

Greater U.S. & Russian Cooperation and Leadership Is Necessary to Fulfill NPT Article VI Obligations to Reduce and Eliminate Nuclear Dangers

Statement to the 2015 NPT Review Conference

May 1, 2015

Since the inception of the NPT, the United States and Russia—the world’s first nuclear-weapon states and still the possessors of the largest and most deadly nuclear arsenals—have been central to the success or the failure of the treaty.

Through the decades, U.S.-Russian bilateral nuclear disarmament treaties have slowly, but significantly reduced the arsenals of the Cold War years, reduced tensions, and lowered the threat of a nuclear exchange.

Despite that progress, today Russia possesses some 1,780 nuclear warheads and the United States some 1,900 thermonuclear warheads¹ that can be delivered on several hundred strategic bombers and missiles—far more than necessary to deter nuclear attack. (Thousands more warheads are held in reserve or awaiting dismantlement.) If these weapons were used even in a “limited” way, the result would be catastrophic global nuclear devastation.

U.S. and Russian nuclear strategy still requires a launch-on-warning or launch-under-attack capability, which “puts an enormous strain on the nuclear chains of command in both countries” and perpetuates the risk of cataclysmic error according to retired senior U.S. and Russia generals.²

In 2008, President-elect Barack Obama said: “Keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment’s notice is a dangerous relic of the Cold War. Such policies increase the risk of catastrophic accidents or miscalculation. I believe that we must address this dangerous situation—something that President Bush promised to do when he campaigned for president back in 2000, but did not do once in office. I will work with Russia to end such outdated Cold War policies in a mutual and verifiable way.”³

U.S.-Russian leadership on nuclear disarmament and arms control is still essential to avoiding catastrophe and ensuring that the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty regime remains strong and viable.

Following the conclusion of the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction accord, Moscow and Washington have failed to start talks to further reduce their still enormous nuclear stockpiles, which still far exceed any plausible deterrence requirements. Despite U.S. adjustments to its missile defense plans in Europe that eliminate any threat to Russian strategic missiles, Russian President Vladimir Putin rebuffed U.S. President Obama’s June 2013 proposal to reduce U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear stockpiles by one-third below the ceilings set by New START.

Then, last year, Russia interfered with the territorial integrity of Ukraine and annexed Crimea in flagrant disregard of the great powers’ pledge to respect Ukrainian

¹ According to research from Hans Kristensen and Stan Norris published in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* this year. The U.S. and Russia currently deploy just under 1,600 New

² See: “How to Avert a Nuclear War,” by James E. Cartwright and Vladimir Dvorkin, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2015.

³ “2008 Presidential Q & A: President-elect Barack Obama,” *Arms Control Today*, December 2008.

sovereignty following Kiev's decision in 1994 to join the NPT as a nonnuclear weapon state.

Since then, Russian relations with the United States and Europe have hit their lowest point in more than a quarter century. New negotiations on further nuclear disarmament beyond New START are unlikely any time soon, and both sides are considering new options for countering the conventional and nuclear capabilities of the other side.

For now, the two sides continue to respect and implement the 2010 New START Treaty. But neither the United States nor Russia is meeting their 2010 NPT Review Conference pledge to accelerate and deepen the verifiable reduction of their nuclear stockpiles.

Meanwhile, NATO has, for several years now, been unable to agree on a proposal for transparency and accounting for Russian and U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. Russia, for its part, refuses to engage in talks on tactical nuclear weapons. As a result, neither side is meeting their 2010 NPT pledge to pursue talks on sub-strategic nuclear weapons.

In addition, there are allegations that [Russia tested a new ground-launched cruise missile](#) prohibited under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Russia has made countercharges about U.S. violations. U.S. and Russian officials say they are interested in discussing the issue, but the matter remains unresolved.

Neither Russia nor the United States says they want to scrap the existing arms control regime, including New START and the INF Treaty, which provide greater predictability and stability in an otherwise strained bilateral relationship. But if tensions worsen further, these treaties could be in trouble.

Scrapping the existing nuclear risk reduction measures would do nothing to protect Ukraine from further Russian aggression or reassure nervous NATO members, nor would it enhance Russia's security.

At the same time, Moscow and Washington are busy modernizing their nuclear weapons and delivery systems, as are France and the United Kingdom. China is continuing to modernize and expand its nuclear forces. These actions are inconsistent with their Article VI NPT commitments. Meanwhile, a technological nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan is also underway.

Statements by officials from NPT nuclear weapon states threatening the use of nuclear weapons—directly or indirectly—are also inconsistent with the aims and purpose of the NPT. Such statements, including vague “all options are on the table” statements, are often intended to intimidate or coerce other states. Such threats are counterproductive and undermine international peace and stability. The mere possession of nuclear weapons is a sufficient reminder they may be used.

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This review conference and the key states with nuclear weapons must recognize that the world is on the cusp of unconstrained strategic nuclear competition, which would not only deepen the distrust and increase dangers, but also would undermine the NPT.

States parties must also recognize that, despite the modest progress achieved through New START, the threat of nuclear war between the major nuclear powers is still with us and would have catastrophic global impacts.

This conference cannot afford to paper over these cold realities with bland statements and restatements of past pledges or, as the U.S. government does, by citing how many nuclear weapons have been reduced since 1970.

As President Obama correctly noted in a speech in 2012, “[t]he massive nuclear arsenal we inherited from the Cold War is poorly suited for today’s threats,” and “we have more nuclear weapons than we need.”

