



Possible Attributes of a New Russian-American Treaty on Strategic Offensive Weapons: The View from Russia

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July 21, 2009

As the first phase of its new [program on U.S. Global Engagement](#), the Carnegie Council examines the critical and evolving U.S.-Russia relationship. To aid in this exploration, the Council entered into a joint project with the Moscow-based Institute for United States and Canada Studies [ISKRAN], the most established and prestigious of Russia's think tanks devoted to bilateral relations.

The cooperative project comprised a series of papers on three critical topics, in each case with submissions from both Russian and American experts. The topics are: arms control, with a particular focus on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, with related missile defense questions; Afghanistan and the future of the NATO alliance; and security, military, and energy issues in the Arctic region.

We now present the first set of papers, those on arms control. The papers speak for themselves, but three general observations may be made: First, arms control and treaties governing both offensive and defensive military capabilities remain absolutely central to U.S.-Russia relations; second, much as the Obama administration may wish to do so, it is not realistic to expect that Russia will agree to "decouple" discussion of the different components of the arms control agenda; and third, the paper writers in general exhibit a healthy skepticism to temper long-range expectations following the recent meetings of the two presidents in Moscow—while offering suggestions for a way ahead to benefit both the United States and Russia.

—David Speedie, Director, U.S. Global Engagement Program

The other three papers in this first set are:

- [Bargaining Chip or Gas Mask? Prospects for Missile Defense](#)
- [A Guide to the Challenges Facing President Obama's Nuclear Abolition Agenda](#)
- [Missile Defense: A Sphere of Competition or an Instrument for Jointly Combating the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#)

Two documents concerning strategic offensive arms (SOA) are currently in effect between Russia and the United States: the Treaty on Reduction and Limitation of Offensive Arms (the START Treaty), which expires on December 5, 2009; and the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (the SORT Treaty), which took effect on June 1, 2003. Should the START Treaty expire without a new treaty (or accord) that has counting rules and verification procedures spelled out for operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads,¹ the SORT Treaty will be weakened. For all practical purposes it will become a declaration of intentions, because it will be impossible to make sure the parties fulfill their obligations to reduce the number of nuclear warheads on deployed strategic delivery vehicles to 1,700-2,200 by December 31,

2012. As a result, the verification regime for the nuclear weapons of Russia and the United States will fall apart, which will be detrimental to strategic stability.

A new Russian-American SOA treaty is needed to prevent this from happening. However, it is not at all necessary that this document should "absorb" the SORT Treaty while replacing the START Treaty. Under Article IV the SORT Treaty can remain in force until its expiration date (December 31, 2012.) A new SOA treaty should be based on the best and most effective features of the START Treaty, while at the same time reflecting contemporary strategic realities.

It must be noted here that recently a number of Russian printed publications have cited highly placed unnamed sources in the security structures of the Russian Federation as saying that the START Treaty was concluded on extremely unfavorable terms for our country and that it is little short of criminal. Without getting into a debate with those who hold this strange and clearly exaggerated opinion of the START Treaty, I will only refer to the statement by Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev on the subject, which the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov read on March 7, 2009 at the plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. In this statement Dmitriy Medvedev noted that the importance of the START Treaty "for ensuring international peace and stability could hardly be overestimated."² And he added: "It [START] has played a historic role in ensuring strategic stability and security and reducing the stockpiles of strategic offensive arms. The world has become safer as a result of its implementation."

I would note that all treaties and accords in the arms arena are compromises. The parties to a treaty cannot win on every point; some losses are inevitable. However, it is crucial that the principle of equal security for each of the parties to a treaty (accord) be observed. And this principle was implemented in the START Treaty. Therefore, the attempts to tarnish the START Treaty cannot be considered valid; they are clearly partisan in nature.

On March 2, 2009, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, who oversees arms control and disarmament in Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed his conviction in an interview in the Russian journal NG-Dipkuryer that, "given the political will, [a new SOA treaty] can be prepared before the expiration of the current START Treaty; that is, before December 5 of this year."³ It appears that the political will exists; Moscow and Washington have each demonstrated their intentions to conclude a new SOA treaty. However, little time remains to translate these intentions into reality. Furthermore, according to available information the Obama administration will not formulate its negotiating position on strategic offensive arms before the summer (currently, in addition to dealing with other urgent problems caused by the severe financial crisis, it is engaged in reexamining and refining the nuclear strategy that it inherited from the Bush administration).

