

Developing Approaches toward Resolving the Issue of Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons

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Definitions

One may find different definitions in the literature describing the class of nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) — tactical, sub-strategic or short-range nuclear weapons. There is no commonly accepted definition what is meant by tactical or nonstrategic weapon. In this paper, the term “nonstrategic nuclear weapons” refers to U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons associated with delivery systems that are not covered by New START agreement.

Russia’s Approach Toward NSNW Reductions

Russia’s current approach toward reducing nonstrategic nuclear weapons is well known. It has been outlined in statements of Russian officials.² One may emphasize three important points with regard to Russia’s attitude:

1. Russia is not avoiding discussions on NSNW, but it does not consider this issue as a priority. In Russia’s view there are more important issues to discuss (as e.g. ballistic missile defenses, European security, space weapons, strategic conventional arms, etc.)
2. Prior to beginning substantive negotiations on NSNW, all states should withdraw their nuclear weapons back to their national territory. That means the United States should return their nuclear bombs from Europe back to its territory and eliminate in an irreversible manner an option to deploy them again (which means eliminating related infrastructure in Europe). In this regard, the Russian military experts frequently raise a following argument: “After disbanding the Warsaw Pact we moved all our nuclear weapons from the Eastern Europe and later from the Former Soviet Union states back to Russia. You promised to take reciprocal measures. Now it is your turn to accomplish promises. Why are you

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² Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, March 1, 2011

making removal of nuclear weapons from Europe dependant on Russia's willingness to negotiate NSNW reductions?"³

3. NSNW issue can not be discussed separately from other issues that have an impact on strategic stability. Those other factors are:
- Strategic arms (both nuclear and non-nuclear)
 - Nuclear forces of other states besides the United States and Russia
 - Missile defenses
 - Conventional forces
 - Space weapons

While the first two points represent the Russia's long-standing attitude, the third point is relatively new to the general public. First time it was spelled out in the statement made in 2003 in the Session of PrepCom in Geneva:⁴

"... Russia proceeds from the understanding that it is impossible to consider the issues of tactical nuclear weapons separate from other kinds of armament..."

... Quite naturally the elaboration of specific proposals to reduce and limit nuclear weapons should be accompanied by the adoption of specific measures also to limit other types of weapons including non-nuclear, as well as including the prohibition or limitation of activities with such weapons within reach of each other's territories..."

What are the reasons behind the Russia's current attitude toward the issue of NSNW?

NSNW Role and Missions

Non-strategic nuclear weapons were created for employment in regional conflicts. Therefore they have very different roles and missions in Russia's military doctrine compared to the roles of NSNW in the U.S. doctrine.

It is hard to imagine that the United States will ever employ a nonstrategic nuclear weapon against their neighbors. There is no such a military threat, and even it existed, it could be deterred by conventional means. This fact explains why the United States are retiring their nonstrategic nuclear weapons. The current Nuclear Posture Review is going to phase out nuclear submarine launched cruise missiles. Finding a military mission for nuclear bombs deployed in Europe is also extremely hard. At the time being these bombs accomplish primarily political objectives as means of cohesion between NATO members.

³ Most recently this view was reiterated by Ambassador Dmitri Rogozin in his interview to "Krasnaya Zvezda": Alexandr Frolov, "Formiruya Vzaimoponimaniye," ("Moulding Mutual Understanding"), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 18, 2011. http://www.redstar.ru/2011/11/17_11/3_01.html

⁴ Statement by the delegation of the Russian Federation at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Geneva, April 28, 2003

This is not the case as to Russia. Unfortunately, an argument about increasing of the military role for non-strategic nuclear weapons is raised more and more often, as Russian political and military leadership sees emerging dangers from NATO expansion, unrest in the Middle East and the South Asia and growing economic and military potential of China. These dangers are seen as having potential to evolve into threats to Russia. Therefore, the Russian military is given a task to prepare for scenarios that assume specific military missions for NSNWs. These scenarios include not only naval nuclear weapons but also the weapons for other military services - the Air Forces, Air Defense and Ground Forces.⁵

Russia's Attitude Toward Transparency

It is well known that the Russia's strategic forces are shrinking. Its conventional forces are also becoming smaller in size even more rapidly. In spite of increase in its budget, the Russian military is unable to replace aged armaments with modern weapons. Results of military reforms carried out for the last twenty years have not lead to creation of a smaller but more capable military forces that the Russia's leadership foresaw, as, in particular, the conflict with Georgia demonstrated in 2008.