Creative, practical ideas are needed to overcome old obstacles and excuses. We urge all states at this conference and all NGOs to come together around four major sets of actions to help reduce nuclear dangers and fulfill the promise of the NPT:

1. Accelerate U.S.-Russian New START Implementation. In 2010, all of the nuclear-weapon states committed “to accelerate concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament,” including “all types of nuclear weapons.”

Further nuclear reductions need not wait for a new U.S.-Russian arms control treaty. The final document for this Conference should call upon the United States and Russia to accelerate the pace of reductions under New START to reach the agreed limits before the 2018 deadline and call on both states to continue to reduce force levels below the New START ceilings, to be verified with the treaty’s monitoring regime.

2. Initiate New START Follow-On Talks No Later Than 2017. This Conference should also call upon the leaders in Moscow and Washington to begin formal negotiations on a follow-on to the New START accord no later than 2017.

Many U.S., Russian, and European experts recommend that such a follow-on agreement should aim to cut each side’s strategic arsenals to fewer than 1,100 deployed strategic warheads and 500 deployed strategic delivery vehicles, including any strategic-range conventional prompt-strike weapons. Such talks can and should explore a wider range of issues, including transparency and confidence-building steps on tactical nuclear weapons and joint understandings on missile defense capabilities and deployments.⁴

3. Reinforce the INF Treaty and Discuss Global Nuclear-Armed Cruise Missile Limits. To reinforce and expand the INF Treaty, this Conference should underscore the value of the INF Treaty, which commits the parties not to test, produce, or deploy ground-launched missile systems with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, and call upon the United States and Russia to agree to special measures, perhaps including inspections, to resolve compliance concerns.

Russia and the United States should also be invited to engage with other states in talks on limiting and eventually phasing out all nuclear-armed cruise missile systems. This would allow the two countries to forgo expensive modernization programs for such missiles, and in cooperation with other key states, head off dangerous cruise missile buildups around the globe.

⁴ “Second Report of the Deep Cuts Commission: Strengthening Stability in Turbulent Times,” published by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, April 2015. Online at: www.deepcuts.org

4. Call On Other Nuclear-Armed States to Freeze Their Nuclear Buildups. This Conference must recognize that the world’s other nuclear-armed states must do their part to advance Article VI goals too.

In addition to urging the United States, China, and the other CTBT Annex II states to finally take the steps necessary to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, China and the world’s other nuclear-armed states should be called upon by all NPT states parties to freeze the overall size of their stockpiles as long as the United States and Russia continue to reduce their nuclear arsenals.

A unified push for further U.S.-Russian arms cuts combined with a global nuclear weapons freeze by the other nuclear-armed states would help create the conditions for multilateral, verifiable nuclear disarmament and an eventual ban on nuclear weapons.

5. Examine dangerous doctrines. In 2010, all of the NPT nuclear-weapon states committed to “diminish the role and significance of nuclear weapons” and “[d]iscuss policies that could prevent the use of nuclear weapons.” Unfortunately, few have undertaken demonstrable, concrete steps to do so.

The final document for this NPT Review Conference should require each of the world’s nuclear-armed states to report, in detail and before the first preparatory committee meeting for the 2020 Review Conference, the physical, environmental, and human impacts of their nuclear war plans, if these plans were to be carried out, and how they believe the use of hundreds of such weapons would be consistent with humanitarian law and the laws of war as some nuclear-armed states claim.⁵

Given the catastrophic consequences of the large-scale use of nuclear weapons against many dozens—if not hundreds—of targets, as envisioned in the U.S., Russian, French, Chinese, British, Indian and Pakistani nuclear war plans, it is hard to see how the use of significant numbers of nuclear weapons could be consistent with international humanitarian law or any common sense interpretation of the Law of Armed Conflict.

To reduce the risk of inadvertent nuclear weapons use, the presidents of Russia and the United States should, as retired Generals Cartwright and Dvorkin have recommended, “decide in tandem to eliminate the launch on warning concept from their nuclear strategies.” This would not undermine “strategic stability” since both countries have nuclear forces designed to withstand an initial first-strike. The Conference should also call upon all nuclear-armed states to pursue a legally- or politically-binding agreement to refrain from putting their nuclear weapons on high alert, as suggested by the Global Zero Commission on Nuclear Risk Reduction.⁶

The NPT nuclear-weapon states should be required to report to fellow NPT states parties on specific changes to their targeting and nuclear weapons employment doctrines

⁵ The June 2013 Report on the Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy of the United States claims that: [t]he new guidance makes clear that all plans must be consistent with the fundamental principles of the Law of Armed Conflict. Accordingly, plans will, for example, apply the principles of distinction and proportionality and seek to minimize collateral damage to civilian populations and civilian objects. The United States will not intentionally target civilian populations or civilian objects.”

⁶ *De-Alerting and Stabilizing the World’s Nuclear Force Postures*, Global Zero Commission on Nuclear Risk Reduction, April 2015.

that reduce the role of nuclear weapons and reduce the risk that their nuclear weapons may be used deliberately or accidentally.

Today, as during the Cold War, effective, persistent nuclear arms control leadership is in the best interests of Russia, the United States, and the world.

In the coming months and years, creative, bold approaches will be needed to overcome old and new obstacles to the long-running effort to eliminate the potential for nuclear catastrophe.

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