

# TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS<sup>1</sup>

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First of all I would like to thank our hosts for a very helpful initiative to organize a series of workshops on the future of arms control which is a well-timed endeavor indeed given substantial obstacles on the way to further nuclear arms reductions. This affords us an excellent opportunity to, as my colleagues in the Russian MFA used to say, synchronize watches by overviewing existing problems and mapping out eventual solutions to them.

It goes without saying that I am expressing here my own views and not those of any official body.

Coming to Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) let me start by shortly presenting an overall picture of the situation.

There is no commonly accepted definition what is meant by TNW but I would propose that for the purpose of our discussion this term refer to US and Russian nuclear weapons associated with delivery systems that are not covered by the New START Treaty. TNW are not yet subject to formal arms control agreements but 1991 Presidents Bush and Gorbachev Nuclear Initiatives led to drastic reductions of the US and Russian tactical nuclear weapons stockpiles. According to official statements all Russian TNW were removed since then from delivery means and placed at central storage facilities within national territory with adequate safety and security measures<sup>3</sup> the current stockpile of these devices constituting no more than 25% of its level in 1991<sup>4</sup>. Unofficial assessments of TNW quantity by reputable independent experts give the figure of 2000 warheads in active arsenals for Russia and 500 for the USA. But the real figures are not known since no bilateral transparency and verification measures were incorporated in the Presidential Initiatives. Therefore there exists an uncertainty as to how many tactical arms of different types have been withdrawn from forward bases, where they were relocated and what form of elimination they were subjected to.

Another problem: TNW use dual purpose launchers and delivery vehicles and therefore one can not implement their limitation by simply eliminating the launchers and delivery vehicles. Nevertheless there is a common understanding in both Russia and USA that at the end of the day the TNW should become a subject of a gradual process of limitations and reductions.

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks at A Carnegie-Ploughshares Workshop “Next Steps in Arms Control”, Washington, February 15, 2012.

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<sup>3</sup> Statement of the Russian delegation at the first session of the NPT Preparatory Committee, New York, April 11, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> S.Lavrov, New START Treaty in the matrix of a global security. Political dimension. International Life N7, July 2010.

Despite different approaches towards the ways of tackling TNW issue there is a general understanding in both countries that this type of nuclear weapons constitutes a serious proliferation risk due to their smaller physical dimensions, which make them more vulnerable to theft and thus more easily accessible to terrorists. Moreover, in comparison with strategic nuclear warheads TNW may have less stringent electronic locks systems preventing their unauthorized use and therefore it would be better to get rid of these arms.

Now let me now put the TNW issue into the context of the US and Russia's national security policies.

While the recently adopted military doctrine of Russia does not explicitly provide specific information about the TNW role in national security policy independent experts concur that Russia's apparently increasing reliance on nuclear weapons, including the tactical component, is determined by geostrategic and economic factors.

Firstly, as opposed to the USA, Russia is within the reach of nuclear weapons of several de jure and de facto nuclear states located close to its long borders and this reality must be adequately tackled. Secondly, the Russian nuclear posture is directly linked to Russia's perception of NATO superiority in conventional forces in Europe against the background of a weakened conventional military capability of Russia<sup>5</sup>. In this context it would be right to speak about a compensatory role of Russian TNW vis-a-vis not only NATO but also against eventual threats from China though such a perspective is absent from Moscow's official discourse. Moreover, American TNW in Europe due to their range and location are considered by Moscow as a supplement to the US strategic forces adding over 10% to the New START accountable limits.

One option considered by the US for the next round of nuclear cuts is an equal ceiling on all US and Russian warheads - strategic, tactical and non-deployed. Such an option viewed from Moscow seems not to be very attractive since Russia has to rely much more than the USA on TNW for regional contingencies and therefore would hardly want to accept disparity in strategic arms in order to maintain a regional stability.

To sum up, a standing Russian position on TNW, which is repeatedly confirmed by high-ranking officials, is that the withdrawal of the US TNW from Europe constitutes a precondition for the beginning of substantive negotiations with the USA on this issue<sup>6</sup>. The dialogue is complicated by other difficult subjects in the security agenda such as missile defenses in Europe and arrangements concerning conventional armed forces in Europe.

At the same time the size and location of the Russian TNW stockpile has become a serious source of concern to the USA and other NATO country-members. The final

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<sup>5</sup> General Makarov : Tactical nuclear weapons – a deterrence against enormous arms stockpiles accumulated in Europe. ITAR –TASS, December 10, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Remarks and Responses to questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.Lavrov at the press conference at MFA on 2010 foreign policy outcomes, January 13,2011.

