



Concept note

Irreversibility in nuclear disarmament

Wednesday 8 – Friday 10 March 2023 | WP3125

Summary

This conference will take forward the dialogue that took place at Wilton Park in March 2022. It will convene an invitation-only group of policy makers from governments as well as experts from think tanks, academia, and NGOs. Specifically, it will assess the spectrum of positions on irreversibility in nuclear disarmament (IND) and work towards a shared understanding of what IND will require; discuss the technical, legal and political parameters and criteria for irreversibility, both during a process of disarmament, and after disarmament has been achieved; and explore avenues for taking IND work forward and set out a programme of work that will include next steps and fora for collaboration.

Context and key policy issues

The action plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference established three key principles of disarmament: transparency, verification and irreversibility. As the latter has remained underdeveloped, Wilton Park organised a conference, co-funded by the FCDO and the Norwegian MFA, on Irreversible Nuclear Disarmament in March 2022. The proposed project aims to build upon and advance the outcomes of that conference, and assess how to take IND forward. Following on from the NPT Review Conference in August, where the draft Final Document stated that “States parties recognise that further work is required to ensure the irreversibility of nuclear disarmament and, as a first step, are encouraged to build an understanding of the application of irreversibility measures in attaining and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons and to exchange information on the application of the principle of irreversibility in relation to the implementation of their Treaty obligations”. The Wilton Park dialogue, convened in partnership with and behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, thereby aims to further develop detailed thinking on the technical, legal, and political parameters and criteria of irreversibility, and hence take up the challenge set out at the Review Conference to build shared understandings among NPT States Parties and advance the prospects for nuclear disarmament. It will further advance work carried out by Wilton Park earlier in 2022.

Goals and objectives

- To assess the spectrum of positions on IND and work towards a shared understanding of what IND will require.
- Based on commissioned original research, to identify and discuss the technical, legal and political parameters and criteria for irreversibility, both during a process of disarmament, and after disarmament has been achieved.
- To explore avenues for taking IND work forward and set out a programme of work that will include next steps and fora for collaboration.

Monitoring and evaluation

Wilton Park's Monitoring and Evaluation process includes follow-up with all participants, speakers and partners on planned actions. An electronic questionnaire will be completed by all participants during the meeting and a further survey conducted 3-6 months after the event.

Communications

Discussion in all Wilton Park sessions is 'off the record' and no individual speaker or participant should be quoted (nor their identity or institutional affiliation revealed) without that individual's express permission. The protocol also applies to all uses of digital and social media, both before, during and after the event.

Our communications team will develop a communications strategy to promote the themes of the event and maximise outcomes.

Format

The participatory format of the meeting, encompassing roundtable discussion during plenary sessions plus time spent in smaller breakout groups, will help generate fresh insights and analysis. It will be held on the basis of non-attributable discussion in a neutral environment designed to encourage an open and constructive exchange.

About Wilton Park

Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is a global forum for strategic discussion organising over 60 events a year in the UK and overseas, bringing together leading representatives from the worlds of politics, business, academia, diplomacy, civil society and media. We focus on issues of international security, prosperity and justice. Our meetings provide a neutral environment for round-table discussion encouraging innovation in global thinking. Discussions are non-attributable to encourage frank exchanges and open and lively debate.

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