Based on the current situation, Moscow and Washington should make it a matter of priority (by no later than June of this year) to come to agreement and solidify the basic principles of a future treaty in a joint declaration made by their presidents. Experience has shown that without such a political solution, when talks begin with a "blank page," the negotiation process inevitably becomes bogged down in discussions at the expert level and is drawn out for an indefinite period.

It appears that the minimum set of basic principles for a new SOA treaty must include the following six points.

The first is the necessity of reducing the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads belonging to each treaty party below the levels established by the START treaty. Without this Russian-American "investment" in nuclear disarmament the next (2010) Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, like the last one (2005), will more than likely be a complete fiasco and will serve as a powerful stimulus for nuclear threshold and, as likely as not, "semi-threshold" countries to acquire their own nuclear weapons. This would not serve the needs of either Russia or the United States, and they should not allow it. Of course, this Russian-American investment is no guarantee of success for the upcoming NPT Review Conference, but it is certainly necessary for achieving success.

As far as the actual numbers that would define the Russian-American investment in nuclear disarmament are concerned, it should be noted that a broad discussion regarding the possibility of a further reduction in the existing nuclear stockpiles is currently underway both in Russia and particularly in the United States. Other leading nations have also joined this discussion. In particular, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband has proposed holding a conference in London this year in which the "nuclear five" (the United States, the Russian Federation, Great Britain, France, and the DPRK) would work out the basis for a process of making deep cuts in the world's nuclear arsenals.⁴ And at the beginning of February of this year the influential British newspaper, *The Times*, cited anonymous Obama administration sources in a sensational story about a proposal supposedly being prepared by the White House to drastically cut the nuclear stockpiles of Russia and the United States—by 80 percent. A number was also named—no more than 1,000 nuclear warheads for each side. However, neither the American nor the Russian government has confirmed the story.

For the present, the reality is such that no highly placed military officers in either America or Russia are prepared to accept such deep cuts in nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon is totally opposed to the idea of a so-called "nuclear zero" that is being actively promoted in Obama's circle. According to this concept Washington should consistently strive on the international stage for total nuclear disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear weapons (the originators of this idea include, in particular, the former secretaries of state George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, who are currently advisors to Barack Obama). In the opinion of Defense Secretary Robert Gates such proposals are absurd and can only cause irreparable harm to the country's national security. According to available information, Gates believes that the American nuclear stockpile can be cut to no more than 1,500 operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads. Time will tell where Obama might "set the bar" for nuclear warheads. At the same time, the "line" drawn by Gates is hardly likely to undergo serious change.

Nor has the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation remained on the sidelines of the ongoing discussions about a sharp reduction in the nuclear stockpiles of Russia and the United States. For example, on February 9 of this year at the conclusion of a visiting meeting in the military department by the State Duma Committees on Defense, Security, Budget, and Taxes devoted to reviewing progress made in reforming the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, General of the Army Nikolay Makarov said, "For the near term, nuclear weapons will remain the main stabilizing factor, and they will likely increase in importance."⁵ In other words, the Russian military is not going to abandon its reliance on nuclear weapons to ensure national security. This is unsurprising under the circumstances, when military threats continue unabated and the Russian general purpose forces are significantly less powerful than the armed forces of the countries competing with Russia on the world stage, not to mention a military-political block such as NATO.

Based on the above statements, the Russian-American "investment" in nuclear disarmament upon conclusion of a new SOA treaty will most likely be limited to a lowering of the bar of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,500, for example, by the end of 2015.

Is it possible that this investment could be more substantial? It would appear that if the presidents of Russia and the United States show the political will, a level of 1,200 operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads is reachable. To do so, however, serious restrictions must be imposed on the strategic missile defense system being developed by the Americans. As a minimum, Washington must forego deployment of the so-called third ABM position area in Eastern Europe and undertake to have no more than 100 GBI ground-based, exo-atmospheric interceptor missiles based in Alaska and California and nowhere else. It is entirely possible that the Russian side will insist on prohibiting the deployment of ships of the U.S. Navy and its allies equipped with missile defense-modified multi-function Aegis fire control systems equipped with SM-3 interceptors near the territorial waters of Russia (the attack capabilities of these interceptors allow destruction of ballistic missiles during the boost phase of their flight at ranges up to 300 km). If Washington will be prepared to completely forego a strategic missile defense and restrict itself to deploying regional and zonal missile defense, a reduction in the strategic nuclear stockpiles of Russia and the United States below even the level of 1,000 warheads indicated by the *Times* article is

achievable.

