

# Chapter 30

## The Future of Nuclear Disarmament



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In this presentation, I would like to focus exclusively on the issue of the prospects for nuclear disarmament. This question seems to require separate consideration, because the current situation in this area not only has all the signs of stagnation, but so far does not give rise to manifestations of even moderate optimism.

So, after the signing in 2010 and entry into force in February 2011 the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms, the questions of a progress towards nuclear disarmament went out from the agenda of Russian-American relations. In contrast to previous periods, the current situation in this area can hardly be described as “pause”.

In the past, such pauses were filled by active consultations of the Parties on the questions of future agreements on nuclear arms control. They were also used for a rethinking of their policies in this area, for a comprehensive evaluation of the positions the opposite side. Even since the autumn of 1983 (when the Soviet Union withdrew from all the negotiations with the United States on nuclear weapons) till the spring of 1985 (resume of the talks) “was not vain”. The preparatory work continued, and contacts with the United States at an informal level (primarily through scientific communities) significantly increased. Now, at least for the fourth year in a row, we witness a decrease (rather, even lack of) activity in Russia and the United States in the field of nuclear arms control, which is very noticeable not only at the official level, but also at the expert level.

Politicians and experts referred to a number of reasons that underlie the gap in the relations between Russia and the United States in the field of nuclear arms control. One of them is the worsening of relations between Russia and the West as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. But the evidence suggests that the problem originated much earlier. We need only to recall that in March 2013 (i.e., one year before the

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events in Ukraine), the former head of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation S. Ivanov stated openly that Russia was not interested in further arms reductions. He stated that the reason for the absence of such an interest was the completion of the modernization of Russia's strategic nuclear forces and reluctance to reduce the number of the recently deployed modern systems of strategic weapons.

Another argument made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in February 2012 was the need to connect the process of nuclear disarmament with the third level nuclear powers during the following of the 2010 Treaty stages. Further clarification of this position by a number of officials, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S. Lavrov, were that deeper cuts (then the 2010 Treaty provides) may lead to a situation where Russian and American strategic forces "become comparable with third level" nuclear powers.

One of the most serious obstacles to the achievement of new agreements with the United States in the field of nuclear arms control, according to the Russian leadership, is ballistic missile defense. This problem has arisen periodically in the relevant negotiations in the days of the Soviet Union. It spiked in 1983 after the US President R. Reagan declared the "Strategic Defense Initiative" (SDI), which slowed down the process of negotiations on START-1 and nearly blocked the conclusion of this and other agreements in the field of nuclear disarmament. The withdrawal of the United States from the ABM Treaty and subsequent US actions aimed at the development and deployment of the defense of the territory of the country and some of its allies, negatively affected the situation even more. Alongside with this all attempts to agree on the implementation of the joint (Russia-United States) programs in the field of defense also failed.

Russian leadership also explains the difficulties in reaching new agreements in the field of further reductions of strategic nuclear weapons, by the existence of nuclear weapons in the inventory of the US NATO allies that "cannot be ignored". In particular, this has been stated by the Deputy Minister of defense of the Russian Federation A. Antonov (at present—Russian Ambassador in the United States). Along with this, Russia is going to "take into account" the concept of the "Prompt Global Strike", the deployment of strategic non-nuclear precision weapons systems, the prospects of the placement of weapons in outer space, the presence of non-strategic nuclear weapons of the United States in Europe and a number of other imbalances of military confrontation. Many of these provisions are reflected in the current National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, approved by V. Putin at the end of 2015.

Generally speaking, the position of Russia regarding the prospects of further steps in nuclear disarmament, is reminiscent of the one followed by the USSR in the late 1960s. In concentrated form, it is expressed in the principle of "equal security". This principle required to take into consideration all the factors determining the balance with the opposing forces. This meant that during the process of negotiations of an agreement with the United States in the field of strategic nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union felt justified to claim compensation for imbalances in other categories of weapons.

Of course, 50 years ago, these categories of “compensation”, were somewhat different than today. So, they completely ignored non-nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union expressed concern on British and French nuclear weapons as well as on the US forward-based nuclear weapons in Europe. Now Russia raises the question of imbalances more widely, focusing mainly on non-nuclear, than nuclear weapons. And this creates additional difficulties in finding an understanding with the United States, and also raises serious doubts on the possibility of concluding new agreements in the field of strategic nuclear weapons.

From the American side there is not a “visible” and serious desire to continue the dialogue on nuclear disarmament. Moreover, the United States raises questions about “violations” of the existing agreements on nuclear disarmament from the part of Russia. In particular, serious complaints are made against certain provisions of the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-range and Shorter-range missiles (INF Treaty). There are also doubts about the ability of Russia to implement all the provisions of the New START Treaty in terms of reducing its strategic weapons by the agreed levels by February 2018. Overall, it appears that the President of the United States D. Trump is very skeptical of the existing arms control agreements, particularly those that have been concluded by the previous democratic administration. He repeated it in his speeches.

