

How to Make Sanctions Work: Interview with Tom Plant



Tom Plant is the Director of RUSI's Proliferation and Nuclear Policy programme. He is also Director of the UK Project on Nuclear Issues (PONI), an initiative designed to foster emerging nuclear specialists. His research interests include nuclear deterrence, arms control, proliferation issues – particularly in relation to North Korea – and UK nuclear policy. Before joining RUSI he was a Principal Specialist at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), and before that worked at the UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) is the world's oldest independent think tank on international defence and security. How has the international security landscape changed over the years and what main challenges does the future presents?

I think the greatest changes in that landscape have occurred when new domains have opened (air, space, cyberspace, and so on), and when the attack-defence balance has changed in these domains. I'm also interested in the changing ways that danger has been socialised, and might be in future: how will societies respond to a world where violence is increasingly prosecuted not against states but against elements within the state, for example? And how might new technologies permit the precision, and even personalisation of that violence? These might result in quite fundamental changes in the way that power could be contested in future, and how that might affect us all.

One of the topics RUSI thoroughly explores is sanctions regime and proliferation financing. How effective have sanctions proven to be in curbing the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

Well it really depends on what you are expecting sanctions to do. Of course, they have some quite important mechanistic value, in that they raise the costs for proliferators, either slowing down programmes or inhibiting them entirely. They also have normative value – they demonstrate that states imposing sanctions consider the activity that provoked them to be abnormal and unacceptable, and they discourage others from going down the same path. And in extreme cases they might also start to create security risks for decision-makers – maybe leaderships become less able to service the rents demanded for their support by powerful elites, for example. I would say that in all those ways sanctions can be shown to have had, and to continue to have, some effect. But I think there is less of a case that they are by themselves decisive, so they really need to be part of a wider policy approach.

What are the main channels used to circumnavigate sanctions and to finance illegal proliferation programmes?

Proliferators either try to limit their exposure to

sanctions risk by avoiding it or by hiding from it. In the first case this might mean limiting exposure to trade and financial systems that are accessible to law enforcement and intelligence agencies of states that are more motivated to implement sanctions – in recent cases this has meant the US, EU and a patchwork of other allies. This could involve trading in currencies other than the dollar or Euro, carrying cash, or using commodities such as gold (or even ivory or rhino horn) to facilitate transfers. It might in the future involve more use of cryptocurrencies than it does now. Where this exposure can't be avoided, proliferators employ large networks of front companies to obscure their presence in transactions and transfers. Some of our newer work looks at using open source information to get at those networks, alongside our established programme that works on structural means of countering proliferation finance of all kinds.

What initiatives can be undertaken to tackle the loopholes and strengthen the non-proliferation regime? How can the EU specifically contribute to this effort?

A consistent finding of our research has been that implementation of sanctions really rest heavily on private sector actors, and that it is not enough to simply tell governments what they should do and expect that to filter into practices in their jurisdictions. Making information about proliferation networks more available and useable for jurisdictions that want to act, and for the private sector actors – banks, insurance companies, commodity traders and so on – that proliferators are trying to exploit, would certainly help, as would facilitating information-sharing between those actors. This has been done in the UK for anti-money laundering and terrorist financing under the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT), for example; this approach could be extended to proliferation finance, and taken up by the EU and its member states. More generally the EU can work to build public-private partnerships on countering proliferation – and can help ensure that sanctions form part of a wider policy picture rather than its entirety.

Additional information and Tom Plant's evidence to the UK House of Lords [here](#) ([transcript](#))

Europe Braces For Fallout From INF Crisis

President Trump's announcement on 1 February that the US was suspending its compliance with the 1987 Intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) treaty and would withdraw from it within six months is a severe blow to European security and the global arms control regime. Russia immediately reciprocated, suspending its observance of the treaty. These moves have caused deep anxiety among Europeans. The widespread fear is that the dismantlement of the INF, a long-lasting pillar of European security, may provoke a new arms race on the continent in a period of heightening tensions between the two nuclear superpowers. In motivating its decision, the Trump administration has pointed an accusing finger at Russia's alleged repeated violations of the treaty. According to Washington, Moscow has been testing and then deploying a number of ground-based cruise missiles – designated 9M729 or SSC-8 – with a range that falls within the 500-5,500 km prohibited by the treaty. NATO's European allies – and Canada – have endorsed the US case against Russia and its withdrawal decision.

In mid-December, at the [EUNPD annual Conference](#) EU High Representative Federica Mogherini had also expressed "serious concerns" about Russia's compliance with the INF treaty calling on Moscow to urgently address them. Yet, she had argued that the current crisis could turn into an opportunity "not to dismantle but to strengthen the INF treaty". NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has meanwhile urged Russia to take advantage of the six-month period before the final demise of the INF to return to full compliance with the treaty. For Washington this means that Moscow should destroy all 9M729 missiles and their launchers in the coming 180 days or so, a rather remote prospect.