In addition, realists should clearly understand that a deeper cut in the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads of Russia and the United States is only possible in the long term and provided other nuclear states, primarily Great Britain, France and the DPRK, and probably India and Pakistan, are involved in the nuclear disarmament negotiation process, as proposed by David Miliband.

The second basic principle for a new SOA treaty is to at least retain if not expand the list of limitations that are critical for preventing a flare-up in the nuclear arms race as provided by START Treaty Article V with regard to stationing of SOA and development of new types of SOA.

These limits first of all include a ban on stationing SOA outside national territory, as well as an obligation not to deploy ICBMs except in launch silos, and SLBMs except on submarines especially designed for that purpose. Also very important is the ban on the manufacture, testing, and deployment of assets, including missiles, for putting nuclear weapons and other types of mass destruction weapons into near-earth orbit or fractional orbit. The ban on development of long-range (over 600 km) air-to-surface ballistic missiles and air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) fitted with two or more nuclear warheads should also be maintained.

In addition to the above restriction, it appears to be necessary to tighten the limits on equipping heavy bombers (HB) with nuclear weapons. Under the START Treaty the American side pledged not to equip existing and future HBs with more than 20 long-range nuclear ALCMs, and the USSR (now the Russian Federation) agreed not to equip HBs with more than 16 such missiles. Based on emerging strategic realities it would be reasonable to limit these bombers to no more than six long-range ALCMs. In so doing it would obviously be necessary to subject existing HBs to specific procedures to remove the extra racks for carrying long-range ALCMs.

The problem of sea-launched long-range (over 600 km) cruise missiles (SLCM) merits separate consideration. In developing the START Treaty the sides agreed that these missiles, which have the capability to strike targets at long range, represent a significant "boost" to the capability of a strategic nuclear arsenal, and they decided to limit their deployment. According to the parallel statements of the United States and the USSR that form an integral part of the START Treaty, the parties pledged that the number of deployed SLBMs of the United States and the USSR would not exceed 880 in any one year. This limit was acceptable for the level of operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads that was defined by the START Treaty—each side having no more than 6,000 nuclear warheads on no more than 1,600 deployed strategic vehicles. Today, the Russian Federation and the United States under the SORT Treaty are in the process of reducing their strategic nuclear arsenals to 1,700-2,200 operationally deployed warheads by 2012 and intend, as stated above, to agree on a lower strategic warhead ceiling. In conjunction with this it is also necessary to reduce the number of long-range nuclear SLCMs that the U.S. and Russian navies have in depots on their naval bases. It appears to be quite sufficient for each side to have no more than 150 SLCMs.

The third basic principle is the establishment of counting rules for strategic vehicles and warheads in the aggregate totals. This issue is currently addressed by Article III of the START Treaty. However, the approach established by this document for counting vehicles and warheads is unlikely to transfer unchanged to a new SOA treaty. Current reality makes an adjustment of the previous counting rules for strategic nuclear weapons unavoidable.

Russia does not possess and does not intend to acquire HBs equipped with nuclear gravity bombs, for which an arbitrary count of nuclear arms was introduced under the START Treaty rules—one warhead for each heavy bomber. Only the U.S. Air Force has this type of aircraft—currently there are 19 deployed B-2A bombers, each of which is capable of carrying up to 24 B61 or B83 nuclear bombs. In concluding a new SOA treaty the Russia side is expected to insist on counting the actual number of nuclear weapons for this type of HB, and not an arbitrary number.

On the other hand, the United States under its concept of "Rapid Global Strike" is conducting intensive research and development on precision unitary warheads (having a conventional explosive) for ICBMs

and SLBMs and is making provisions to deploy such missiles. Moreover, based on available information the Americans believe that unitary warheads and their associated strategic vehicles should not be included in the limits to be set by a new SOA treaty. This approach raises an objection from the Russian side, which believes that the development, testing, and deployment of conventionally armed ICBMs and SLBMs should be banned altogether.