Thus, from the point of view of the prospects for continuing the dialogue on further reductions of nuclear weapons, the situation does not look very promising. In such circumstances, the best option for developments in the near future (5–7 years) should be regarded as a preservation of the agreements already reached in this area. In other words, it is necessary to resolve the conflict regarding the INF Treaty and to extend the New Start Treaty to the year 2026, as contemplated by this agreement.

In opposite case one cannot exclude the option of further aggravation of the relations, not only between Russia and the United States, but also between Russia and NATO in general. If the existing treaties will no longer work, the nuclear arms race will continue, with further accusations of the Parties and the complete lack of control of the development and the deployment of nuclear forces. It will be quite possible that Russia and United States in such a case will deploy nuclear strategic weapons in excess of the limits of the New START Treaty (700 delivery vehicles and 1550 warheads), as well as will deploy the prohibited by the INF Treaty nuclear weapons in Europe.

One can clearly conclude that the progress in the area of strengthening the control of nuclear weapons and the new steps in the field of nuclear disarmament, with the existing Russian and United States administrations can be considered improbable. However, there is still a small hope that the Parties nevertheless can agree on new measures to limit the nuclear arms race.

It is obvious that both in Russian-American relations and in Russia-West relations on the whole, a lot of political obstacles to the beginning of new negotiations have been accumulated. It is extremely difficult to overcome them, and it will take most likely significant efforts of the parties and an extended period of time. There is a point of view that the move towards the negotiations on deeper cuts of strategic

nuclear forces of the Parties is possible only after their relationships become more or less stable or, in any case, they indicate a clear trend towards improvement.

But one can approach this problem in a different way. Namely, to put at the forefront the achievement of a new agreement on deeper reductions of strategic offensive arms of the United States and Russia up to 1000 strategic warheads for each side. In case of a success, the new agreement could become a positive example of cooperation, which will give a serious chance to achieve mutual understanding in other areas. This will be facilitated by the beginning of extensive consultations on the whole range of security issues, including those of concern to the Russian side.

With regard to the problems of the military-technical nature, it is obvious that there are no serious obstacles to continue the dialogue on Russian and the US strategic nuclear arms reductions. The role and influence of “precision weapons” and “space weapons” on the strategic balance of the Parties was clearly exaggerated. In the foreseeable future, such influence will also be minimal if not absent at all.

U.S. programs in the sphere of missile defense are quite limited in terms of their impact on the ability of Russia to a crushing retaliation even by using weakened as a result of the “first attack” strategic forces. And this “attack” is extremely questionable strategic “first strike” concept, which, however, underlies many speculations about the ways to strengthen security and so-called “strategic stability”. The reliance on highly unreliable missile defense system, many exercises of which ended unsuccessfully, is quite unrealistic. This system can easily be “bypassed” in terms of the direction of the strike. The decision to deliver a first strike cannot be taken by any reasonably thinking leader under any circumstances.

Relative to more distant prospects—after the year 2024, one can build pessimistic and optimistic scenarios as well. Many will depend of whether the Parties will be able to preserve the existing treaties on disarmament and thus to prevent uncontrolled arms race. In the meantime, one can only talk about the high degree of uncertainty in this area. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that the question of the continuity of Putin’s policies after his resignation from the post of the President of the Russian Federation in 2024 is still open.

Among other factors that may have a significant impact on prospects for nuclear disarmament not the last role will play American policy regarding the settlement of the North Korean crisis. Russian attitude to the continuation of the dialogue on disarmament, including the signing of new arms control agreements will depend (alongside with the other factors) on how consistently and firmly will the United States act in this regard.

In conclusion, the most optimistic (but, unfortunately, the least likely) version of the further steps on nuclear disarmament can be described as a shift from a quantitative to a qualitative solution. This approach, can open up the possibility to conclude a multilateral agreement in this area. The idea is to negotiate by the five major nuclear powers a total ban on ground-based ballistic missiles with a range more than 500 km (as provided by the INF Treaty). In this case, the Parties will talk about the complete elimination, first of all, of the most dangerous category of the first strike strategic nuclear weapons.

In the future, such a qualitative approach can be extended to other nuclear systems. This question, at least, could be discussed in the international format, first at the level of experts and then involving governmental representatives and authorities. Unfortunately, as already stated, such an option can be considered the least likely of wider set of scenarios of the development of the strategic situation in the future. But it seems that nothing prevents the scientific community consider and fully discuss even such seemingly fantastic, approaches to strengthening international security and nuclear disarmament. This will allow the leadership of many states to take informed decisions on the measures aimed at strengthening international security and may open up new perspectives on the road to complete nuclear disarmament.

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