

The Future of U.S.-Russia Arms Control, Transparency, and Confidence Building

Discussion Paper for a Track II Dialogue on U.S.-Russian Crisis Stability

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The United States and Russia have a rich legacy of arms-control negotiations and long-standing traditions of transparency and confidence-building efforts. Their fruitful bilateral arms-control cooperation is crucial for the viability of global WMD (weapons of mass destruction) disarmament and nonproliferation, as well as the sustainability of regional security regimes. However, the current systemic crisis in relations between Russia and the West makes the future of existing arms-control arrangements unclear and casts doubt on prospects for future arms-control agreements.

The New START treaty will stay in force until 2021, and a potential extension would prolong it until 2026. In March 2018, Russian citizens elected their president for the next six years (2018–2024). Donald Trump is expected to be president until at least 2021 (having begun a four-year term in 2017), and, should he win reelection in 2020, would likely be president until 2025.

2026 will be 64 years since the Cuban missile crisis and 81 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This means that a significant part of the mid-career positions in Russian and U.S. government offices will be occupied by those who were born just before the end of the Cold War or later. For this generation of military strategists and diplomats, the perception of the role of nuclear weapons and the burden of strategic decisionmaking might be different from those who had the personal experience of standing at the edge of a global nuclear Armageddon. At the same time, the legacy of the Cold War and the traditions of U.S.-Soviet/U.S.-Russia transparency and confidence-building efforts might seem obsolete for this next generation of decisionmakers. Under such circumstances, the tradition of U.S.-Russia security and arms-control cooperation may be irretrievably lost.

This paper describes the background of contemporary U.S.-Russia relations and the tendencies that influence the efficiency and sustainability of the two leading nuclear powers' arms-control and confidence-building efforts. This paper also suggests what can be done within the next 5 to 10 years to mitigate the negative effects of the described tendencies as well as take advantage of their positive potential.

U.S.-Russia Relations: General Context

In late 2017 and early 2018, Russian experts were expressing regret over the lack of trust in U.S.-Russia relations.¹ Officials from the Russian Foreign Ministry were more measured in their words. For instance, the former Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Mikhail Ulyanov said in December 2017 that despite the Obama administration having “stopped full-fledged contacts on the entire range of strategic issues in 2014 . . . it would be wrong to say that there is no dialogue on issues of strategic stability.”² It seems it was critical for Ulyanov to highlight that the dialogue still exists, that the contacts continue on different levels, and that issues of strategic stability are regularly addressed during such meetings. However, since 2014, no developed, routine dialogue has existed between stakeholders in the Russian and U.S. governments, nor between the special government agencies that cover the entire spectrum of issues that affect strategic stability. For almost four years, Moscow and Washington have had no well-established and reliable channels of communication on the political, military, and intelligence levels that secure the transparency needed to avoid mutual misunderstandings and miscalculations.

Dmitry Trenin thinks that the Russian issue will be a sore topic in American domestic politics for the next 5 to 10 years. He believes that the root of the conflict between Washington and Moscow lies in the clash of perceptions of fundamental notions such as leadership and parity. The United States perceives its global leadership as an integral part of its national identity and as a symbol of its international status. Similarly, Russia cannot accept that any nation would dictate to it, and insists on reciprocity and equality as the basic principles for relations between nations.³ Trenin's idea should be highlighted. Indeed, when Russia calls for an inclusive international dialogue regarding arms-control and security issues, it is critical to understand that this position rests on these fundamental values.

1. Dmitry Trenin, "The Disruptor," *Security Times*, February 16, 2018, <http://carnegie.ru/2018/02/16/disruptor-pub-75565>. See also: Andrey Kortunov, "Disillusionment and Missed Opportunities: Russian-U.S. Relations in 2017," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 23, 2018, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/23/disillusionment-and-missed-opportunities-russian-u.s.-relations-in-2017-pub-75626>; Andrey Baklitsky, "A call from the times of the Cuban missile crisis: How not to start a new arms race," RBC, March 3, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/03/03/2018/5a993f519a79476563db95ce>; Alexey Arbatov, "Absorb the shock: How to save the nuclear arms control system," RBC, February 20, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/opinions/politics/20/02/2018/5a8bf1389a79474081914794>; Evgeny Buzhinsky, Aleksey Kondratiev, Andrey Kortunov, and Anton Utkin at the roundtable, "Chemical weapons in Syria: Russian and American Perspectives," hosted by Rossiya Segodnya, February 6, 2018, <http://pressmia.ru/pressclub/20180206/951850245.html>.

² Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Mikhail Ulyanov's interview with the Interfax news agency, December 19, 2017," December 20, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/diverse/-/asset_publisher/zwl2FuDbhJx9/content/interv-u-direktora-departamenta-po-voprosam-nerasprostraneniya-i-kontrola-nad-vooruzheniyami-mid-rossii-m-i-ul-anova-informagentstvu-interfaks-19-dekabra?_101_INSTANCE_zwl2FuDbhJx9_redirect=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mid.ru%2Fen%2Fdiverse%3Fp_p_id%3D101_INSTANCE_zwl2FuDbhJx9%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-1%26p_p_col_pos%3D2%26p_p_col_count%3D6.

3 Dmitry Trenin, "The Conflict of Uniqueness: How will U.S.-Russia relations evolve after Putin's Presidential Address," Carnegie Moscow Center, March 3, 2018, http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=75696&utm_source=rssemail&utm_medium=email&mkt_tok=eyJpLjoiWVRneVlXRTRZV1F3TW1VeCIsInQiOiJEemRLTIg2MkIDTUcwTmJaaHQyMEorYkIqcStDbkdmWE13WWp4NkRiT3ZMUU5BZDdtQ28rcitYbXUrR1VqaDRXZkdFKzBCcXVZaGRldlpDYjdYbWlVZDARUFowS3NqdThcLzVmVkJ2cVBZUjlmN2M1ZW5sM0FJTUNVbkdIM0VuS0EifQ%3D%3D.

Therefore, each time Russian expectations for an equal partnership and consideration for the interests of all parties involved are not satisfied, it undermines trust and serves as additional evidence for Russia's anxiety that the United States prefers unilateral measures when it comes to settling global or regional problems.

Andrey Kortunov says that as U.S.-Russia relations currently stand, the logical approach is almost impossible. Rational thinking, he argues, is depressed by the "unhealthy exaltation" that now exists in both Washington and Moscow.⁴ Dmitry Trenin argues that the outcome of the U.S.-Russia rivalry will be defined in the realm of Moscow and Washington's domestic politics. That is to say, it will be determined within the borders of the United States and Russia—nowhere else.⁵ Russian experts agree U.S.-Russia relations are deteriorating rapidly, and they have no doubts that this deterioration will continue for quite a long time.

Experts who attended the workshop hosted by PIR-Center and the Russian Diplomatic Academy in March 2018 agreed that the new Nuclear Posture Review published by the Trump administration includes not only challenges but also opportunities for Russia.⁶

Russia sees that the United States has a lack of interest in continuing arms-control cooperation. This has created a perception among some Russian experts that arms control is fading.⁷ For leading Russian experts, there is no doubt that Russia and the United States are equally interested in turning the current atmosphere of anxiety into one of greater maturity and cooperation. Many of them agree that the door for possible productive dialogue regarding bilateral nuclear arms control is still open.⁸ Sergey Oznobishchev says that the current situation may be interpreted as follows: Moscow and Washington "are trying on suits (or, perhaps new suits – A.M.) in arms control."⁹

In these circumstances, it is critical to work on confidence-building measures in order to keep the very tradition of bilateral dialogue alive.

No doubt, the lack of trust will influence the effectiveness and sustainability of U.S.-Russia arms-control and confidence-building measures within the next 5 to 10 years. Analysis of the opinions

⁴ Andrey Kortunov, "How do we get out of the Chelyabinsk disco?," Russian International Affairs Council, March 1, 2018, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/how-do-we-get-out-of-the-chelyabinsk-disco/>.

⁵ Trenin, "The Conflict of Uniqueness."

⁶ Albert Zulkharneev about the workshop, "Facebook," March 1, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/albert.zulkharneyev?fref=pb&hc_location=profile_browser.

⁷ Trenin, "The Conflict of Uniqueness."

⁸ Arbatov, "Absorb the shock." See also: Aleksandr Bratersky, "Nuclear war with the U.S.—Russia is expected to strike first," *Gazeta.ru*, February 3, 2018, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2018/02/03/11635519.shtml>; Polina Himshiashvili, Georgy Makarenko, and Aleksandr Atasuntsev, "The End of START III: Will Russia and the U.S. continue to reduce nuclear weapons?," *RBC*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/05/02/2018/5a7847189a794722887d497c>.

