

# ON PROSPECTS OF THE US-RUSSIAN DISARMAMENT DIALOGUE

Vladimir I. Rybachenkov<sup>1</sup>

Having signed last April the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (The New START Treaty) the Presidents of Russia and of the United States of America not only fixed the reduced quantitative limits of these arms but also indicated prospects for continuation of the dialogue at this disarmament track so important for the international community. The Parties note in the Preamble of the Treaty their adherence to the step-by-step process of reducing and limiting nuclear arms while maintaining the safety and security of their nuclear arsenals, and with a view to expanding this process in future, including a multilateral approach.

Speaking at the New Treaty signing ceremony in Prague President B. Obama expressed hope to pursue discussions with Russia on reducing both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) accidentally responding to the criticism from the republican wing of the Senate that TNW were not included in the New Treaty's scope<sup>2</sup>.

The subject matter of TNW has been attracting attention of the American expert community for many years the emphasis been put on substantial imbalance in favor of Russia in this type of nuclear weapons (according to the Federation of American Scientists Russia has about 2000 deployed tactical nuclear weapons while US – only 500, of which 200 are located in five European countries)<sup>3</sup>. Besides that concerns are expressed about the lack of arrangements related to mutual transparency measures on TNW.

Taking into account this context the position of the US administration and the Congress consists in the premise that negotiations on TNW should start as soon as possible without any preconditions, which apparently would not suit Russia. As it follows from numerous official statements of the MFA of Russia Moscow proceeds from the necessity to equalize the starting positions of two sides without waiting for the launch of the negotiating process, that is to assure first the relocation of the US tactical nuclear weapons to the American continent. As far as the correlation between Russian and American TNW is concerned some Russian competent experts believe that Moscow would be ready to exchange corresponding data only after the begin-

---

<sup>1</sup> Senior Research Scientist, Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology.

<sup>2</sup> The White House Office of The Press Secretary, April 8, 2010; The New START, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report to the Senate, October 1, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> R. Norris, H. Kristensen, Russian nuclear forces, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 2010; R. Norris, H. Kristensen, US Nuclear Forces, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May/June 2010.

ning of negotiations on reduction of such weapons as it was done during preparation of the bilateral INF Treaty on elimination of intermediate and shorter range missiles signed in 1987.<sup>4</sup>

Judging by recent statements of the US administration no changes in the American position on TNW are noticeable. Speaking in April in Tallinn at the NATO foreign ministers meeting US Secretary of State H. Clinton stated in plain English that American tactical NW should remain in Europe linking their transparency to similar Russian measures. Moreover such an approach was confirmed in the run-up of the Lisbon NATO Summit: a draft of a new Strategic Concept developed by an expert group headed by former US Secretary of State M. Albright distributed to the country-members ambassadors in Brussels contains a provision about the necessity of maintaining TNW in Europe as a counterbalance to Russian tactical weapons and as a bargaining chip at eventual negotiations with Moscow on further reductions of Strategic Offensive Arms<sup>5</sup>.

The problem of tactical nuclear weapons is not the only stumbling block for continuation of the US-Russian dialogue on Strategic Offensive Arms. As it was stated by a high-ranking Russian diplomat at the 1-st Committee of the last UN General Assembly, further nuclear disarmament steps should be considered and carried out taking into account the totality of factors apt to influence the strategic stability<sup>6</sup>. He mentioned in particular such factors as creation of regional missile defense systems without taking into consideration the security of neighboring countries, plans for the development of conventional strategic delivery vehicles, enhancement of strategic missile defense potential, imbalance in the sphere of conventional armaments, nuclear weapons deployment on the territory of non-nuclear states.

Worth saying that a possible negative impact of practically all of the above mentioned factors on prospects of US-Russian disarmament dialogue has been examined in detail by the Russian expert community<sup>7</sup>. But remarkably somewhat fewer attention was paid to the assessment of how seriously further dialogue may be hindered by the absence of a final agreement on conventional armed forces in Europe, i.e. by unsettled situation around Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.