It appears that reaching a compromise on the problematic issues listed above is still possible. For example, the Americans may agree to count the actual number of nuclear weapons⁶ on B-2A bombers in exchange for not including unitary warheads on ICBMs and SLBMs in the aggregate limit on operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to be established by a new SOA treaty. In this case, the American side will of course be entitled to establish the maximum permissible bomb load for B-2A bombers, but with the condition that irreversible procedures for removing the extra nuclear bomb racks be performed on these aircraft. In addition, it is likely that in order to address the concerns of the Russian side it will be necessary to introduce certain restrictions on the deployment of ICBMs and SLBMs with unitary warheads by, for example, setting a limit on the number of such vehicles and the number of unitary warheads on them. But it seems indisputable that all ICBMs and SLBMs with unitary warheads will be subject to inclusion in the aggregate limit that the new SOA treaty will establish for strategic vehicles. Indeed, although a portion of the ICBMs and SLBMs will have unitary warheads, they will not cease being strategic vehicles.

As far as the question about how to distinguish between unitary and nuclear warheads is concerned, the procedure for this inspection has already been worked out and approved. It is currently being used for conducting inspections with regard to warheads of ICBMs and SLBMs (Paragraph 6 of Article XI of the START Treaty). Inspectors use portable thermoluminescent dosimeters to distinguish between nuclear warheads and heavy decoys of similar size and shape located on the same final-stage dispensing platform.

The fourth basic principle is the necessity of addressing the problem of the so-called "reconstitution potential" of strategic nuclear forces. In the final analysis, this problem is caused by problems in the SORT Treaty. In particular, it not only does not set a limit on the number of deployed strategic vehicles or restrict the total throw weight of ICBMs and SLBMs, but in contrast to START it in no way limits the possibility of reducing the number of warheads on deployed multi-warhead ICBMs and SLBMs without replacing the dispensing platform on their final stage. This gave rise to the possibility of arbitrarily reducing the number of operationally deployed warheads on them for the purpose of retaining the greatest possible number of ICBMs and SLBMs in a group of strategic nuclear forces in order to comply with the quota imposed by the SORT Treaty. The warheads removed from the missiles were stored at ICBM and nuclear ballistic missile submarine bases and held in active reserve (in readiness for immediate installation on ICBMs and SLBMs). These warheads constitute the reconstitution potential.

Unless an acceptable solution is found to the reconstitution potential problem, which is one of the stumbling blocks in the way of reaching agreement on the format and content of a new SOA treaty, it will be impossible to eliminate the imbalance, which clearly favors the United States, in the strategic nuclear forces of the parties. This imbalance, which undermines the fundamental principle of equal security for the treaty parties, results from the numerical superiority of the United States in terms of ICBMs and SLCMs that are capable of loading out to their full warhead capacity when required.

SOA experts have proposed various approaches to resolving the reconstitution problem, including the recycling of warhead casings taken from ICBMs and SLCMs.⁷ Without a doubt, this procedure would be the cardinal measure to guarantee elimination of the possibility of reinstalling warheads that have been removed in ICBMs and SLBMs. However, the treaty parties are hardly likely to agree to such an approach, and the Americans certainly would not. All the more so because under the existing START Treaty (Paragraph 5 of Article III) each side is entitled to reduce the number of warheads listed for the existing types of ICBMs and SLCMs to a total of 1,250, which comprises a little more than 20 percent of the 6000 warhead ceiling allowed under the Treaty.

The following two approaches are the most acceptable for resolving the reconstitution potential problem:

The first approach is the traditional (or conservative) approach. It is based on the already approved provisions of the START Treaty limiting the number of strategic vehicles and warheads while simultaneously establishing rules for "unloading" ICBMs and SLBMs equipped with multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRV). An example might be 500 vehicles with 1,500 nuclear warheads and consent to reduce the complement of warheads on each type of MIRV ICBM or SLBM by no more than two.

The second approach is a non-traditional (or flexible) one in which the reconstitution potential is limited to a set ceiling (in this case no rules for unloading MIRV ICBMs and SLBMs would be established). It appears that a reasonable reconstitution potential might be one third of the ceiling for operationally deployed nuclear warheads that will be established by a SOA treaty. What does this figure mean? This is the total number of warhead "seats" on MIRV dispensing platforms in deployed ICBMs and SLBMs (these seats are the locations where nuclear warheads from the active reserve can be mounted).