⁹ Aleksandr Bratersky, "Missiles under one's breath: How the U.S. threatens Russia," *Gazeta.ru*, February 22, 2018, https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2018/02/22_a_11659609.shtml.

expressed by Russian experts and officials proves that Russia is concerned about four tendencies that, if unaddressed, will continue to negatively affect U.S.-Russia relations.¹⁰

The first tendency of Russia's unfulfilled expectations that the United States would treat it as an equal partner and show respect to Russia's national interests is the sore legacy of the 1990s and early 2000s. Moscow's attempts to reframe U.S.-Russia relations on the basis of mutual respect and the balance of interests have not met with understanding in Washington. This has created a perception that the *lack of reciprocity* in bilateral relations corresponds with U.S. strategy and national interests.

The second tendency, as perceived in Moscow, is *the lack of political will to foster dialogue* in order to find compromises and solutions for complex international issues. It seems to Moscow that Washington sees coercive diplomacy and unilateralism as effective tools for tackling complex problems. For Russia, this appears to be a sign that the United States believes there may be military solutions for complex security problems. Russia is concerned that war has become acceptable for a significant part of the American political establishment. From Moscow's point of view, it seems that many American strategists think there will be no catastrophic consequences for the United States if an armed conflict occurs, and that the achieved success could compensate the negative consequences of war. It seems that American strategic thinking views war as an integral component of the contemporary world order. In these circumstances, Russia is concerned that the U.S. government might be less prudent in its decisions and reactions during a crisis.

The third tendency is Russia's concern about *the lack of consistency* in U.S. arms-control and nonproliferation policy. Russia is not sure that reaching an agreement would guarantee long-lasting U.S. compliance with the provisions. The most recent example here is the uncertain future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Fourthly, the current lack of dialogue about the evidence underlying judgments regarding complex nonproliferation and other security issues creates the perception that the U.S. prefers to act unilaterally and impulsively. Russia is concerned that *the standards* for arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation procedures *are not clear and reliable*. Russia is concerned that impulsive solutions made without carefully weighing all available evidence may undermine the foundation of global nonproliferation regimes.

¹⁰ "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," Kremlin.ru, October 19, 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>. See also: Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the Moscow Nonproliferation Conference," October 20, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2913751; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement at the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva," February 28, 2018, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2913751; "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," Kremlin.ru, March 1, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the press conference on the results of the talks with the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," March 9, 2018, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3115200.

However, there are three factors that frame a window of opportunity in U.S.-Russia confidence-building:

First, there are some spheres where Russia and the United States still need to stand together to face challenges. In some areas there has been consistent and successful collaboration, which could open the door for future collaboration. Such domains of cooperation include the JCPOA process, outer-space activities, and the Korean Peninsula Track 1.5 Diplomacy dialogue.

Second, the need to secure existing multilateral nonproliferation arrangements corresponds to both Russian and U.S. basic national interests. The erosion of the existing international arms-control and nonproliferation regimes will dramatically decrease the predictability of the strategic situation. Logically speaking, this must be unacceptable for both Moscow and Washington. To prevent any negative consequences of the possible atrophy of international regimes, Russia and the United States must carry out coordinated activity based on a shared understanding of the problems. The existing global security problems are urgent and demand U.S.-Russia collaboration. Among such issues one can mention the uncertain future of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty review process, an urgent need to enforce the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention, the need to support the international fight against the threat of chemical and biological terrorism, and the need to construct and maintain clear standards for outer-space activities in order to prevent an arms race in outer space.

Third, bilateral nuclear arms-control arrangements had become an integral part of both Russian and U.S. national security policies. The rich legacy of U.S.-USSR/U.S.-Russia confidence-building efforts and arms-control diplomacy, if studied thoroughly, can help identify the most suitable approaches, formats, and solutions for the current security problems.

On one hand, the risk that national military forces may be drawn into direct conflict will grow rapidly without a full-fledged strategic dialogue between the two leading nuclear powers. On the other hand, the foundation for the dialogue has largely dissolved. Neither the Russian nor the U.S. expert community have common visions of the starting point for such a bilateral dialogue, what the agenda should include, or what the appropriate format might be. Moreover, there is no clear evidence that the governments of the two leading nuclear powers have any desire to address the full spectrum of positive and negative tendencies described above. However, if efforts are made to prevent an uncontrolled arms race and increase the productivity of a U.S.-Russian strategic stability dialogue, a roadmap will be needed. The following nine goals should be included into such a roadmap of U.S.-Russia Arms Control and Confidence-Building for the next 5 to 10 years:

1. *Secure* routine communication in critical spheres. In communication regarding crisis stability issues, the process may be as important as the results. High expectations might lead to deep disappointments. Similarly, “baby steps” may lead to a significant transformation. No matter the circumstances, Moscow and Washington must keep communicating.
2. *Bridge* the “generation gap” in arms-control and crisis management. As the crisis in U.S.-Russia relations promises to be long, it is critical to preserve basic skills in cross-government and interstate dialogue crucial for situational awareness. The tradition of respectful bilateral strategic dialogue may serve as a good reserve for the future.

