dialogue.

## The Principles of the Dialogues

The partnership between BASIC and the ICCS was conceived in order to draw together BASIC's creative dialogue facilitation and the Institute's academic expertise on responsibilities and trust-building, as well as their joint expertise on the global nuclear order, risk reduction, and nuclear disarmament. Both institutions also have a recognised reputation for convening innovative and trustworthy dialogues across political divides that produce meaningful outcomes.

The Programme adhered to a set of dialogical principles that derive from the institutional values of BASIC and the ICCS. These were adopted to enable meaningful exchange and help ensure that the meeting chairs remain genuinely honest brokers. The roundtable meetings have been conducted as a series of guided facilitations where the chairs have tried not to offer substantive proposals of their own, take sides, or try to judge between competing conceptions of responsibilities. The 'nuclear responsibilities dialogues' have embraced the principles of non-judgement, pluralism, inclusivity, active listening, and empathy. In doing so, the aim has been to involve a wide range of stakeholders, helping to create an atmosphere in which all parties felt comfortable expressing their own conceptions of responsibility without concern at being shamed or blamed. This was essential given as we have argued that notions of responsibility are inherently subjective and can only become shared practices if they are contested and potentially agreed through a

dialogical process.<sup>82</sup> Neutrality of this kind on the part of the facilitating team is crucial to ensure that all the parties trust in the process.

## The National Roundtables

Through a set of national roundtables held under the Chatham House Rule in the capitals of five states, the Programme sought to stimulate a critically introspective process among officials and experts at the national level, and assist them in articulating each state's conception of its nuclear responsibilities. In doing so, the Programme sought to demonstrate the value of thinking and talking about nuclear responsibilities at the national level to constituencies in each state, and prepare the ground for multilateral exchange.

Five states were approached as potential hosts for the roundtables. To maximise the potential of the 'proof of concept' stage, they were selected as a representative sample of different positions on the legitimacy and utility of nuclear weapons in the global order. Given here in the order that the roundtables took place, these were:

1. **The United Kingdom** (London, October 2018), a NWS with a demonstrable interest in the value of framing nuclear weapons policy in terms of responsibilities (see Section II) and which sponsored the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities during this period.
2. **Japan** (Tokyo, January 2019), a NNWS with a full nuclear fuel-cycle that bases its security on US extended deterrence and is committed to multilateral nuclear disarmament as a result of being the only country to have suffered two nuclear attacks as part of a wartime strategy.
3. **Malaysia** (Kuala Lumpur, March 2019), a NNWS that has played a leading role in bringing forward the TPNW, that served as the President of the 2019 NPT Prep Com, and that will hold the chair of Main Committee I at the Tenth Review Conference.
4. **The Netherlands** (The Hague, August 2019), a NNWS with a well-known NATO nuclear mission and proponent of both nuclear deterrence and nuclear disarmament, positioning itself as a 'bridge building' state.
5. **Brazil** (São Paulo, November 2019), one of the six 'core group' NNWS that led the diplomatic process to conclude the TPNW.

Of these, the United Kingdom, Japan, and the Netherlands might be clustered at the 'pro-nuclear' end of the spectrum, while Malaysia and Brazil would usually be clustered at the 'anti-nuclear' end. Japan and the Netherlands were also selected because they are active members of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI): a grouping of 12 member states of the NPT founded in 2010 on the principles of cooperation and bridge-building across political divides to 'jointly to advance the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agendas as mutually reinforcing processes'.<sup>83</sup> We anticipated that if all five states could agree that the Method would make an important contribution – and more importantly, that they could demonstrate their ability to have a meaningful conversation through it – we could be relatively confident that it would be equally well-received amongst the vast majority of states.

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<sup>82</sup> Wunderlich and Müller, 'Not lost in contestation', pp.341-366.

<sup>83</sup> Nuclear Threat Initiative, 'Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI)', 31 May 2020, <<https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/non-proliferation-and-disarmament-initiative-npdi/>>, last accessed 11 October 2020.

Each day-long national dialogue was organised around a set of key discussion questions. Participants were asked to consider the following five themes:

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1. **What might be the opportunities and risks of reframing nuclear weapons policy through the lens of responsibilities?**
  2. **What are the core responsibilities of nuclear possessor states?**
  3. **What are the core responsibilities of non-possessor states?**
  4. **How does your own state conceive of its core nuclear responsibilities?**
  5. **Where, and with whom, should the Programme engage next to increase the impact and legitimacy of the nuclear responsibilities approach?**
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Experts were drawn from a wide-range of backgrounds, which varied to some extent from state to state. These included current and former officials from each state's Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Departments for Trade, Ministry of Energy, national nuclear regulators, and national intelligence services, as well as experts from think tanks, academia, and civil society. As a result, perspectives on nuclear responsibilities were wide-ranging, and at times required careful management to maintain a respectful dialogue.

After each roundtable, BASIC and the ICCS produced a report which both documented the discussion and built upon it with additional research and thinking, with the exception of the first meeting in the United Kingdom, which has been documented in more detail below. These reports are the fullest accounts of these meetings, but they have been briefly summarised below. Owing to each country's unique national circumstances and capabilities, and the relatively light-touch chairing style, each national roundtable dialogue had its own character and distinct substantive discussions. Longlists of all the responsibilities proposed during each national roundtable are found in each roundtable report, to give a sense of the breadth of contributions.

# The Five-Way Dialogue

Through a strategic dialogue in London in January 2020, at the end of the two year ‘proof of concept’ period, the Programme brought two to three officials and experts from the five states to exchange their experiences of the national roundtables, gather feedback on the conceptions of nuclear responsibilities that they reached, and chart the next steps in seeding the idea in national and global public policy debates. The idea was that these encounters could then generate ideas and reflections that these officials and experts could take back into the national process of critical introspection, and also increase empathy on the part of those present for their counterparts’ understandings of their nuclear responsibilities.