US Senate resolution on New START Treaty ratification stipulates “initiation, following consultations with NATO Allies but not later than one year after New START entry into force, negotiations with Russia on agreement to address disparity between TNW stockpiles of Russia and the USA and to secure and reduce TNW in verifiable manner”. Consistent with the Senate conditionality the Obama Administration has said it believes TNW should be included in the future negotiations but the reciprocal actions could be taken on the basis of parallel steps by each side in advance of a New Treaty.

The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review reiterated the reasons for the presence of the US TNW in Europe, namely maintenance of NATO cohesion and reassurance of Allies and stated that any change would be introduced only after a thorough review by the Alliance. The NATO strategic concept adopted in November 2010 underlined the importance of seeking Russian agreement to increase transparency of its nuclear forces in Europe and relocating these weapons away from the territory of NATO members as well as taking into account the disparity with the greater Russian TNW stockpiles in the future steps with NATO. This document also stated that the supreme guarantee of the NATO security is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particular those of the USA. Such a stance apparently reflected a scant support of TNW in Europe among the US military. For example, general J. Cartwright, the vice Chairman of Chiefs of Staff stated recently that TNW do not serve a military function not already addressed by US strategic and conventional forces<sup>7</sup>. The gist of his declaration is that in the age of tight budgets and competing defense priorities, when the threat of nuclear proliferation and terrorism are the greatest threats to NATO security, maintaining the nuclear status in Europe runs high risk and high cost.

Some NATO country-members also agree that TNW in Europe has little military value but acknowledge the political significance of allied nuclear sharing. Several countries like Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Norway would support withdrawal as long as it involves reciprocal measures from Russia. The more recent NATO members from Central and Eastern Europe resist change because for them the American nuclear presence symbolizes strategic link with the USA. Some even go further in saying that the TNW removal could represent a red line for them.

Interestingly, the statement that the credibility of NATO’s extended deterrence would necessarily require a TNW presence in Europe is not confirmed by the situation in Asia: the US has extended its nuclear umbrella over Japan and S. Korea for two decades without having stationed nuclear weapons on the territory of these countries. Another factor in favor of the US TNW removal – enormous costs of the forthcoming NATO dual capable aircraft replacement to be partially covered by the European member-countries currently under severe economic stress.

After the Lisbon Summit the North Atlantic Council was tasked with conducting NATO Defense and Deterrence Posture Review to further discuss the role of nuclear

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<sup>7</sup> Council on Foreign Relations meeting on Nuclear Posture Review, Washington, April 8, 2010.

weapons and future relations with Russia. The document is slated to be presented to the NATO Summit in May 2012. This event could become a tipping point in shaping cooperative approaches with Russia to TNW issue but one can presume that no recommendation on TNW withdrawal from Europe will be put forward in Chicago due to serious divide among NATO country-members on this matter.

At this point two questions arise so familiar to my compatriots since the times of 19th century prerevolutionary Russia: “Who is to blame?” and “What has to be done?” As to the first question it would be right to say that each side has its part of guilt as it often happens in family conflicts. In trying to find an answer to the second question I sympathize with Senator S. Nunn who recently said it would be wise to forgo rigid linkages between different issues so that the lack of progress on one of them at any given time would not mean the sacrifice of others<sup>8</sup>. According to this logic a treaty-based approach is not a priority at this time and one should rather concentrate on coordinated unilateral transparency measures. In practical terms it means that a more promising way to begin the process of engagement on TNW would be for the USA, NATO and Russia to start with consultations on definitions and proceed with data exchange and associated confidence building measures. I will not dwell at length on such procedures since they are amply described in the recent papers by my colleagues A. Diakov and E. Miasnikov and can be found on the website of our Center [www.armscontrol.ru](http://www.armscontrol.ru).

Suffice it to say that the proposed measures include voluntary exchange of information about the total number of TNW eliminated since 1992 as well as annual exchange of confidential data on number of warheads in active arsenals and their storage locations. Later on the sides could share confidential information on number of TNW warheads associated with each type of delivery systems and permit visits to facilities where active TNW are stored. In parallel with the implementation of these initiatives Russian and US experts could continue a joint effort started in the mid 1990s on the development of technical means and methods for monitoring non-deployed nuclear warheads and the process of their elimination without compromising sensitive information. There is no doubt that such an undertaking will enhance mutual trust and create a technical basis for a legally binding US – Russian agreement on limitation and reduction of tactical nuclear weapons.

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<sup>8</sup> Reducing Nuclear Risks in Europe. A Framework for Action. Nuclear Threat Initiative, Washington, 2011.