At these circumstances the Russia's leadership puts high stakes on retaining highly survivable nuclear deterrent capability. Building up strategic forces is an expensive way to pursue such a goal. Decreasing transparency is a much cheaper alternative. For these reasons there is a little interest on the Russian side toward increasing transparency of its military forces, and in particular – transparency of its non-strategic nuclear arms. In fact, the trend is opposite. Over the past several years Russia decreased the level of transparency. Russia left the CFE Treaty regime. The New START data exchange mechanism has also become less transparent compared to the one of the previous START Treaty.⁶

NSNWs as a Political Leverage

It is not surprising that the Russia's leadership might consider its non-strategic nuclear weapons as a powerful trump card to resolve other arms control issues that are of its primary interest. Therefore it is unrealistic to expect a U.S.-Russian agreement on NSNWs not linked to agreements covering also other topics.

⁵ For more details, see: Anatoli Diakov, Eugene Miasnikov and Timur Kadyshev, "Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons. Problems of Control and Reduction," Occasional Paper of Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Dolgoprudny, 2004; <http://www.armscontrol.ru/pubs/en/nsnw0406.htm>

⁶ Hans Kristensen, New START Data Exchange: Will it Increase or Decrease International Nuclear Transparency? March 22, 2011; <http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2011/03/startexchange.php>

Some western analysts believe that Russia might accept a proposal to set up common limits on deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons (both strategic and nonstrategic) by claiming that such an approach would resolve the problem of so called “breakout” or upload potential (non-deployed nuclear weapons placed at storage).⁷ After New START reductions the United States are going to retain over 3000 nuclear warheads ready to be deployed within days or weeks, twice as much as permitted number of deployed nuclear warheads. Russia’s upload capability will be significantly smaller.

It is true, that the upload potential issue became a strong argument against START II Treaty in Russia in the middle of 1990s and it caused a lot of criticism from the Treaty opponents. Compared to the START II the New START Treaty is even worse in terms of disparity in upload capabilities of the sides. However, there was almost no criticism in Russia with regard to this disadvantage of the Treaty. Russia does not seem to be interested in discussing upload capability issue at all, so that the proposal to set common limits on nuclear warheads is likely dead on arrival.

There are also ideas to link the issue of NSNW to resolving the current U.S.-Russian disagreements on missile defenses. It is unclear yet to what extent such an approach could help start a U.S.-Russian dialog on NSNW, as there is not much progress on BMD talks at the time being. On the other hand, some Russian experts already warn that it would be a huge mistake to trade off NSNW for the opportunity to build a joint missile defense system with the United States.⁸ They argue that any missile defense system would be extremely expensive and inefficient.

Conditions for Moving the NSNW Issue Forward

As the analysis above suggests, the Russian attitude toward NSNW is still primarily shaped by the “Cold War” mentality and the lack of trust in the U.S. intentions. On the other hand, one should admit that Russia’s behavior is not surprising as the policy of the United States toward Russia over the past twenty years has also been mostly determined by the same factors.

It is highly unlikely, that the sides will be able to make substantial progress on the NSNW issue unless they significantly change the nature of mutual deterrence relationship and develop trust and true partnership by working on common projects aimed at common goals. At the same time both the United States and Russia need to reveal flexibility and make steps demonstrating their willingness to resolve the issues of their disagreement.

Two tracks are suggested to address NSNW in near future. The first one is discussing NSNW during negotiations on the New START follow up, another

⁷ Steven Pifer, “After New START: What Next?” *Arms Control Today*, December 2010; http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_12/%20Pifer

⁸ Alexandr Khramchikhin, Protiv Kogo EvroPRO? (Whom EuroBMD Against Is?), Part 2, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyj Kurier*, October 26, 2011; <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/8281>

– within the frames of NATO – Russian Council dialog. The work on both tracks can be carried out in parallel.