The second goal of the five-way dialogue was the reduction of mistrust, and even distrust, and the development of trust between the parties present. As with all the national roundtables, the Programme proceeds from the theoretical starting point that face-to-face interaction has great potential to promote interpersonal trust through a process of social bond formation, where there is an openness to this on the part of participants, and where a key precondition for interpersonal trust to develop is the reciprocal exercise of security dilemma sensibility.<sup>84</sup> We are not arguing that interpersonal trust cannot develop through other modalities of interpersonal interaction, though this would need to be tested out in future work, but it is our contention that there is something unique and critical about in-person encounters, a proposition supported by the reflections of some diplomats on the possibilities of non-face-to-face interactions during the COVID-19 global crisis.<sup>85</sup> In addition, it was felt important to hold this meeting in person so as to ensure that the subtleties of the approach could be communicated among parties, around half of which did not identify English as their first language.<sup>86</sup>

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84 Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, pp.51-75.

85 Marcus Holmes, Mark N.K. Saunders and Nicholas J. Wheeler, ‘UN general assembly: why virtual meetings make it hard for diplomats to trust each other’, *The Conversation*, 22 September 2020, <<https://theconversation.com/un-general-assembly-why-virtual-meetings-make-it-hard-for-diplomats-to-trust-each-other-146508>>, last accessed 28 September 2020.

86 It is unknown at the time of writing whether the COVID-19 pandemic will have abated sufficiently by the time the Programme begins to hold a new round of dialogues in 2021-22 (see Section VI), meaning there is a good chance that some or all of the meetings will need to be held virtually. If this is the case, the facilitators will create opportunities to build interpersonal trust between parties through virtual one-on-one discussions and small group discussions in the run up to any larger meetings, which may be able to simulate the kind of informal, trust-enhancing conversations that can often happen at the margins of in-person events.



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# The Complementary Activities

The following complementary activities were designed to further expand thinking and communicate the aims and objectives of the nuclear responsibilities approach.

- The Programme conducted extensive desk-based research to develop the approach, understand the unique national context that would inform each dialogue, and formulate perspectives on how constituencies within each state involved understands its responsibilities at present.
- With the Centre for Science and Security Studies at King's College London in June 2018, the Programme hosted a track 1.5 meeting with participants predominantly from India and Pakistan, to discuss in principle how a nuclear responsibilities approach could be applied in a Southern Asian context.<sup>87</sup>
- At a roundtable at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy in Geneva on the 25 March, the Programme presented the draft approach to 25 Non-Possessor States for the first time. The intention was to 'common sense check' the approach, as well as source new ideas that could feed back into the approach's development in a closed discussion space. BASIC and the ICCS also held private bilateral and group meetings with a number of states at their UN missions.<sup>88</sup>
- On the margins of the 2019 NPT Preparatory Committee, the Programme hosted a side event to present the first tranche of findings. The panel consisted of four speakers from the UK, Japan, Malaysia and Australia, each from states that had either hosted or taken part in one of the four dialogues that had taken place up to that point.<sup>89</sup>
- In November 2019, with funding from the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the Programme hosted the first nuclear responsibilities dialogue in New Delhi at the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS).<sup>90</sup>

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87 Rishi Paul, *Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Responsibilities* (London: BASIC and CSSS, 2019).

88 Spilman et al., *Common Security*.

89 Marion Messmer, 'Nuclear Responsibilities at the NPT Preparatory Committee 2019', BASIC, 31 May 2019 <<https://basicint.org/nuclear-responsibilities-at-the-npt-preparatory-committee-2019/>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

90 Rishi Paul, *Exploring the Nuclear Responsibilities Framing in India* (London: BASIC & ICCS, 2020).

## SECTION V:

# Reception

What did we find as we road-tested the nuclear responsibilities approach over the POC period in 2018-2020? This section summarises each of the roundtable discussions and the five-way dialogue, before looking at the overall findings of the Programme.

## The National Roundtables (October 2018 - November 2019)

### United Kingdom (London, October 2018)

The London roundtable at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was the launch meeting of the Programme. Since the approach was relatively undeveloped at the inception of the work, the roundtable had an exploratory tone, covering a wide range of topics and questions related to the intersection of nuclear weapons and responsibility. Starting with presentations on the RNS conceptual framework, the discussion centred around the value-added of responsibility talk and how it might be operationalised in a way that would promote new steps of nuclear risk reduction and progress on the disarmament agenda. The general consensus was that a stronger 'culture of responsibility' should be baked into British nuclear weapons policy making and, if executed correctly, that deploying an eventual nuclear responsibilities approach could change the dynamics of the international conversation around disarmament and deterrence. The conversation looked both backwards to policy choices the United Kingdom has made so far, such as the move to a 'minimum credible deterrent' and transparency actions, and forward to choices that the United Kingdom could make, such as minimising the exceptions to its negative security assurances and developing its risk reduction agenda.

Several participants expressed profound discomfort with the idea that any nuclear weapons possession could be legitimately called 'responsible' and cautioned against the systemic political risks that would arise if non-possessor states and NGOs were to create a permissive atmosphere for possessor states to label themselves as 'responsible nuclear weapon states'. These challenges signalled a need for the Programme to reconsider RNS as the starting point, and ultimately led to the shift from 'responsible' to 'responsibilities'.

## Japan (Tokyo, January 2019)

The national roundtable at The Japan Institute of International Affairs in Tokyo attracted a cross-section of the Japanese nuclear weapons policy community, with participants travelling in from Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Osaka.<sup>91</sup> The chairs sought to take the participants through an introspective process to consider Japan's responsibilities in the global nuclear order, drawing upon Japan's history as a victim of nuclear weapons use and the national security context it faces today. While respectful disputes remained around the practice of nuclear deterrence and the approach to disarmament, a broad consensus emerged that Japan should recognise at least five key areas of responsibility: for education on the risks and impacts of nuclear weapons, as an ally of the United States, for East Asian regional security, as a nuclear threshold state, and to promote nuclear transparency. These responsibilities were publicly reiterated by the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Division, Nobuharu Imanishi, at the NPT Prep Com in 2019.<sup>92</sup>

## Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (March 2019)

The Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) in Kuala Lumpur hosted the Programme's national roundtable dialogue in Malaysia, where participants were principally drawn from across Government.<sup>93</sup> Malaysia is a longstanding advocate of disarmament, as exemplified in its role as Chair of the 2019 NPT Prep Com and advocacy for the TPNW, which had been recently adopted at the time. The roundtable participants were keen to stress that whilst they welcomed the promise of the nuclear responsibilities approach, this should do nothing to dilute the responsibility of the possessors to disarm, a responsibility enshrined in the legal obligations of the NWS in Article VI of the NPT. As in the London roundtable, some participants challenged the nuclear responsibilities approach, citing the risks that it could be co-opted by governments and used to justify slower progress on disarmament. Some also cited a perception of double standards and unreciprocated responsibilities between possessors and non-possessors, such as the fact that although NNWS in South-East Asia had negotiated a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, none of the NWS had signed its protocol. There was agreement that one of Malaysia's core responsibilities is to improve export controls in order to aid in non-proliferation efforts, and that middle powers could play a greater leadership role in the global nuclear order.

## The Netherlands (The Hague, August 2019)

The Dutch national roundtable took place at the Clingendael Institute in the Hague, where many state responsibilities were proposed in a lively debate.<sup>94</sup> Early on, the discussion considered the different forms of power that actors have in the global nuclear order, and how access to those forms of power grant actors different kinds of responsibility. Participants proposed that actors have common responsibilities for nuclear risk reduction, nuclear safety and security, non-proliferation and disarmament education, and improving gender diversity and awareness in the field, among others. Key possessor state responsibilities 'while disarming' included promoting and engaging in transparency, non-testing, and moving towards minimum credible deterrence, while the Netherlands' responsibilities were considered to centre around a safe and reliable practice of its nuclear mission, adherence to non-proliferation and export control obligations, and engaging in nuclear bridge-building initiatives.

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91 Brixey-Williams, *Common but Differentiated Nuclear Responsibilities*.

92 Messmer, 'Nuclear Responsibilities at the NPT Preparatory Committee 2019', 2019.

93 Sebastian Brixey-Williams, *Nuclear Responsibilities in an Interconnected World: Perspectives from Kuala Lumpur* (London: BASIC and ICCS, 2019).

94 Sebastian Brixey-Williams, *Differentiated Nuclear Responsibilities among Non-Nuclear Possessor States: Perspectives from the Hague* (London: BASIC and ICCS, 2020).

## São Paulo, Brazil (November 2019)

Fundação Getulio Vargas hosted a roundtable with participation from the Brazilian government, policy, and academia.<sup>95</sup> The roundtable first explored misperceptions about Brazil's nuclear story; having assessed new archival evidence, both national and international, the participants unanimously agreed that Brazil did not have a historic nuclear weapons programme. The roundtable participants also discussed whether responsibilities should be recognised and fulfilled unilaterally or only reciprocally. This was raised in the context of Brazil's historic position that it would not take further non-proliferation steps without equivalent steps on disarmament from the possessor states. In addition to its responsibilities around non-proliferation, export control, disarmament, and peaceful uses, participants agreed that Brazil has new responsibilities when it comes to the application of safeguards to its nuclear-propelled attack submarine programme, the *Álberto Alvaro*: a subject worthy of further research.

## The Five-Way Dialogue (January 2020)

In January 2020, the Programme convened a five-way Nuclear Responsibilities Dialogue comprising officials and experts from the United Kingdom, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Brazil. The dialogue was an opportunity for a representative sample of officials involved in each of the national consultations to engage in a critically reflective dialogue on the viability of the nuclear responsibilities approach, share their learning from participating in the Programme over the two-year proof of concept stage, and develop consensus on pathways forward for the nuclear responsibilities approach. The dialogue had four sessions. Session 1 asked each of the national representatives present to give feedback on the national roundtables over 2018-2019 and express why they are interested in the approach, as well as any hopes, reflections, concerns, and questions they have about it. Session 2 presented a discussion paper based on the roundtable consultations that set out a draft set of guiding responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons, inspired by the national roundtables. Session 3 was designed to enable the group to collectively strategise how the nuclear responsibilities approach could be propagated amongst their allies and constituencies. Session 4 was an opportunity to think openly about possible short, medium and long-term objectives of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities to promote this work and have a positive impact. The discussions at the dialogue, which brought together the discussions that took place at each national roundtable, are the source of the main findings of this report, which are set out thematically below.

### 1. Positive Reception

The nuclear responsibilities approach and prototype Method were received positively in the road-test, evidenced by the encouraging feedback at the Five-Way Dialogue. The dialogues were called 'creative' and 'more inclusive', with participants noting that the approach 'allows for a discussion of responsibilities not covered by legal documents' and has 'less of a barrier to entry than talking about specific policies'. One official said that nuclear responsibilities thinking was 'helpful to frame issues in capital' and 'to get civil society to think more widely', while another described themselves as coming to London 'under the spell of the meeting' in their country, where the quality of original thinking and participation made the meeting 'one of its kind among many others'. Suggesting that the nuclear responsibilities approach has successfully differentiated itself from older forms of responsibility talk, one participant related that he 'had heard of the concept of "responsible" being used before [in relation to nuclear weapons]', but that 'this framing suggested

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<sup>95</sup> Alice Spilman, *Nuclear Responsibilities in the Global Nuclear Order: Perspectives from São Paulo*, (London: BASIC and ICCS, 2020).



This preference for bottom-up work pointed to a common goal among the group to find new practices at the working level that could help generate better outcomes in respect of the existing risk reduction and disarmament agendas.

something more'. At the end of the Five-Way Dialogue, another official stated that the process had 'worked far better than I could possibly have imagined'.