However, a first important step could include the launching – ideally well before the expiration of the six-month period – of formal US-Russia talks on the fate of 9M729 missiles and other pending issues (Moscow has also accused Washington of violating the treaty). The EU no doubt retains a vital interest in achieving a diplomatic solution to the current crisis and should continue to insist on the resumption of a US-Russia strategic dialogue, a key pre-requisite to preserve the arms control framework on which global security is founded.

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EU News

[Chemical weapons: the EU places nine persons and one entity under new sanctions regime](#)

[EU Statement: Arms Trade Treaty Working Group on Treaty Universalisation](#)

Latest Network Publications

[The potential stigmatizing effect of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), Tom Sauer and Mathias Reveraert, *The Nonproliferation Review*, 2018

[How The Darknet Can Be Used By Terrorists To Obtain Weapons](#), Nikita Malik, *Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT)*, 2019

[Europe's Preparedness To Respond To Space Hybrid Operations](#), Jana Robinson at all, *Prague Security Studies Institute (PSSI)*, 2018

Network Calls

ASSOCIATE LEGAL OFFICER
VERTIC is looking to appoint an Associate Legal Officer for the National Implementation Measures Programme.
Starting salary: TBD
Location: London

INVESTIGATOR
Conflict Armament Research (CAR) is looking for an Investigator for its Enhanced Investigation Unit
Salary: Starting at £55,000
Location: London, Brussels, Washington DC, or home-based

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) is seeking to appoint a Research Assistant on India-Pakistan nuclear and related bilateral issues.
Salary: TBD
Location: London

EU INSTITUTIONAL NEWS

EU Statement on the Conference on Disarmament

On 21 January 2019, during the first session of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the European Union delivered an opening statement reaffirming its support for the Conference and its full engagement on disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

The [Conference on Disarmament](#), first established in 1979 as the Committee on Disarmament, is a multilateral forum tasked with negotiating arms control and disarmament agreements related to weapons of mass destruction (biological, chemical and nuclear) as well as conventional arms. The Conference focuses on the nexus between disarmament, development and international security, and the implications of the reduction of military budgets and armed forces. It also explores ways in which CD Parties can establish confidence-building measures and verification mechanisms in relation to disarmament that can be universally accepted.

The opening statement by the EU underlined how the CD continues to be a forum of “utmost importance” in the face of growing international tensions and “the severe and increasingly volatile security environment”, stressing the need for further dialogue, transparency and confidence-building measures. The EU expressed concerns over the use of chemical weapons; the emergence of new threats including malicious cyber activities and destabilizing activities in outer space; and the disengagement from major international agreements by key countries. In this regard, the EU called on all Parties to the CD to “contribute to improving the strategic context for arms control and disarmament and avoid eroding the rules-based multilateral system, which is indispensable for maintaining international peace and security”. The EU also reiterated its strong support for all three pillars of the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), the entry into force of the [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty](#), the conclusion of a [Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty](#), the preservation of the [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#) and the [New START Treaty](#).

The statement also expressed concern over the under-representation of women across multilateral fora that focus on security, including in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament, and emphasised the importance of equal participation of women and men in all decision-making processes.

[EU Opening Statement at the Conference on Disarmament](#)

NETWORK NEWS

Nuclear Disarmament Colloquium

On 15 April 2019, the Netherlands will organise a colloquium that gathers academics and experts for an exchange of views on what constitutes an optimal climate for renewed and real progress on nuclear disarmament. In doing so, the colloquium aims to follow up and stimulate further dialogue initiated by the US NPT Working Paper presented at the 2018 Nonproliferation Treaty Preparation Conference (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.30).

The colloquium will take place in Geneva in order to encourage an open exchange between academics and diplomats who deal with disarmament issues on a daily basis. Participants will be expected to present their ideas in a panel form, after which there will be ample time for discussion in an informal Q&A format. Presentations are expected to last 10-15 minutes.

Prospective panellists are free to focus on any aspect of the nuclear disarmament environment, including but not limited to:

- Historical cases of disarmament, reasons for proliferation
- Institutional (legal): issues of compliance, collective security
- Security: stability at lower numbers of nuclear weapons, the nexus between global and regional security
- Other: technological issues, use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes

Experts are encouraged to submit abstracts, no longer than a single page, outlining their proposed contributions by 15 February 2019 to NCD-2019@minbuza.nl.

Selected experts will be contacted in early March. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the organisers