### **On the situation around the CFE Treaty**

The CFE Treaty was signed in Paris in November 1990, entered into force in November 1992 and became for the beginning of the 1990 a sufficiently effective instrument of strengthening of European security. Six Warsaw Pact and sixteen NATO country-

---

<sup>4</sup> V. Kozin, “[New Treaty Under Threat](#)”, *Red Star*, August 3, 2010 (in Russian language).

<sup>5</sup> N. Gaouette, “[Clinton Says NATO Should Retain Tactical Nuclear Weapons Based in Europe](#)”, Bloomberg BusinessWeek.

<sup>6</sup> [Statement by A. Antonov, Director of the Department for Security Affairs and Disarmament, MFA of Russia, October 4, 2010.](#)

<sup>7</sup> A. Arbatov, “[Tactical nuclear weapons-problems and solutions](#)”, *Military-Industrial Courier*, May 5, 2010 (in Russian language); A. Diakov, T. Kadyshev, E. Miasnikov, “[Further Reduction of Nuclear Weapons](#)”, Center for Armscontrol, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, February 3, 2010.

members became its participants. Taking into account the existence of these military-political blocks two groups of states-parties were formed.

CFE Treaty ended the era of the Warsaw Pact and NATO confrontation having established a military balance between the two alliances at a lower level and having restricted the possibility of deployment of their conventional armaments along the Warsaw Pact and NATO dividing lines. The CFE Treaty basis consists in quantitative limitation on five basic categories of conventional armaments and military equipment of the armed forces of the states-parties in the area of the Treaty's application: tanks, armed combat vehicles, artillery pieces, attack helicopters and combat aircraft. Central are provisions about maximum ceilings of armaments and equipment limited by the Treaty for each of the established state-parties groups in the area of the application of the Treaty in total and in its particular regions.

For the purpose of monitoring the compliance with the provisions of the Treaty a system of notifications and detailed information exchange about conventional armaments was developed. The main oversight instrument of its implementation is on-site inspections.

With the dissolution of Warsaw Pact, the demise of the USSR, withdrawal of Soviet/Russian troops from Central/Eastern Europe, Baltic States and former Soviet Republics, and especially with NATO expansion the CFE Treaty negotiated mechanisms started losing their effectiveness. In the judgment of the Russian side NATO countries, as a result of the Alliance expansion, substantially exceeded maximum levels for armaments and equipment fixed by the Treaty in whole and for the established regions in particular. Extremely unfavorable for Russia turned out to be segregation into a separate zone with strict limitations of so called flank region, which included vast territories in North and South Europe.

Taking into account these changes an Adapted CFE Treaty was developed and signed in Istanbul in November 1999. The new Treaty transformed the zone-group basis of the initial Treaty into the system of national (for all categories of armaments) and territorial (for ground armaments) ceilings for each state-party. Instead of five former geographical zones was formed a rigid network of territorial limitations, consisting of 28 territorial levels (corresponding to the number of the European members of the Treaty), as well as two flank sublevels for the territory of Russia and Ukraine. The new Treaty regime is oriented towards the enhancement of the security of each state-party independently of its membership in political-military alliances.

The new Treaty substantially leveled the negative consequences of the first NATO expansion wave for the security of Russia and for the European stability in whole, but the next expansion wave complicated the situation anew.

The Adapted CFE Treaty was ratified by Byelorussia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, but then again the NATO countries practically right away after the signature of the Treaty headed for the procrastination of its entry into force – they started linking the ratification of the Adapted Treaty with the fulfillment by Russia of so called Istanbul commitments (bilateral arrangements with Georgia and Moldova before Is-

tanbul Summit on withdrawal of Russian armed forces from their territories). Russia for its part considered such a link wrongful declaring that all her CFE Treaty commitments have been fulfilled.

Extraordinary circumstances around CFE Treaty forced Russian Federation to consider a suspension of the Treaty implementation until NATO countries ratify the Adapted Treaty and start its fair implementation. A statement to this effect was made by the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in April 2007.