The Method described in this report (Section III) crystallised through the five-way dialogue, where there was a notable consensus among the parties that stakeholders should attempt to arrive at shared conceptions of responsibility through a combination of critical introspection and empathic dialogue. This was held up in opposition to the more prescriptive notion that nuclear responsibilities could be predetermined (whether by the Programme or another third party) with a view to lobbying states to accept them. In order to ensure that the merits of this prescriptive approach was tested, the facilitators of the five-way dialogue tabled a discussion of a prescriptive approach to nuclear responsibilities in session II. The parties were asked to consider whether they could support negotiations on a draft set of 'guiding principles' around nuclear weapons, which synthesised the proposed responsibilities of states from each national roundtable into a single set of non-binding 'guiding responsibilities' to illustrate what a soft law instrument of this kind could look like. The aim of doing so was not to publish a *fait accompli*, but to help the parties imagine what it would feel like to have a more prescriptive soft law instrument before them.<sup>96</sup>

As expected, the prescriptive approach was strongly opposed. The parties noted that prescriptive lists of responsibilities essentially 'already exist' a new one would be conceptually little different from the '64 Point Action Plan' from the 2010 NPT Review Conference or the TPNW, the latter of which sought first to define a set of obligations in treaty law and then lobby states to sign and ratify the treaty.<sup>97</sup> For proponents of these documents, another list would be a confusing replication; for opponents, such a prescriptive approach emulates a type of approach for which they have already expressed their dislike. A prescriptive approach also fails to answer how the process of producing a list would subsequently change policies and behaviours. As one participant put it, quoting an English idiom: 'You can take a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.' Conversely, the parties spent a long time discussing the value of the practice of critical introspection.

<sup>96</sup> The 'guiding responsibilities' document first set out some general responsibilities, and then organised responsibilities under a set of thematic headings: Responsibilities Relating to the Conduct of Nuclear Weapons Diplomacy and Politics; Responsibilities for Nuclear Disarmament; Responsibilities around Doctrine, etc. Under these headings were listed specific guiding responsibilities, noting where possessor states have a special responsibility and where non-possessors may differ from one another depending on their unique national circumstances. The document took for its inspiration the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (1998), although this is only one of a number of forms that a soft law instrument can take.

<sup>97</sup> 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Final Document: Volume 1. NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol.1), New York, 2010; Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), 7 July 2017.

Nevertheless, provided the process was right, there was some interest in the idea that states – particularly nuclear possessor states, though in coordination with non-possessors and non-governmental experts – should agree a set of shared baseline responsibilities or key ‘norms of self-restraint and self-regulation’ around nuclear weapons. Thus, it was thought possible that the nuclear responsibilities approach could be a mechanism for establishing baselines through a managed, ‘bottom up’ process in the longer-term. A key attraction of the approach in this regard is that it has been led by a non-governmental actor who is trusted as an honest broker to facilitate such discussions.

This preference for bottom-up work pointed to a common goal among the group to find new practices at the working level that could help generate better outcomes in respect of the existing risk reduction and disarmament agendas. Put in theoretical terms, the group preferred that the nuclear responsibilities approach adopt what Joseph Nye has called a ‘process utopian’ approach rather than that of the ‘end-point utopian’.<sup>98</sup> The latter looks to grand, long term visions of progressive change such as GCD or the TPNW, whereas process utopians, in Ken Booth’s words, take ‘modest, reformist steps in order to make a better world somewhat more probable for future generations’.<sup>99</sup>

There was also notable support in the application of the CBDR-RC principle to the global nuclear order. CBD-RC was described as ‘original’ thinking that makes intuitive sense, with one participant saying that it is ‘not only applicable to the wider nuclear regime, but also compatible with its legal mainstays’. Another participant appreciated the fact that CBDR-RC highlights the responsibility of possessor states, adding that ‘we should be socialising the NWS to think of themselves as having special responsibilities’ in order to foster a stronger culture of responsibility within the policy making communities of those states.

We have concluded from this feedback that the parties were willing to put their trust in the approach and facilitation, which was further evidenced by their willingness to adhere to the principles and constraints that the approach imposed on the conduct of dialogue. The parties also demonstrated an interest in remaining involved in this work going forward, recognising that this is an iterative process, and with all demonstrating their interest in considering joining a state-sponsored NPT Rev Con working paper (see Section VI). This appeared to evidence that even states that stand opposite ends of the spectrum on the legitimacy of nuclear weapons see long-term value in this approach as a means to reduce risks and transform the culture of blame. Some state officials present indicated that they would continue to use the method to think and talk about policy going forwards.

## 2. Preventing Misperceptions

Participants reflected that the nuclear responsibilities approach is nuanced and easily misunderstood. The distinction between ‘responsibilities’ and ‘responsible’ is slippery, for instance, and maintaining a tight vocabulary amongst participants in a nuclear responsibilities dialogue requires some care and attention. There is a risk that others will mistake the Programme’s intentions if it fails to communicate its purpose clearly, potentially damaging the approach’s credibility and turning it into a target.<sup>100</sup> Participants therefore

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98 Joseph S. Nye Jr, ‘The Long-Term Future of Deterrence’, in Roman Kolkowicz (ed.), *The Logic of Nuclear Terror* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp.245-247.

99 Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.252.

100 Such was the case for the predecessor to the US Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) process, called Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament (CCDN), whose perceived focus on ‘pre-conditions’ for nuclear disarmament attracted negative responses from a wide range of states early on and has arguably harmed the process even in the long-term.

advised that the facilitators take plenty of time to refine their messaging and cautioned that the Programme ‘needs to be careful when trying to bring others in’.

Particularly important is for the Programme to signal that nuclear responsibilities discussions are ‘not a substitute or diversion from legal obligations, or other issues’. The same participant noted that his own state ‘knows the intention is positive’, but that this could be better communicated. The concern that responsibility talk in relation to nuclear weapons is a smokescreen to reopen or force new legal interpretations gives rise to many of the critiques of RNS outlined in Section III, which the nuclear responsibilities approach was specifically designed to overcome. In a fast-moving policy world where details can sometimes be lost, it is essential that misperceptions are swiftly resolved.

### 3. Recurrent Themes

The facilitators kept lists of the responsibilities proposed at each of the roundtables, which were reprinted in full in each national roundtable report. These indicative responsibilities could usually be organised under one or more of several parent categories, which included: general; nuclear weapons diplomacy and politics; nuclear disarmament; nuclear doctrine and military strategy; non-proliferation and disarmament education and non-governmental engagement; non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and related technologies; nuclear risk reduction; and nuclear safety and security.

