

The U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Reduction Dialog: Challenges And Opportunities.

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Presentation to the *Berlin Article VI Forum*

**“New Imperatives and Openings for
a Nuclear Weapons-Free World”**

Berlin, January 28-30

Background

The U.S.- Russian (Soviet) nuclear arms reduction dialog has always been very important for the security relations between them, as well as for the stability in the world. It has the purpose of:

- creating channels of communication between the two governments and keeping them open;
- helping limit their nuclear arms buildups, and make them partners in a great project to reduce the danger of nuclear war;
- reassuring the public that something was being done about nuclear threat.

This cooperation and the resulting shared understanding of the dangers of nuclear weapons laid a foundation for the U.S.-Soviet partnership in building the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

After the end of the Cold War some in the United States started to argue that because Russia and the United States are not rivals anymore, the arms control is simply a wrong paradigm for their modern relations and an outmoded approach to the achievement of strategic stability.

Based on such views the G.W. Bush administration decided to keep its own freedom of action in deploying and operating its nuclear forces rather than to retain START and others arms control agreements.

As a result, the military security system based on treaties and agreements has been practically dismantled over the past decade and the bilateral U.S.-Russian dialog on arms control came to the impasse.

However, Russia and the United States have not become true allies. Indeed, each deploy today about 4,000 strategic nuclear warheads with more than 1000 warheads on each side on hair-trigger alert. Thus, nuclear deterrence continues to be a central part of their relationship.

As long as this state of mutual nuclear deterrence exists, it is impossible to consider the relations between Russia and the United States as "normal".

Currently US-Russian nuclear relationship has four components:

- The 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).
- The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).
- The 1991-92 reciprocal unilateral Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI), that were related to non-strategic nuclear weapons.
- The 2002 Moscow Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT).

The START and SORT Treaties

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed by the Soviet Union and the United States in 1991 limits strategic delivery vehicles and warheads, and requires the destruction of most excess delivery systems.

Also, START established a comprehensive system of notifications and inspections that provides to the both sides a detailed picture of each other's strategic nuclear forces.

The SORT treaty sets limits on nuclear strategic warheads between 1700 and 2200 by 2012. But because sides failed to reach agreement on counting rules, reduction schedule and verifications this treaty can only be considered as a joint declaration.

The START will expire this December and after that the US-Russian strategic relationship will likely exist in a legal vacuum and the lack of verification will lead to increasing uncertainty about each other's strategic capabilities and intentions.

Russia and the U.S. possess more than 90% of the world's nuclear warheads. Without agreement between them on further nuclear weapons reductions it will be difficult to convince other nations that they pursue their NPT commitments and to consolidate efforts of international community for strengthening of the NPT regime.

The recent U.S.-Russian discussions on strategic nuclear weapons reduction

Discussions among U.S. and Russian experts on the future of START, that began in the beginning 2007 made clear that neither Russia nor the United States wants to extend the START Treaty. Mainly because it imposes problems for both sides in their efforts to develop and modernize their strategic offensive forces.

Russia wants to deploy RS-24 missile as a new type of missile equipped with three warheads having capability to penetrate ballistic missile defense. But RS-24 is most likely a version of single warhead SS-27 missile. The START contains a strict definition of the changes needed to count a new missile as "a new type". The RS-24 likely does not satisfy this definition and therefore can not be deployed with a three warheads under this START requirement.

The United States placed a strong priority on converting excess U.S. strategic delivery systems for use as conventional-weapon carriers. Some of this plans will likely collide with START constraints.

Also these discussions have revealed differences on several core issues.

Russia:

- prefers negotiating a new legally binding treaty that would reduce each side's nuclear strategic warheads as well as put limit not only on the warheads but on the strategic delivery means too;
- it seems to be ready to go as low as 1500 and even 1000 warheads;
- insisted that the new treaty should count also those delivery systems that have been "downloaded" or converted to a conventional mission.

Russia wants to count them in order to limit the U.S. upload potential. In its view only such an agreement would maintain the predictability and the stability.