An approach based on limiting the total throw weight of deployed ICBMs and SLBMs is also possible, but it would be difficult to implement in practice. In addition, strict limits would have to be set on new ICBMs and SLBMs introduced into the operational inventory of the strategic nuclear forces, something which the treaty parties are unlikely to agree to.

The fifth basic principle is the presence in a new SOA treaty of a verification system, because any treaty that does not have such a system invariably becomes a declaration of intentions.

The system of control and transparency present in the START Treaty should be taken as the basis. But it would be ill-advised to blindly transfer it to a new SOA treaty, since under the current realities, which differ radically from the conditions of the rigid standoff between the USSR and the United States when the START Treaty was concluded, it has become excessive and in need of simplification in order to reduce costs, among other goals. It would be advisable in a future strategic offensive arms treaty to substantially simplify the notification system introduced by Article VIII of the START Treaty and retain only those inspections provided for by Article XI that have proven to be practical and relevant. In addition, the procedures of several of the retained inspections should be simplified, and the annual inspection quotas should be reduced.

The inspections retained may include inspections concerning updated data on SOA facilities, inspections of new and abandoned facilities, inspections in connection with the improvement and elimination of strategic offensive arms, inspections with regard to warheads of deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, and distinguishability exhibitions and inspections relating to HBs and long-range ALCMs.

It must also be noted that since a new SOA treaty will become a kind of legal successor to the START Treaty, after it enters into force there will be no need to conduct multiple and expensive inspections regarding initial data on SOA facilities. The data exchanged by the parties on a regular basis in accordance with Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Section I of the Protocol on Notification, which is an integral part of the START Treaty, will serve perfectly as the initial data.

The sixth basic principle is that a new SOA treaty must have a legally binding status: it must be signed by the presidents and ratified by the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the Congress of the United States. It appears obvious that this principle does not need to be discussed.

Certainly these six basic principles of a new SOA treaty are not exhaustive. The list may be expanded and they must necessarily be fleshed out in a number of areas during the drafting of the text of a new SOA treaty.

In conclusion, it should be noted that negotiations on a new SOA treaty may turn out to be much more complicated than is apparent at present, and at that time the parties will be unable to develop an agreed text. In any event, this possibility cannot be excluded. The minimum needed to untangle this situation is a serious joint political statement by the presidents of Russia and the United States concerning their commitment to reducing and limiting strategic offensive weapons together with an expression of their

confidence that a new SOA treaty between the two countries will soon be concluded. Moreover, this statement must necessarily follow a meeting by the presidents at which they would discuss the negotiations and agree on approaches to reaching compromises on contentious issues concerning which the delegates at the negotiations could not achieve consensus.

And it appears on the whole that success in concluding a new SOA treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States will depend largely on whether both presidents show perseverance in attaining the goal, are prepared to consider the interests of the other side, and have confidence in each other's intentions.

References and Comments

¹ "Operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads" is not currently a legally defined term. The expert community concerned with SOA issues understands the term to mean nuclear warheads that have been fitted to deployed strategic vehicles: intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), and heavy bombers (HB).

² Taken from the text of a speech by Russian Foreign Minister S. V. Lavrov to the plenary session of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on March 7, 2009, posted by the press center of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its site at www.mid.ru (visited on March 12, 2009).

³ Taken from text posted in the on-line news bulletin 'Yadernyy Kontrol' [Nuclear Control], No. 5 (344), 2009 (www.pircenter.org/index.php?id=1770; visited March 12, 2009).

⁴ Taken from an ITAR-TASS report dated February 5, 2009 posted on the PIR-Tsentr site www.pircenter.org (visited on March 18, 2009).

⁵ Taken from an ITAR-TASS story dated February 9, 2009 posted on the PIR-Tsentr site www.pircenter.org (visited March 18, 2009).

⁶ The precedent for this was established in 1993 when the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (the START II Treaty) was concluded.

⁷ This practice occurred with regard to the warhead casings of intermediate-range and shorter-range ballistic and cruise missiles that came under destruction in accordance with the Treaty Between the USSR and the United States of America on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter Range Missiles (the INF Treaty), which was concluded in 1987.

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