Themes repeated across the roundtables, many of which were predictable. Nuclear risk reduction and the importance of exercising restraint in relation to activities that could result in nuclear use – whether intended or accidental – was at the centre of many proposed common responsibilities between all stakeholders. The importance of reaffirming nuclear disarmament and working towards it in good faith also appeared on multiple occasions, as did a broader responsibility to respect past commitments and demonstrate willingness to adhere to international law. Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament education appeared in all roundtables, usually accompanied by a sense that this crucial ‘pillar’ is treated by many as an afterthought.

There was a widespread sense that the possessor states bear special responsibilities for the achievement of key objectives including improving the international security environment and nuclear risk reduction (including leading progress on nuclear disarmament). These resulted in associated responsibilities not to engage in vague or tit-for-tat threats, and to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in their defence and security doctrines such as by moving to minimum deterrence postures. The feeling that possessor states undervalue the importance of promoting and maintaining civility within the conduct of nuclear weapons diplomacy and politics was mentioned on several occasions. Non-possessors also expressed a perception that the NWS do not seem to have fully recognised quite how much assurance that making a joint statement disavowing nuclear weapons use (in the spirit, if not the letter, of the Reagan-Gorbachev statement) would give to the non-possessors. While making their contributions, many participants implicitly adopted the idea socialised by the Programme that possessor states have both a responsibility ‘to disarm’ and responsibilities ‘while disarming’.

Proposals on the responsibilities of non-possessors often turned into discussions of how these states could reduce regional or global tensions, and influence nuclear states through alliances and regional or multilateral institutions such as the UN, NATO, or ASEAN. Non-possessor states were also seen to be potential innovation hubs for new ideas that could provide alternatives to the hegemonic ways of thinking and talking that comes out of many possessor state institutions. Non-proliferation and export controls were also, unsurprisingly, common themes, with arguments being made that these are the areas in which non-possessors can exercise the greatest responsibility and thereby make their clearest contribution to the global nuclear order.

## SECTION VI:

# Future Pathways

The nuclear responsibilities approach has been designed to be an agile and adaptable approach to frame thinking and talking about nuclear weapons in a wide range of contexts: from augmenting the thinking of individuals, to supporting the policymaking process at the national level, to providing an overall context for multilateral discussions.

Drawing upon recommendations generated at the five-way dialogue, the Programme will operate at multiple levels going forwards. The strategy is to gently ‘seed’ the nuclear responsibilities approach among officials and non-governmental experts, demonstrating how foregrounding nuclear responsibilities could strengthen discussions in a wide range of existing fora, and in doing so, build a global community of actors who advocate for the approach. Below we outline some of the main future activities.

As shown in Section V, the nuclear responsibilities approach has so far demonstrated the potential to build shared understanding and empathy among a possessor state and a select group of non-possessors. In the longer term, however, the approach is intended to be operationalised in the same way within and between the nuclear possessor states, especially among those who are in relationships of distrust and enmity, where the risks of nuclear conflict are at their greatest. Because the value of this approach is to transform the way people and institutions think and talk about nuclear weapons, this is necessarily a long-term systemic process. It is likely that stakeholders will need to be engaged multiple times before we start to see a pattern of change.

## Multilateral Level

The Non-Proliferation Treaty review cycles are a key forum in which to promote the value of the approach. To do this, the Programme will share its findings at the Tenth NPT Review Conference through briefings with key individuals and multilateral groupings within the NPT process, a state-sponsored working paper detailing the work to date, and a virtual side event.

Collectively, these activities will help build awareness of the approach and seek to answer questions or misperceptions about its objectives. The working paper will also explain on public record how engagement in this work helped the states involved prepare for the Tenth Rev Con, as well as make the case for continued work on nuclear responsibilities into the Eleventh and Twelfth Review Cycles.

Since interest in the nuclear responsibilities approach is still emerging, we remain realistic about prospects that the Programme can dramatically shape the direction of the Tenth Rev Con. Instead, its impact is more likely to be felt over the next decade once it has had a chance to take root. Nevertheless, one participant provided feedback that the nuclear responsibilities roundtable in their capital had been the direct cause of their state's decision to host an 'NGO day', in which non-governmental experts were invited to give feedback to officials on the state's NPT national report, following the UK's example in 2019.

Nevertheless, although useful for promoting awareness of the approach, multilateral fora are not conducive to more meaningful and transformative dialogues owing to the result of the large number of states and civil society organisations present, a wide spectrum of polarised opinion, and a tendency towards political theatrics, among other reasons. Instead, we look more towards the 'minilateral', regional, and bilateral levels for these opportunities.

## Minilateral Level

'Minilateralism' is defined by its inventor, Moisés Naím, as bringing 'to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem'.<sup>101</sup> Its express aim is to circumvent the structural challenges of multilateral diplomacy described above, and the groupings need not be regionally focused. The activities of the Programme over 2018-2020 are an example of a minilateral process. While it is important the process of talking about nuclear responsibilities is diverse and inclusive, this must be balanced against the need to make meaningful progress in developing shared understandings of responsibility. To this end, the Programme is looking to increase its engagement with key minilateral groupings of states and non-governmental experts in order to introduce a responsibility dimension to their existing agendas.

The Programme will continue to engage with the NWS, with the potential to help frame discussions within the 'P5 Process': the informal annual meetings that take place between the five Nuclear Weapon States on a rotating chair. The Programme's impact could already be felt in the United Kingdom's Chairing of the P5 Process conference in London in February 2020, where responsibility talk had a prominent role in British statements. Director General of Consular and Security at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Thomas Drew, invoked the idea of the NWS having special responsibilities when he cited the 'particular responsibility of the P5 in ensuring the success of the Rev Con as the underpinning of the NPT'.<sup>102</sup> The extensive use of responsibility talk in French President Emmanuel Macron's speech on deterrence and defence strategy in February 2020 implies that there are promising opportunities for engagement with France, which is due to Chair the next conference.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Moises Naim, 'Minilateralism: The magic number to get real international action', *Foreign Policy*, 21 June 2009 <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/21/minilateralism/>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Drew, Prepared Remarks at the P5 Process Conference, London, 13 February 2020.