With regard to the New START follow up negotiations, the issue of NSNW needs to be discussed within the framework covering missile defenses and strategic conventional weapons as well.⁹ Ballistic missile defenses seem to be the key issue. On one hand, reducing the gap in the two sides' attitudes toward missile defense would promote resolution of the two other issues. On the other hand, a lack of progress on missile defense will block the dialogue on nonstrategic nuclear weapons and conventional strategic arms as well as on further reductions of strategic nuclear arms. Recently Michael McFaul, President Obama's nominee for US ambassador to Russia, stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, that the Russian side made clear that it was not going to negotiate NSNWs without some substantial progress in resolving current disagreements on missile defense.¹⁰

Another issue that has to be linked to BMD and NSNW issues at New START follow up talks is strategic conventional arms. It is frequently thought that this issue is confined to the weapons developed in the United States within the "Prompt Global Strike" program. In fact, it is much broader as the New START contains numerous "gray" areas, which have not been resolved yet.¹¹

Recently in October the sides reported to the UN about successful beginning of the Treaty implementation.¹² However, the situation is not that shiny. In particular, according to informal sources, the Russian side was not satisfied with the procedures, which the US side was going to implement for B-1 bomber conversion. Russia considers the issue important, since the New START Treaty does not limit converted heavy bombers and submarine ballistic missile launchers. In addition, once all B-1 bombers are converted to carry conventional arms, they will not subject to the Treaty provisions, including the limitations on their deployment.

Unfortunately, the New Treaty does not have a mechanism to resolve the issue, unless the sides demonstrate their good will. The Treaty does require discussing the disagreements at the Bilateral Consultative Commission, but

⁹ For more details, see: Anatoli Diakov, Eugene Miasnikov and Timur Kadyshv, Nuclear Reductions After New START: Obstacles and Opportunities, *Arms Control Today*, May 2011 pp 15-22; http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011_05/Miasnikov

¹⁰ Hearing on the Nomination of Dr. Michael Anthony McFaul to be Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, October 12, 2011; <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=5cc7bb1f-5056-a032-52f3-8e44304ba387>

¹¹ For more details, see: Eugene Miasnikov, "Strategic Conventional Arms: Deadlocks and Solutions," *Security Index*, N 3 (96), Vol. 17 (2011), pp. 9-15. The version of the article in Russian is available at <http://pircenter.org/data/publications/sirus1-11/Analysis-Miasnikov.pdf>

¹² Rose Gottemoeller, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, U.S. Priorities in Nuclear Arms, New York, October 20, 2011; <http://fpc.state.gov/175924.htm>

the sides are not obliged to agree on conversion procedures. This is just a one example explaining why Russian officials often say, that let's first see how the existing treaty will be implemented, when they are asked about Russia's willingness to negotiate a follow up treaty.

The second track (NATO – Russian Council) also assumes creating conditions for the discussions on the NSNW. Besides resolving BMD issue, there has to be some progress on Adapted CFE Treaty.

Verification Measures

There is a common understanding in the expert community that establishing control over NSNW is a complicated process that will require a lot of time and efforts from the United States and Russia. Besides political problems there are also technical ones since control over NSNW has to include application of transparency and verifications measures over nuclear weapons themselves.¹³ The United States and Russia have no experience on monitoring of warheads yet. Moreover, the development and use of an inspection mechanism for nuclear warheads is prevented by the fact that their design, manufacturing, and maintenance are among the most tightly guarded secrets in any nuclear-weapon state.