Among these extraordinary circumstances were reckoned:

1. Evasion of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Czech Republic from fixing the changes in the composition of the state-parties groups following the accession of these countries to NATO.
2. Overriding by new NATO members of the CFE Treaty group limitations as a result of NATO expansion.
3. Negative impact of the planned US conventional forces deployment in Bulgaria and Romania on the fulfillment of the CFE Treaty group limitations.
4. Negative impact of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia nonparticipation in the CFE Treaty on the fulfillment of the Final act of the CFE Treaty state-parties Conference (Istanbul, 17-19 November 1999).

On July 13 2007 was signed and entered into force the Presidential Decree on suspension by the Russian Federation of the CFE Treaty and related international agreements implementation. A corresponding Federal Law was approved by both chambers of the Russian Parliament, signed by President Putin, and entered into force on December 3 2007. On December 12 started the implementation of the measures resulting from the Decree. In practical terms this meant that as of 00 hours Moscow time were suspended all the activities of Russia related to the CFE Treaty and associated documents implementation. In particular the provision of information and the conduct of on-site inspections were discontinued. In addition during the suspension period Russia does not consider being linked by restrictions, including the flank ones, on quantity of the conventional armaments. At the same time according to the statement of MFA of Russia there are no plans for their massive build-up. Moreover the CFE Treaty suspension, as opposed to the withdrawal from the Treaty, reserves the possibility of a rapid resumption of its implementation upon resolution of the above-mentioned problems.

After the CFE Treaty suspension by Russia consultations were continued with Western partners about the restoration of its viability, the main work in this direction being undertaken within Russia-USA format. In the meantime NATO countries put forward as a departing point the concept of “parallel actions” – some NATO countries embark on Adapted CFE Treaty ratification while Russia undertakes certain measures regarding its presence in Transdnistria and at former military base at Gudauta.

During the consultations it became clear that the West is still not ready to take into account a number of key Russian proposals first of all having to do with a repeal of

the flank limitations with respect to the Russian territory. Regarding other problems readiness only was expressed to discuss them after the Adapted CFE Treaty entry into force. In July 2008 the American side expressed the intention to intensify the dialogue but after August 2008 events in the Transcaucasia NATO countries took again a break in the consultations.

On May 5, 2009 Russia submitted to the CFE Joint Consultative Group a memorandum “Restoring CFE Treaty viability: a way forward” which was underlining the importance of counter actions and the necessity of settling the controversy not in the indefinite future but within the framework of the package solution proposed by Moscow. The first half of 2010 was marked by intensified activities of US partners in trying to find out the way out of the current impasse (US administration designated a high-ranking diplomat as a special representative on problems of conventional armaments in Europe). In June-September a number of meetings devoted to CFE Treaty were conducted where Russian and US representatives as well as other parties to the Treaty exchanged opinions about the ways to restore the CFE Treaty viability. Judging by the absence of full-scale reports about the outcome of these consultations one can surmise that their participants could not come to a common ground and the prospects of finding consensus solutions on CFE Treaty in the foreseeable future are vague.

In this context deserves attention information made public by a Russian news media that in December 2009 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S. Lavrov passed on to the NATO leadership a draft agreement on foundations of Russia-NATO relations but by the mutual consent of the parties it was agreed not to make the document known. Its key provision contains the proposal to limit the deployment of “Essential Combat Forces (ECF)” on the territory of countries which became NATO members during the last expansion waves (eight former Warsaw Pact members plus Slovenia, Albania and Croatia). A source at the NATO headquarters confirmed to Russian journalists under condition of anonymity the receipt of the Russian draft but underlined that it would be too early to speak about the signature of a legally binding document since the term “ECF” has been never clearly determined. Permanent Representative of Russia at NATO Rogozin for his part allegedly remarked: “NATO officials do not want to sign anything”.<sup>8</sup>

### **Prospects of dialogue on nuclear armaments reductions**

In the judgment of American experts Obama administration is aware that in the final analysis the US will have to decide the issue of the Adapted CFE Treaty entry into force or to develop a New Treaty satisfactory to Russia as a condition for obtaining Russia’s consent to pursue further reductions of Strategic Offensive Forces<sup>9</sup>. As a major argument in favor of such a scenario experts cite the necessity to lift Russian con-

---

<sup>8</sup> V. Soloviev, E. Chernenko, “NATO forces are being cut in their offensive effort”, *Kommersant*, N 200, October 27 2010 (in Russian language).