<sup>103</sup> President Macron's speech in February 2020 made numerous references to responsibility throughout, linking together his personal responsibility as a head of state, French nuclear doctrine, and the responsibilities of France to maintain European and international peace and security. The former is captured in the following: 'This is why the Europeans must now take greater responsibility for this European defence, this European pillar within NATO. And I myself, fully take that responsibility, without hesitating!', while the latter can be seen in another extract: 'Every day, I take on this ultimate responsibility, which is at the core of the duties of President, with the strongest determination. It is carried out through nuclear deterrence. Like the transparency and the trust we owe to the international community, which is part of our responsibilities as a "nuclear-weapon State" under the NPT, exercising deterrence requires a strictly defensive, clear and predictable doctrine.' Emmanuel Macron, 'Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy', 7 February 2020 <<https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy>> last accessed 25 September 2020.



The nuclear responsibilities approach can be used at regional levels to have a positive impact on regional security, by generating shared, empathic understandings of the responsibilities that different actors within that region have to one another.

The Programme also offers its Method for engagement with the US Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) initiative. The idea behind CEND, launched in 2019, is to collectively identify and ‘address the security issues that underlie states’ rationales for retaining nuclear weapons’, in order to pave the way for nuclear disarmament.<sup>104</sup> A core component of any environment conducive to nuclear disarmament is trust and empathy among the possessor states, and a broad and globally-institutionalised culture of responsibility. As such, reinforcing a similar suggestion by Burford, Meier, and Ritchie, the nuclear responsibilities approach is offered to explore these themes within CEND and shape exchange between the participating states.<sup>105</sup>

## Regional Level

The nuclear responsibilities approach can be used at regional levels to have a positive impact on regional security, by generating shared, empathic understandings of the responsibilities that different actors within that region have to one another. As for minilateral groupings, the smaller size of regional groupings is conducive to progress. The Programme has identified three regional tracks where the approach could help reduce nuclear risks through the development of mistrust and distrust reducing forms of cooperation, and lay the groundwork for the development of new trusting relationships.

**1. An Asia-Pacific Track** will stimulate a sustainable conversation on nuclear responsibilities among key officials and policy influencers in the Asia-Pacific region, building on the commitments to responsible nuclear behaviour made by the region’s nuclear possessor states and the broader differentiated responsibilities of the non-nuclear possessors to contribute to regional security. A key value of the nuclear responsibilities approach is that it enables a normative discussion of nuclear weapons policy that transcends the NPT regime, not only among these two countries, but also China and many non-nuclear possessors in the region. To date, the Programme has hosted two roundtables (in London and New Delhi) and published three reports

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<sup>104</sup> Chris Ford, ‘Moving Forward With the CEND Initiative’, Remarks at CEND Working Group, Wilton Park, 20 November 2019 <<https://www.state.gov/moving-forward-with-the-cend-initiative/>> last accessed 25 September 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Lyndon Burford, Oliver Meier and Nick Ritchie, ‘Sidetrack or kickstart? How to respond to the US proposal on nuclear disarmament’, 19 April 2019 <<https://thebulletin.org/2019/04/sidetrack-or-kickstart-how-to-respond-to-the-us-proposal-on-nuclear-disarmament/>> last accessed 28 September 2020.

focused on this region,<sup>106</sup> and has funding secured into 2021 for an extensive series of interviews and dialogical engagements with key officials and policy influencers in the region.

For the first time, this track will apply the approach to a strategic and political context in which some of the actors involved are in relationships of active distrust. The introduction of distrust will be a new challenge for the Method which, while it has been designed to accommodate these kinds of relations, has so far only been used in relation to states who display mistrust of one another's intentions. For this reason, we are planning to introduce the approach carefully and at the individual level, to ensure that all parties trust in the process and fully understand its objectives. Moreover, before engagement in this region begins, we will be formalising the method through our forthcoming Toolkit, detailed below.

**2. A Euro-Atlantic Track** will engage actors from across mainland Europe, Greater Europe (including Russia and Central Asian states), and North America, with the purpose of developing shared conceptions of responsibility within the Euro-Atlantic region in the service of deepening regional security. Within NATO, the region's largest nuclear alliance, the Programme will seek to facilitate a critical introspective process with NATO officials, looking at both member states and at NATO as an alliance. Such discussions could take place within the Nuclear Planning Group and the counter-proliferation and disarmament committees. Equivalent discussions could take place in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the European Union. By involving a range of nuclear and non-nuclear Euro-Atlantic states, both inside and outside alliances, the Track would enable a new kind of European security dialogue to emerge that transcends traditional political boundaries.

**3. A Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Track** will look to utilise dialogue on nuclear responsibilities in order to reduce the deep levels of distrust within the region that have so far been obstacles to regional peace and security. In doing so, a MENA Track could help ease the pathway to negotiations to achieve a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free-Zone in the Middle East, which has been deadlocked since its achievement was mandated by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

## Bilateral Level

The nuclear responsibilities approach could be employed bilaterally between two actors. Such a process would be more focused than one at the regional level, with the objective of allowing both actors to reflect deeply on their responsibilities towards one another, and engage in a process of designing reciprocal responsibilities that each could fulfill to reduce nuclear risks thereby reassuring the other of their commitment to mutual security. Alternatively, two allies could engage with each other using the approach in order to harmonise their understandings of the responsibilities that they both commit to within their alliance.

## National Level

It is essential to see national-level engagements not as standalone events, but rather as the start of a process of sustained engagement that can help reframe perspectives and strengthen policy-making. In

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<sup>106</sup> Rishi Paul, *Foregrounding India's Nuclear Responsibilities: Nuclear Weapons Possession and Disarmament in South Asia* (London: BASIC, 2018); Paul, *Indian and Pakistani Nuclear Responsibilities*; Paul, *Exploring the Nuclear Responsibilities Framing in India*. See also: Manpreet Sethi, 'Acceptance of Mutual Vulnerability and Responsible Behaviour: Equally Necessary for COVID-19 and Nuclear Deterrence' in *Nuclear Dynamics through the COVID-19 Lens* (New Delhi: Centre for Air Power Studies, 2020).



