

US-Russian Nuclear Disarmament: Current Record and Possible Further Steps¹

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Nuclear disarmament is getting higher and higher on international agenda. The number of disarmament initiatives is growing fast, and this evolution reflects a growing aspiration of mankind for a more secure and stable world free of nuclear weapons. Unlike former gloomy days of the Cold War, today this goal seems to be achievable – though the US President Obama said it will not probably happen during his lifetime, and he is a young man.

Russia understands this pressing need to move further along the road of nuclear disarmament. As President Dmitry Medvedev has emphasized, in accordance with its obligations under the NPT our country is fully committed to reaching the goal of a world free from these most deadly weapons.

We are aware of the fact that progress towards “global zero” can only be achieved through strengthened strategic stability and strict adherence to the principle of equal and indivisible security for all. In its turn this suggests the need to carry out a set of measures required for a sustainable and consistent disarmament process. Among such measures:

- advancement of nuclear disarmament by all states possessing nuclear weapons;
 - prevention of putting weapons into outer space;
 - prevention of operational deployment of conventionally tipped strategic offensive weapons that would create the so-called “compensatory” potential;
 - restricting possibilities to maintain a “nuclear upload potential” or "recoverable nuclear capabilities" while reducing deployed assets;
 - prevention of any attempts to use the NPT membership to implement military nuclear programs;
- and
- ensuring verifiable cessation of conventional capabilities' development coupled with efforts to resolve other international issues, including settlement of regional conflicts.

As a country entirely committed to the goal of sparing humankind from the nuclear threat and a responsible State party of the NPT, which consistently fulfills its obligations under Article VI of the Treaty, Russia produces significant practical results in the field of nuclear arms reduction and limitation.

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The signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between the Soviet Union and the United States on December 8, 1987, opened the way to nuclear disarmament. For the first time in history, two classes of nuclear weapons were irreversibly eliminated and effective controls over the subsequent implementation of the treaty obligations were ensured.

According to the provisions of the INF Treaty, during three years, 1846 ground-launched ballistic and cruise intermediate-range missiles (and shorter range missiles were eliminated, as well as 825 related launchers, and further missile production and testing were prohibited. Related infrastructure was also eliminated. It is crucial to note that some 3,500 nuclear warheads were dismantled along with the missiles and infrastructure. This excluded the possibility of using them as "recoverable capabilities". We propose to develop a comprehensive agreement on global elimination of intermediate- and shorter range missiles.

The signing of the INF Treaty gave a strong impetus to other tracks of the nuclear disarmament process. It has created prerequisites for developing the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the START), which entered into force on December 5, 1994. Under the START Treaty the Russian Federation was to reduce the number of strategic delivery vehicles to 1,600 and the number of warheads attributed to them to 6,000. These obligations were carried out completely and ahead of time. By the reference date of December 5, 2001, the aggregate number of deployed strategic delivery vehicles had actually been reduced to 1,136, and the number of warheads attributed to them to 5,518.

The Moscow Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty concluded between Russia and the United States in 2002 marked yet another contribution of our country to the nuclear disarmament. In accordance with its provisions Russia and the United States were to reduce the levels of their strategic nuclear warheads to 1,700-2,200 by December 31, 2012, that is approximately by the factor of three in comparison with the START ceiling. These obligations have been already carried out.

The signing in Prague on April 8 last year of the New START Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America marks a milestone in the field of nuclear disarmament. The new Treaty provides for each Party to reduce and limit its strategic offensive arms to no more than

- 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers (HB);
- 1,550 warheads on them;
- 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers for ICBMs and SLBMs, and heavy bombers.

In practical terms this means reducing total holdings in warheads by 1/3 in comparison with what was authorized by the 2002 Moscow Treaty. Reductions in delivery vehicles are even deeper – Russia and the US will keep less than 1/2 of their former START limits (1600), while the 2002 Moscow Treaty contained no restrictions on delivery vehicles. The New START brings strategic nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States to the lowest levels since early sixties – the time when the nuclear arms race

had started for good. The reductions under the Treaty will be irreversible, verifiable and transparent to both parties. These are features that only a negotiated legally-binding instrument can provide.

On the whole, as of January 1, 2010, Russia had eliminated about 1,600 launchers of ICBMs and SLBMs, 3,100 ICBMs and SLBMs, 47 nuclear submarines, and 67 heavy bombers. As of February 5, 2011 our country had 521 deployed ICBMs, SLBMs and HBs, 1537 deployed nuclear warheads and 865 launchers – both deployed and non-deployed.

Along with the strategic nuclear armaments, the Russian Federation has substantially, by several times, reduced its non-strategic nuclear systems. In the framework of the unilateral Russian and US Presidential Initiatives of early 1990s the remaining non-strategic nuclear assets were taken off alert and moved to centralized storage facilities within our national territory. Presently the non-strategic nuclear potential of Russia is no more than 25 percent of that of the USSR in 1991.