<sup>9</sup> E. Grossman, “Further U.S.-Russian Nuclear Talks Might Hinge on Armor Cuts, Analyst Says”, *Global Security News*, July 21, 2010.

cerns about the NATO superiority in conventional armed forces in Europe. Otherwise Russia would hardly start reducing its tactical nuclear weapons, which are considered as a kind of a neutralization factor of this superiority. Noteworthy that an official in the Obama administration acknowledged that Moscow is concerned about conventional force levels but insisted that the matter has its own value and remains on a track separate from tactical nuclear dialogue.<sup>10</sup>

Thereby as of today Russian and US approaches to the dialogue on further reductions of the Strategic Offensive Arms seem to differ substantially and apparently the list of differences has a tendency to grow (an example – the Adapted CFE Treaty).

As one could have noted from the Senate START hearings the republicans, who's positions got stronger after November intermediate elections, flatly oppose any negotiated limitations of the US missile defense potential while the Russian side will certainly seek to introduce such restrictions in the body of the future agreement not confining itself to a general statement in the preamble of the New Start Treaty as it was done in April 2010. The same ambiguous situation emerges around tactical nuclear weapons: republicans in the Senate would hardly accept a renewed START negotiation round without TNW in its agenda while Moscow would insist on their preliminary withdrawal from Europe. Another possible Russian precondition for the launch of the negotiating process – achievement of a final agreement on conventional armed forces in Europe.

Prior to the November NATO Summit independent American experts considered that no final decision on US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe will be taken in Lisbon. In their opinion NATO seemed likely to delay a nukes pullback decision until are known the results of a wide-ranging review of its deterrence strategy, assessing how conventional, nuclear and missile defense postures must be combined to assure security in the coming years.<sup>11</sup>

The new NATO Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon confirmed this assessment. Good news – gone is the previous language about US tactical nuclear weapons providing an essential political and military link between Europe and North America, or that sub-strategic forces provide a link with strategic forces. Not so encouraging news for Moscow – “in any reductions NATO aim should be to seek Russian agreements to increase transparency on its nuclear forces in Europe and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members. Any further steps must take into account the disparity with greater Russian stockpiles of short-range nuclear weapons”. As was rightly noted by an American independent expert the paradox of the moment is that the new NATO Strategic Concept declares that “NATO poses no threat to Russia“ and at the same time states that the size of the US arsenal is linked to Russia which resembles the Cold War policy when NATO looked to Russia for siz-

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> E. Grossman, “[NATO Seen Likely to Delay Nuke Pullback Decision](#)”, *Global Security Newswire*, October 28, 2010.

ing the US nuclear arsenal in Europe.<sup>12</sup> Moreover the truth seems also to be that Russia's nuclear tactical weapons posture is less tied to the US nuclear posture in Europe and more to Russia's perception of NATO's superior conventional forces.

Summing up it seems that in the current complex situation the search for the common points of contact will require a good will from both sides though this process may demand one or two years taking into account the depth of the rift. Nevertheless it is evident that both sides will seek to start negotiations on further reductions of Strategic Offensive Arms not later than the spring of 2014 so as to have the opportunity to announce the results achieved at the NPT Review Conference in 2015.

*December 1, 2010.*

© Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies at MIPT, 2010.

---

<sup>12</sup> H. Kristensen, "[NATO Strategic Concept: One Step Forward and a Half Step Back](#)", *FAS Strategic Security Blog*, November 23, 2010.