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Because the value of this approach is to transform the way people and institutions think and talk about nuclear weapons, this is necessarily a long-term systemic process.

engaging with any state, the Programme's objective is to demonstrate the value of thinking and talking about nuclear responsibilities, and help embed it into the institutions and strategic culture of the state. While it will not be possible for the Programme to host national roundtables in every state in the near term, parties to the five-way dialogue nevertheless felt that hosting several more targeted national roundtables could be useful for promoting the approach. They recommended two broad categories of state to prioritise.

First, states – like the United Kingdom – that may be willing to play a norm entrepreneurial role by championing the nuclear responsibilities approach in an official capacity, and who would like the opportunity to explore the process hands-on. Second, states in contexts in which engagement with the nuclear responsibilities approach could make a measurable near-term impact to reduce nuclear risks. Examples include states locked into competition (nuclear or non-nuclear) with a possessor state, and non-possessor states engaged in producing proliferation-sensitive military nuclear technologies that are exempt from international safeguards – like nuclear-powered submarines – such as Brazil and South Korea.<sup>107</sup> In the latter cases, nuclear responsibilities thinking can help frame policy choices and bring to light potential risks at the international level that may not be under consideration.

## Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit

Over the autumn and winter of 2020-2021, the Programme will further develop the Method into a Nuclear Responsibilities Toolkit. Based on the feedback from the five-way dialogue, the Toolkit will provide a number of key prompts and questions designed to trigger and guide a process of critical introspection, before, during and after the dialogue.

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<sup>107</sup> Eugenio Pacelli Lazzarotti Diniz Costa, 'Brazil's Nuclear Submarine: A Broader Approach to the Safeguards Issue', *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 60(2), 2017, p.2; Lami Kim, 'South Korea's Nuclear Hedging?', *The Washington Quarterly* 41(1), 2018, pp.115-116.

## SECTION VII:

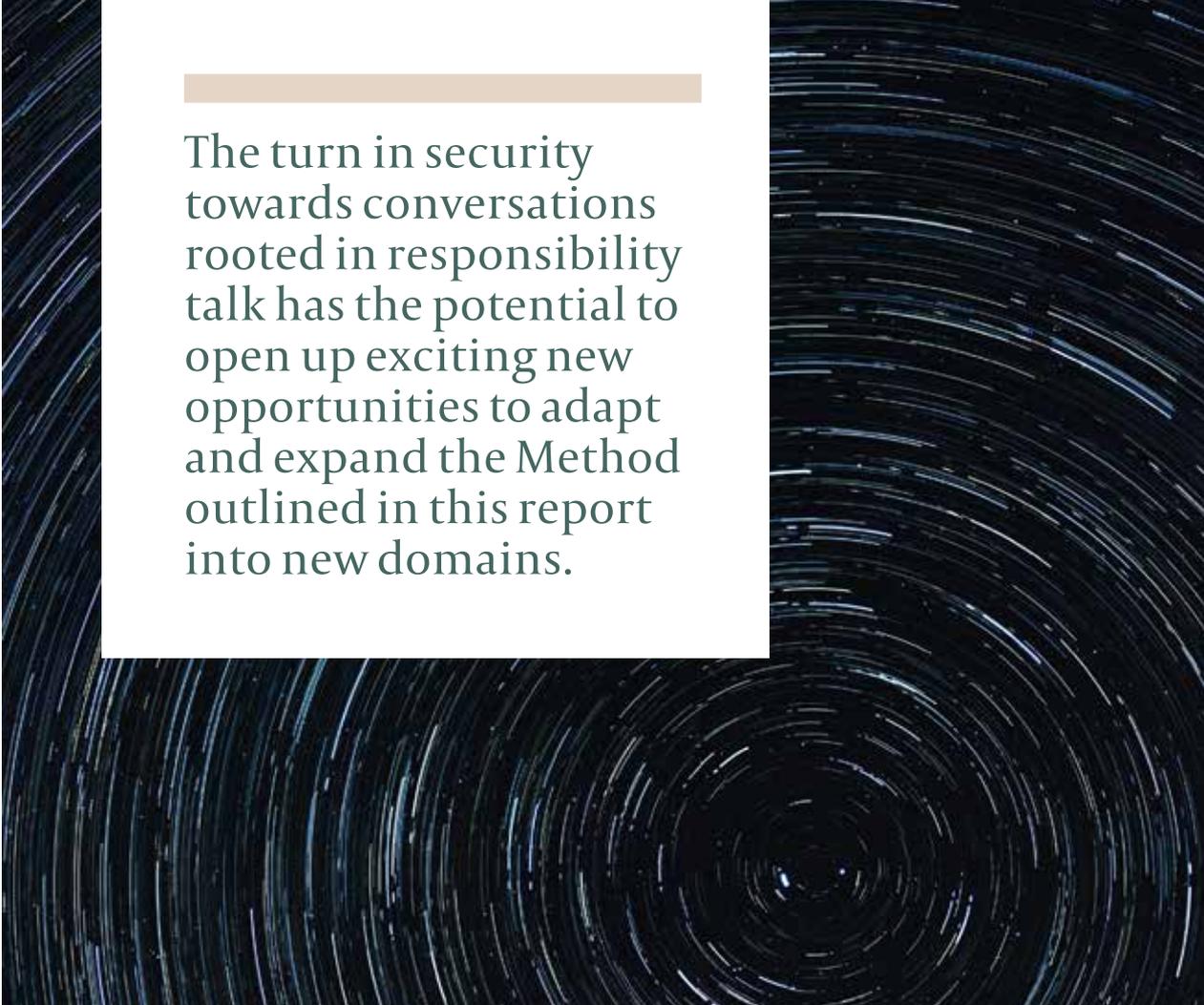
# Conclusion: A ‘Responsibility Turn’ in Security

There are challenging years ahead in international security. The failure of the United States and Russia to preserve or build on the limited, but important nuclear arms control successes of the post-Cold War period leaves the two most powerful nuclear states interacting in the absence of the restraints provided by arms control: a key mechanism by which the two states have managed and set limits to their nuclear competition since its inception in the early 1960s.

