

# ***Are There Any Prospects for START Replacement?***

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Press sources recently reported a possible breakthrough in U.S.-Russian consultations on problems, related with the end of START Treaty in 2009. They referred to a statement by Senator Richard Lugar, a Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:<sup>2</sup>

*“...Last year, I was concerned by reports that U.S.-Russian negotiations did not include discussions of a legally binding treaty or the continuation of a formal verification regime. I am pleased to report that the Administration has changed course and will accept a legally-binding regime... While we have put the question to rest of whether an agreement would be legally binding, we now must cross the finish line and conclude negotiations to ensure that the START Treaty does not expire...”*

However, a few days later Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak who heads the Russian delegation at the consultations on START future, in his interview to “*Interfax*” news agency, in fact, rebutted any significant progress:<sup>3</sup>

*“...The consultations have been underway, but they are not as successful as we hoped for after a meeting of the Russian and U.S. presidents in Kennebunkport ... As of today, the situation is disappointing. Our colleagues have a different idea of the tasks set...”*

Why the START Treaty remains important for both sides, what differences do the United States and Russia have in their approaches to strategic arms control and what prospects are there for achieving a new bilateral agreement?

It is well known, that the U.S.-Russian Moscow Treaty (also known as Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty or SORT), that is going to be effective till 2013, has significant drawbacks. One of its shortcomings is an absence of a mechanism for verification of nuclear reductions. Most likely, the lack of such a mechanism can be explained by a failure to reach an agreement on what reductions the United States and Russia were going to conduct. The term “strategic nuclear warheads” in the Article I of the Moscow Treaty has not yet been defined.<sup>4</sup> As long as START Treaty remains in force, the existing differences may seem inessential, since transparency and irreversibility of the Moscow Treaty reductions are provided by a verification mechanism laid in START. In contrast to Moscow

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<sup>2</sup> [Lugar Speech at Conference on Defense against Weapons of Mass Destruction](#), January 30, 2008;

<sup>3</sup> [The absence of U.S. missile defense in Europe is the best guarantee that it is not directed against Russia – Kislyak](#), *Interfax*, February 4, 2008

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Anatoli Diakov, Timur Kadyshev, Eugene Miasnikov and Pavel Podvig, [What To Do With The Treaty On Strategic Offensive Reductions?](#), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, September 20, 2002

Treaty, START also contains a set of certain limits on development of strategic offensive weapons. It provides basis for retaining predictability in this area and maintaining stability in the U.S.-Russian relations.<sup>5</sup> Should START end in December 2009, its verification mechanism including a system of inspections, notifications and data exchange will also end to exist.

Importance of these factors is likely understood both in Russia and the United States. However, there are several reasons why the sides do not want to extend START. Speaking about disadvantages of the Treaty its parties usually refer to excessive complexity of its verification mechanism that was worked out during the cold war. However, a deeper insight shows, that, in addition, START creates obstacles for plans to develop strategic forces in both countries.<sup>6</sup>

In June 2006 Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed to begin talks with the United States on replacing the START Treaty,<sup>7</sup> and the sides started discussing related problems soon after. Though the U.S.-Russian consultations are strictly confidential, some information that appeared in the press reveals the key points of disagreements.

As one should expect, the main motivation for the U.S. side is importance of retaining the verification regime, and this fact is emphasized in the Senator Lugar's testimony mentioned above. However, the U.S. side seems to be interested in separating the mechanism, that ensures control and transparency, from START restrictions and limitations, and extend the former only by "hooking" it to the Moscow Treaty.<sup>8</sup> To all appearances the Russian side does not agree with such an approach:<sup>9</sup>

*"...We think that a range of START provisions that envision weapons elimination, verification and other measures have been fulfilled. That is why there exists no special necessity to extend them for the future... Our U.S. partners are talking about trust measures in relation to the Moscow Treaty..."*

Russian objections are understandable, since a verification mechanism of any treaty is inseparably connected with the goals and implementation of such a treaty. The START verification system is capable to provide a basis for the Moscow Treaty implementation mechanism, but, first of all, the sides need to agree on the goals of SORT and its counting rules. The difference in existing approaches consists in the fact that the Russian side interprets the term "strategic nuclear warheads" according to START definitions, but the U.S. side understanding is much narrower and includes "operationally deployed nuclear warheads" only. The Russian approach does not suit the U.S. side, because the Pentagon plans to deploy much more than 2,200 warheads permitted by the Moscow Treaty, if these warheads are counted according to "old" (START) rules. The United States are not going to elimi-

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<sup>5</sup> Statement by Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, at the Conference of Disarmament, Geneva, February 12, 2008. On START Treaty benefits and problems of its extension see also: Anatoli Diakov and Eugene Miasnikov, [ReSTART: The Need for a New U.S.-Russian Strategic Arms Agreement](#), *Arms Control Today*, September 2006, pp. 6-11.