The U.S. has:

- proposed to conclude a short legally binding Treaty and only politically binding agreement on monitoring and transparency regime;
- rejected further weapons limits and any of the detailed definition and counting rules of START;
- rejected to put any limits on strategic delivery means equipped either by nuclear or by conventional warheads and count conventional warheads under the Treaty.

Apparently, the U.S. does not want to include in the new treaty provisions that could effect deployments of conventional warheads on strategic delivery means and their potential deployment with conventional warheads at sites that are not listed in the Treaty.

The U.S. and Russia's approach to the verification

It seems both sides want to retain some of START monitoring and verification provisions under a new treaty, while they want to make them less costly and simpler. But there are differences in the U.S. and Russian approaches that will have to be bridged.

Russia wants to eliminate two sets of restrictions of START.

The first one is imposed on its mobile ICBMs. These restrictions include limits on the size of deployment areas, notifications about exercises, and special on-site inspections after missiles have dispersed for exercises.

The second set is the permanent presence of US inspectors at the Votkinsk mobile missile production plant to verify the number of road mobile missiles that Russia produces.

The U.S. wants to preserve the START inspection regime, most of the data exchange provisions, and the ban on telemetry encryption.

It does not want to include in the treaty those verifications provisions which could affect possible deployment of conventional warheads on ballistic missiles.

But the principal difference is that the U.S. would like to have a political (legally non-binding) agreement to continue as many of the START verification measures as possible, while Russia insists on a legally binding agreement reasoning that otherwise some verification procedures (on-site inspections) would be illegal under Russia's domestic laws.

Does it mean that current differences between Moscow and Washington close the way to the further deeper reductions in their nuclear arsenals?

Russia has consistently expressed interest in negotiating a new treaty on further verifiable reduction of strategic nuclear arms. In his speech on October 10, 2008 Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev stated that Russia attaches "exceptional importance to concluding a new, legally binding US-Russian agreement on nuclear disarmament".

Policy makers in the United States articulated recently the need for a new US nuclear policy. President Obama has expressed the desire to «seek dramatic reductions in U.S. and Russian stockpiles of nuclear weapons.»

These statements give grounds to expect that Russia and the United States could reach a new agreement on verified and irreversible reductions in Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals to levels more consistent with the end of the Cold War.

One rational approach to resolving the current deadlock between Moscow and Washington would be consent of both sides to make some concessions.

The area of compromise could be:

The Russian side should agree with the U.S. approach of counting warheads.

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.

With these concessions and **following the principle of parity and equal security for both parties** Russia and the United States could replace the START and Sort treaties with a new treaty, that would:

- Limit deployed strategic warheads to 1200 or even 1000.
- Establish associated limits for nuclear and conventional strategic delivery means.
- Allow each side to decide on it's own the correlation between number of nuclear and conventional warheads.
- Preserve most of the START verification and transparency measures.

A provision to eliminate excess launchers, missiles and warheads could be also negotiated to make reductions irreversible.

Resolving dispute on the Ballistic Missile Defense

Progress on further reduction of nuclear weapons will depend on finding solution to others issues as well. The most important of them is the development and deployment by the United States of the missile defense System.

In 2002, the Bush Administration withdrew from the 1972 U.S.-Soviet/Russia Treaty on Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Systems. Later the U.S. began to deploy missile interceptors in Alaska and California and intended to do so in Poland. As was declared the systems are directed against possible future threats from North Korea and Iran.

But Russia doubts that these countries will have the technical capability to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile attack on the U.S. in the foreseeable future. It suspects that a real purpose of the U.S. BMD systems – especially of those that are going to be deployed in Poland – is an attempt to obtain a unilateral strategic advantage over Russia by creating a threat to its deterrent.

Perhaps a compromise on this issue would be possible if the United States either reconsider their plans to deploy the European BMD site or takes decision not to expand it after year 2013, when interceptor missiles will be deployed in Poland.

During their 2008 meeting in Sochi Russian president Vladimir Putin has offered to the US president George W. Bush cooperation on Missile Defense. Taking into account the previous history of U.S.-Russian attempts to start such cooperation, today it is unlikely to expect that both countries could initiate a joint work in near term.

But they could initiate at least a joint U.S.-Russian objective analysis of the ballistic missile threat from third countries and of the need and effectiveness of possible alternative responses.