Even if there is a Biden presidency after the US Presidential election in November 2020, it seems improbable that the 2010 ‘New START’ Treaty that expires in February 2021 can or will be renewed by both sides in time. At the same time, the US-China relationship has become increasingly competitive, with growing talk in US strategic circles of the need to hedge against China’s expanding nuclear capabilities through the development of new US capabilities – nuclear and conventional – that can hold Chinese nuclear forces at risk. A logic of competitive nuclear risk manipulation, rather than nuclear restraint, risks becoming the new normal. Permeating global nuclear politics is a deep and ongoing debate about who bears responsibility for this breakdown of arms control and the failure to progress nuclear disarmament. But this debate is rarely fruitful because it is trapped in a culture of blame that obstructs agreement.

The nuclear responsibilities approach is a contribution from the non-governmental sector supported by strong academic research. Through its two-stage Method of critical introspection and empathic dialogue, it aims to make a modest contribution to the goals of reducing mistrust and distrust, and from this position the building of new trusting relationships. It is not an initiative, in the sense that it will not seek to provide the roadmap to zero in an already crowded field. However, it is offered as a tool to anybody who might find it useful to think about their responsibilities in relation to nuclear weapons, and who can see a benefit in reaching out to their allies and adversaries to do the same. The risk that nuclear weapons will be detonated, whether by accident or design, cannot be eliminated while they exist. However this risk, alongside the distrust and fear that drives nuclear weapons possession and modernisation, can be lessened if those that can influence nuclear weapons futures commit to building a collective culture of responsibility around them.

The results of the Programme on Nuclear Responsibilities’ proof of concept period have demonstrated that the approach has more than sufficient potential to enable a meaningful dialogue between a range of stakeholders with radically different perspectives on nuclear weapons. Through our dialogues, the parties involved demonstrated a willingness to listen and exchange their conceptions of responsibility with one



The turn in security towards conversations rooted in responsibility talk has the potential to open up exciting new opportunities to adapt and expand the Method outlined in this report into new domains.

another in a respectful manner. Over the coming two years, as the Programme begins to work more regionally in the Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic areas, the test will be to see whether the approach can also generate a meaningful dialogue between states who find themselves in relationships of distrust and enmity.

The time is ripe for a global conversation about responsibility, not just in relation to nuclear weapons. Across international peace and security debates, responsibility talk has started to emerge as a theme in attempts to govern and regulate a range of global commons. Over the last decade, there has been increasing momentum behind the movement to develop norms of ‘responsible behaviour in cyberspace’, with states parties seeking to emphasise the importance of restraint due in part to the extreme difficulties associated with the attribution of offensive cyber-attacks.<sup>108</sup> At the time of writing, the United Kingdom has launched a new initiative designed to achieve a landmark UN resolution on ‘responsible behaviours in space’, which is increasingly crowded by both governmental and civil hardware.<sup>109</sup> In both cases, neither strict legal

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<sup>108</sup> Paul Meyer, ‘Norms of Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace’, in Markus Christen, Bert Gordijn, and Michele Loi (eds.), *The Ethics of Cybersecurity* (Cham: Springer, 2020), p.350.

<sup>109</sup> GOV.UK, ‘UK push for landmark UN resolution to agree responsible behaviour in space’, GOV.UK, 26 August 2020, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-push-for-landmark-un-resolution-to-agree-responsible-behaviour-in-space>> last accessed 28 September 2020.

measures (which are held back by structural verification challenges and political obstacles) nor *laissez-faire* attitudes towards self-regulation (which all too often fall foul to temptation) have succeeded, or are likely to succeed, as strategies to regulate state policies and practices in order to reduce the risks of conflict. The introduction of responsibility talk, by contrast – in the nuclear, cyber, space, and other strategic domains – makes an emotional appeal to the ‘better angels of our nature’: to exercise restraint and lay the foundations for stable norms. We suggest that this effect might be thought of as a *responsibility turn* in global peace and security, and that it might become a prevalent feature of international politics in the coming years.

As for the domains described above, responsibility talk in the nuclear sphere may come to provide a porous – but essential – layer of protection between global nuclear order and disorder. While it cannot replace legally-binding and verifiable limits on nuclear arsenals and other treaty regimes, a global conversation about nuclear responsibilities may be able to put in place an important normative barrier to restrain the emerging logic of competitive nuclear risk-taking and signpost the way to radical nuclear reductions.

The turn in security towards conversations rooted in responsibility talk has the potential to open up exciting new opportunities to adapt and expand the Method outlined in this report into new domains. The processes of debating and perhaps developing shared conceptions of responsibility will take time and patience. But, if done right, and all the relevant stakeholders are present, and all feel heard and respected and act in good faith, then such processes will likely result in a more legitimate, resilient – and crucially – widely-accepted normative framework that can underpin norms, laws, and practices that promote security for all. While they are nascent, such conversations may need to have at least one foot within these topics’ existing frameworks and communities. But in time, one can only hope that such conversations may eventually link these often-siloed and yet intrinsically interlinked domains into a broad and integrated taxonomy of strategic responsibilities. If so, a whole new generation of cross-domain arms control and risk reduction measures that we haven’t been able to imagine yet may become possible.

- BASIC promotes meaningful dialogue amongst governments and experts in order to build international trust, reduce nuclear risks, and advance disarmament.
- The ICCS offers a unique multidisciplinary perspective on global security challenges combining as it does expertise from leading scholars in international relations and political psychology.

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**The British American Security  
Information Council (BASIC)**

17 Oval Way  
London  
SE11 5RR

**The Institute for Conflict,  
Cooperation and Security (ICCS)**

University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham  
B15 2TT

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