<sup>6</sup> Anatoli Diakov and Eugene Miasnikov, 2006; *Op.cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Putin held a meeting with ambassadors and permanent representatives of the Russian Federation in Moscow at the Foreign Ministry on June 27, 2006

<sup>8</sup> In particular, Senator Lugar mentioned about necessity of extension of START Treaty's verification and transparency elements. See also: Wade Boese, [Report: No Progress on Missile Defense, Nukes](#), *Arms Control Today*, October 2007

<sup>9</sup> Sergei Kislyak's interview to "Interfax" news agency, February 4, 2008

nate strategic delivery systems assigned to conventional missions. According to START rules, such systems are still counted, and each assigned to a certain number of warheads. The U.S. plans create understandable concerns for the Russian side:<sup>10</sup>

*«...Warheads do not exist just by themselves. They are 'delivered' by strategic delivery means. The issue deals with how plans for the development of offensive strategic arms will evolve given the absence of any limitations on delivery means. Is there a risk of destabilizing stock-piles?...»*

In our view a compromise is still achievable. The Russian side has to agree with the U.S. approach toward counting rules. For its turn, the U.S. side should accept the Russian view that strategic delivery means remain strategic even if their nuclear warheads are replaced with conventional ones. Therefore, such conventional strategic delivery means should be covered by associated limits for deployment, as well as verification and transparency measures. Verification measures toward strategic systems may be more or less intrusive depending of what kind of warheads such systems carry, but it is important to keep conventional strategic systems within mutually agreed limits as well.<sup>11</sup>

The compromise can unlikely be achieved within the frames of the Moscow Treaty, as the U.S. side inclines to. The Russian proposal to work out a new agreement seems more realistic. Moreover, a consensus on new accounting rules would open a way toward lower ceilings in a new agreement that would be beneficial for both political and economic reasons to both sides. One of the goals of a new agreement would be creation of a new much simpler verification mechanism based on START implementation experience.

Speaking about prospects for START replacement, one should emphasize that, unfortunately, the background for resolving the related problems is far from favorable. The U.S. plans to deploy missile defenses in Europe became the most substantial irritator for the talks. The Russian side insists that the necessity of the deployment can be explained by *“the need to survey the Russian deterrent systems”* only.<sup>12</sup> Thus, one may not exclude that solving problems of START expiration will be tightly dependent on settling problems related with the deployment of missile defenses in Europe, which does not seem to happen in the nearest future.

There are also subjective factors. Resolving problems of START expiration and missile defenses with Russia apparently is not in the list of top priorities of the current U.S. administration, which is mostly focused on the forthcoming presidential elections, war in Iraq and threats of economic recession. Since George W. Bush came to power, the State Department lost almost all experts who had experience of negotiations on strategic reductions and missile defenses issues. It is notable, that Sergei Kislyak’s vis’ a’ vis - 39 years old John Rood, who was appointed Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security in 2007, while speaking about the ABM Treaty some time ago called a *“huge advantage...not being encumbered with all this baggage from the Cold War.”*<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is hard to expect any constructive steps from the current U.S. administration in near future. A new U.S. administration will likely need time to *“adjust”* to the White House, after it comes to the power

<sup>10</sup> Sergei Kislyak’s interview to *“Interfax”* news agency, February 4, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Anatoli Diakov and Eugene Miasnikov, 2006; *Op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Sergei Kislyak’s interview to *“Interfax”* news agency, February 4, 2008

<sup>13</sup> Dafna Linzer, [The NSC's Sesame Street Generation](#), *The Washington Post*, Sunday, March 12, 2006; B03

early next year. For these reasons there is a little hope that the United States and Russia succeed in undoing knot of accumulated problems before December 2009.

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