3. *Adapt* the glossary of basic terms and concepts to the rapidly changing strategic environment. Constructing and maintaining common language to describe threat perceptions and approaches to countering threats in the rapidly changing world could be a great achievement in itself.
4. *Reflect* on the legacy of confidence-building procedures and practices developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Identify which formats and channels can be adjusted to current circumstances.
5. *Prevent* the erosion of bilateral nuclear arms control arrangements in force, namely START (2010) and the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty.
6. *Strengthen* the frames of both bilateral U.S.-Russia arms control and multilateral WMD nonproliferation.
7. *Ensure* the stability and predictability in mutual deterrence.
8. *Achieve* a common vision of the basic principles of strategic stability in the changing environment and communicate this common vision to the international community.
9. *Apply "hybrid negotiations"* instead of hybrid warfare. Look for options to involve officials in the Track 1.5 dialogue regarding crisis stability, deterrence, and situational awareness. For instance, during a November 2017 conference in Sochi on global biosecurity challenges hosted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Rospotrebnadzor (Russian national authority to BTWC), a discussion was able to be organized between Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and U.S. officials. That dialogue resulted in a joint statement of the three state depositories of the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (London supported the statement proposed by Moscow and Washington).¹¹ The three states demonstrated their common vision and called for the productive work of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) review process. That has sent a strong positive impulse and intensified the productive work in Geneva at the conference of the state parties of BTWC in December 2017.

So what can be done to meet the goals for U.S.-Russia arms control and confidence building described above?

Arms Control Issues

- Support full implementation of and strict compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran.
- Send a message to the international community that both the United States and Russia recognize their responsibility to work together to prevent an uncontrolled arms race.
- Reaffirm the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

¹¹ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement by the Russian Federation on behalf of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Sochi," November 2, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2932126.

- Consider any possible measures to prevent additional deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons (from unilateral statements to bilateral or multilateral arrangements).
- Initiate the conference of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear weapon states where the role of arms control and competing definitions of strategic stability might be discussed in a broader context. India and Pakistan might be invited to participate as observers of such a conference.
- Continue a productive dialogue regarding possible inclusive and complementary measures to enforce the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention.

Confidence-building Measures

To reinforce stability, the U.S. and Russia might share their visions regarding:

- The meaning of the principles of reciprocity and equal and indivisible security, and how these principles may be adapted in order to construct a common concept for further joint actions.
- How Russia and the United States currently see deterrence and how their respective policies of the use of nuclear weapons might be adapted with regard to technological and geostrategic changes.
- The possibility to exclude the reference to other WMD (other than nuclear) from nuclear deterrence policy.
- How the Chemical Weapons Convention regime may be adapted to the rapidly changing technological and geopolitical environments.
- What measures may be applied to reduce tension regarding missile defense systems.
- How strategic stability in cyberspace may be assured.
- Potential common interests and concerns in the cyber domain.
- Which mechanisms, in addition to those that exist, may be applicable to the cyber domain to avoid incidents.
- Current challenges in the biosecurity realm.
- What extra measures may be taken to avoid incidents at sea and in the air.
- What conflict prevention mechanisms might be applied to activities in outer space.

To reduce the dangers of miscalculations, the United States and Russia might consider choosing an appropriate format for exchanging information regarding:

- Plans for the deployment and methods of the development of ballistic missile defense systems including but not limited to the exchange of information about missile defense flight tests.
- Numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons unilaterally destroyed in the 1990s and 2000s by Russia and the United States.
- Partial, step-by-step declarations of the numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons and deployment.

- Cyberspace activities and especially cyberspace incidents.
- Security-related activities in outer space.
- National biosecurity research and development activities.

To prevent an uncontrolled nuclear arms race, a broad scope of security issues needs to be addressed. It is difficult to predict now which combination of approaches and ideas will work. A classic negotiation rule says that if there is a stalemate in some critical sphere, the players should extend the field of negotiated issues and reach agreements in the domains where collaboration is more possible. Therefore, the combination of smaller achievements in different spheres could produce a positive impulse for more ambitious results in the future. Moreover, if Russia and the United States manage to negotiate an agenda for possible arms-control talks, that would be a confidence-building measure in itself. Naturally, both nations have their own concerns and needs that must be reflected in the agenda, so the approach should be balanced and inclusive.

A “holistic” approach to arms control and “hybrid diplomacy” may result in the possibility for creating various combinations of package deals that will secure strategic stability.

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