Under these circumstances, proven methods as controlling launchers might also become valuable tools to address NSNW. Some experts argue that controlling NSNW launchers is impossible because the latter are used for dual purposes (can carry both nuclear and conventional weapons).¹⁴ However, control of conventional launchers worked quite well for the CFE Treaty in the past. “Old” START did have measures for controlling dual use heavy bombers as well. The New START has transparency measures with regard to dual capable platforms also and, compared to the “old” START, it significantly eases the procedures for conversion or elimination. In fact, covering NSNW launchers by arms control measures is not enough for entirely different reason. Such measures can only be used with regard to deployed nuclear weapons. NSNW at storage places will be out of verification mechanism, as well as nondeployed strategic nuclear weapons, which are currently not covered by the New START limitations and verification procedures. Nevertheless, applying arms control measures to dual capable NSNW launchers might resolve many of the concerns raised these days with regard to NSNW. They could provide assurances, that nonstrategic nuclear weapons are not deployed or, if deployed in a non-provocative manner, do not pose a threat to concerned parties. Such measures could also help to diminish concerns over

¹³ For more details, see: Anatoly Diakov, Nuclear Warheads and Weapon Grade Materials, In “Nuclear Reset: Arms Reduction and Nonproliferation”, Ed. by Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, Carnegie Moscow Center, 2011. In print. The Russian version of the book is available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/Nuclear%5Freset%5F2011%2Epdf>

¹⁴ NATO-Russian Relations (Prospects for New Security Architecture, Nuclear Reductions, CFE Treaty) by Alexei G. Arbatov, Vladimir Z. Dvorkin, Sergey K. Oznobishchev and Alexander A. Pikaev, Moscow: IMEMO, 2010; <http://www.imemo.ru/en/publ/2010/10001.pdf>

possible theft of NSNW by terrorists, because there is a common understanding that nuclear weapons are safer and more secure when they are placed at central storage facilities rather than deployed with the units.

What Can Realistically Be Achieved Regarding NSNW in Near Future?

There is no doubt that the task of developing transparency and verification measures over nuclear warheads and bombs themselves has to be solved, as we are moving to the world free of nuclear weapons. Under such circumstances, coordinated unilateral initiatives with regard to nuclear weapons seem preferable, even though such initiatives will not be legally binding.¹⁵ In the first place, unilateral initiatives could be aimed primarily at the introduction and development of transparency measures in Russia, the United States, and NATO.

Transparency measures could be implemented in two phases. First, arsenals of U.S. and Russian nondeployed nuclear weapons could be divided into two categories. The first category would include nuclear weapons assigned to deployed delivery systems. Most of these weapons are currently placed at storage sites as a hedge (active arsenal). The second category would include nuclear weapons with expired lifetimes and slated for disassembly and disposal.

In the first stage of implementing the transparency measures, Russia, the United States and NATO could voluntarily:

- share information about the total number of nonstrategic nuclear weapons eliminated since 1992;
- share information about the number of nuclear weapons associated with different types of delivery systems that were completely eliminated in accordance with the unilateral commitments in 1991 (e.g. land mines and artillery shells);
- share information annually on the total number of nuclear weapons in the first category and on the locations at which the weapons are stored. The sides should undertake commitments that weapons of this category will stay only in declared storage sites;
- declare that they have no plans to transfer weapons from the second (to-be-eliminated) to the first category.

This exchange of information could be implemented confidentially, in accordance with the national legislation of each side.

Another initiative that could greatly facilitate progress on establishing a verification regime over nonstrategic nuclear weapons would be unilateral

¹⁵ For more details, see: Anatoli Diakov, Eugene Miasnikov and Timur Kadyshv, Nuclear Reductions After New START: Obstacles and Opportunities, *Arms Control Today*, May 2011 pp 15-22; http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2011_05/Miasnikov

commitments by Russia and the United States not to conduct research, development and manufacture of new types of such weapons.

In the second stage the sides could:

- exchange information on the number of nonstrategic nuclear weapons associated with each type of delivery system;
- permit visits to the facilities where weapons of the first category are stored. The purpose of these visits would be to confirm that the number of weapons stored does not exceed the declared number;
- provide evidence of elimination of weapons of the second category;
- permit visits to weapons storage facilities of the second category upon completion of weapons elimination procedures.

The implementation of the second phase will require an agreement on the protection of sensitive information provided by the sides (for example location of storage facilities).

In parallel with the implementation of the above initiatives, Russian and U.S. experts could jointly develop technical means and procedures for nuclear weapons verification, so that in case Russia and the United States agree to negotiate monitoring of nondeployed nuclear weapons, the sides would have verification means and procedures at their disposal.