The 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

The 1987 INF Treaty eliminated 1836 Soviet and 859 U.S. land-based nuclear missiles with ranges between 500 and 5500 kilometers.

Recently the Russian political and military leadership has dropped a hint on possibility of Russia's withdrawal from the INF Treaty.

President Putin has motivated such possible decision that it would be difficult for Russia to remain bound by the Treaty's ban while Russia's neighbors China, India, Iran, Pakistan, DPRK and South Korea are developing and deploying medium and intermediate-range missiles. But apparently such thoughts in Moscow were triggered by Bush Administration's withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the proposed deployment of missile interceptors in Poland.

At the same time it seems that Moscow understands all negative political and military consequences that would follow such a step. In October 2007, President Putin suggested, as an alternative to Russian withdrawal, converting the bilateral US-Russian INF treaty into a global treaty.

President Obama has embraced the “goal to expand the U.S.-Russian ban on intermediate-range missiles so that the agreement is global.”

Therefore there is a hope that if the other Russia-US issues are resolved successfully – especially the issue of the deployment of U.S. missile defenses in Eastern Europe – then Russia should be willing to stay within the INF Treaty.

Dealing with the Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW)

An essential part of the U.S. and Russia's nuclear weapon arsenals is non-strategic nuclear weapons.

In 1991, Presidents Bush and Gorbachev unilaterally and reciprocally announced that they were:

- removing all nuclear weapons deployed with the U.S. and Soviet land military formations;
- removing nuclear weapons from U.S. and Soviet surface ships;
- eliminating a considerable number of the withdrawn NSNW.

The PNI are not legally binding and do not include control and verification measures of the realization of the commitments that were made.

Establishing a control over NSNW is not an easy task. One of the principal difficulty is that it should be control not over delivery means as for strategic weapons but over nuclear charges. Russia and the United States have no experience of direct control over nuclear charges.

Nevertheless, nongovernmental estimates indicate that number of NSNW was reduced approximately by seven times since 1991.

Russia's number of NSNW reduced from 21700 in 1991 to about 3000 in 2008. The U.S. NSNW reduced from 7165 in 1991 to 1200.

Russia has declared its principal readiness to discuss the issue of non-strategic nuclear weapons, but in its view such discussions could start only after all countries withdraw their nuclear weapons to the national territory.

Also, Russia's position takes into account general military strategic situation, NATO's incorporation of the East European States and some former Soviet republics, and the correlation of conventional forces.

The U.S., maintaining the NATO's Strategic Concept which is emphasizing the importance of nuclear weapons for the Alliance security, still has a few hundred nuclear bombs deployed on fighter-bomber airbases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey. Today, these are the only nuclear weapons that any country has deployed on the soil of another country.

In view of Russian experts the process of establishing control over NSNW would be initiated with reaching binding agreement between NATO and Russia not to deploy NSNW in the Central and East Europe.

The second step would be the ending US –NATO nuclear deployment in Europe without requiring concessions from Russia.

In fact, the U.S. has gradually been removing its nuclear weapons from Europe. NATO could agree to remove all NSNW from Europe but to leave the infrastructure for their deployment. Such step could open a way to establishing of confidence building measures over NSNW.

The third step would be aimed to creation of an atmosphere of openness and transparency, for instance, announcement of the number of NSNW warheads destroyed and subject to destruction under the 1991 unilateral initiatives.

With mutual confidence growing, Russia and the U.S. can renew the joint Russian-American science-and-technology program for development of verification measures over nuclear warheads and their destruction with simultaneous protection of sensitive information. This program could create a basis for effective verification of deep reductions and even ultimate elimination of nuclear warheads, the most essential component of nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

The difference exists currently between Russia and the United States either on START or on other difficult issues, such as deployment U.S. missile interceptors and radars in Europe, NATO expansion and NSNW.

But both countries must not allow to stall their nuclear arms reduction dialog. The priority in their discussions should be given to negotiating a new treaty on strategic arms reduction with preserving the principle **of parity and equal security for both sides**.

Doing so they will create conditions for resolving others issues as well as to maintain continuity in their strategic nuclear relationship.

Thank you!