We realize that issues related to non-strategic nuclear weapons are currently drawing increased international attention. This is quite logical against the backdrop of strategic reductions undertaken primarily by Russia and the United States. We are open to discussing it in a broader context of disarmament efforts undertaken on the basis of equal and indivisible security, taking into account all relevant factors that can affect strategic stability in a negative way. We have repeatedly called to follow the example of the Russian Federation as a first step and return non-strategic nuclear weapons to the territory of those states that own it, to eliminate the entire overseas infrastructure for rapid deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons beyond national territory and to renounce "nuclear sharing". We are convinced that such a decision would improve international climate and strengthen security and trust.

Russia has its own disarmament priorities for the post-START agenda. Our point is that before engaging into any other joint disarmament endeavor we must assess the efficiency and viability of the New START as it is implemented in practice. The first session of Bilateral Consultative Commission under the Treaty took place in Geneva this spring. It was a good meeting with a really constructive and business-like atmosphere. Still, it was just a first step in a journey that is scheduled to last ten years.

The full-fledged implementation of the Treaty will bring us to the point where all aspects of the evolving stability equitation should be taken into consideration. As Minister Lavrov has said, this means that further progress on the way towards nuclear disarmament will require that a number of specific issues be addressed, including involving into the process all states possessing nuclear arsenals without exception. Multilateralization of nuclear disarmament is the only viable and direct way to the "nuclear zero".

Some ideas about eventual next steps are contained in the Treaty itself. For instance, it highlights the issue of non-nuclear ICBMs and SLBMs as a kind of "unfinished business". During the negotiations it was agreed that if such weapons are deployed, they would be included in overall limits under the Treaty. We take it as a starting point for an in-depth discussion on influence of conventional strategic missile systems on strategic stability. Another important point is exploring ways for deeper reductions in delivery

vehicles. Our initial proposal was to limit them by 500, and we still believe this was a good idea, for it is the number of delivery vehicles that determines the actual strike capacity. Without them warheads are just useless “dead weight”.

As we consider making further progress in the field of nuclear disarmament, it seems to be increasingly important to assume lessons that may be drawn from the New START negotiations that we believe have produced a sort of "golden standard" in the area of arms control.

We surely welcome unilateral practical steps of other stakeholders, who reduce their nuclear weapons. But at the same time we cannot ignore that all these measures are not legally binding, that they suppose no verification regime and can be reversed at any given moment.

To make things more clear, let us imagine that there is no New START Treaty, but that sometime in April or May 2009 the President of Russia had announced that by the end of 2017 Russia's strategic arsenal would consist of 700 ICBMs, SLBMs and HBs carrying up to 1550 warheads. That is to say, the limits under the Treaty would have been introduced unilaterally. Such a move would hardly have had the same significance as the signing of the Treaty. Numbers, surely, would have been the same. But they represent only a minor fraction of the Treaty provisions. So, are those two figures contained in three lines of text of Chapter II of the Treaty a sufficient replacement for all the understandings and arrangements that make more than 300 pages of the Treaty itself, Protocol and Annexes? I strongly doubt it.

Making nuclear disarmament multilateral will require creating an adequate legal framework, closely reproducing the intricate system of rules, definitions, proceedings and mutual obligations that has been created bilaterally by Russia and the United States. A similar comprehensive framework will be needed for any new dimension of arms control involving other categories of nuclear weapons. The New START experience shows that fixing numbers or introducing confidence-building and transparency measures alone are not sufficient to provide results that would reliably guarantee security and stability.

Arms control negotiations require taking into account the integrity of factors that may negatively affect strategic stability. We would hardly have concluded the New START Treaty without reflecting in it the interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms, that will become more important as strategic nuclear arms are reduced.

Any further steps in the field of nuclear disarmament would be possible only if such comprehensive approach is applied. We will not be able to advance without having securely prevented such destabilizing developments as placing of weapons in outer space and deploying strategic offensive arms in non-nuclear configuration. Nor could we ignore considerable imbalances in conventional arms, especially against the background of dangerous conflicts persisting in many regions.

Making nuclear disarmament a reality is not an easy job. International relations are still largely dominated by a high degree of distrust, whereas the “nuclear choice” is seen by many as an efficient means to ensure national security and an instrument to increase political clout. But the wind is turning, and

sound trends are also making their way in the sphere of disarmament and arms control. The New START Treaty and the positive outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference are here to prove it. They show us the way to follow and they provide ideas on how to proceed.

Another source of inspiration as well as intellectual and creative support is of course the non-governmental organizations and independent expert groups. New nuclear disarmament initiatives proliferate, while the existing ones remain robust, up-to-date and proactive – Pugwash movement being one of the most prominent among them. These initiatives contain many elements which are close to Russian approaches. Obviously, we cannot fully agree with each and every idea coming from the NGO's, which is normal. But a substantial dialogue is under way, and this exchange of views helps to bring our positions closer to each other, giving additional impetus to our efforts.

Russia will continue its efforts to make the World more peaceful and secure, working closely together with all those sharing this noble goal.