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A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO REVITALIZING U.S. -RUSSIA ARMS CONTROL

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Introduction

The current tensions in the relationship between NATO and Russia are at their highest point since the end of the Cold War. The causes and symptoms of these tensions are multifaceted.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said May 14 on Meet the Press that the United States needs to “improve the relationship between the two greatest nuclear powers in the world.”¹

“I think it’s largely viewed that it is not healthy for the world, it’s certainly not healthy for us... for this relationship to remain at this low level,” Tillerson added. “But I think the President is committed, rightly so, and I am committed with him as well, to see if we cannot do something to put us on a better footing in our relationship with Russia.”²

If the Trump administration truly desires better relations with Russia now and for the future, attempting to reverse the stalemate on arms control is a good place to start.

As the world’s two largest nuclear powers, Washington and Moscow have a special obligation to work together to reduce the risks of conflict and nuclear dangers. Even when the relationship between Moscow and Washington was at its most tense during the Cold War, cooperation on arms control provided an important means for the two superpowers to reduce tensions and strengthen global security.

But resuming the arms control dialogue won’t be easy. This paper proposes a two-pronged agenda for revitalizing U.S. and Russian engagement on arms control and reducing nuclear weapons risks. The first prong would focus on options to lessen the risks of conflict and strengthen strategic stability. The second prong would entail a bold U.S. step to right-size its nuclear forces to the lowest level necessary to meet deterrence requirements, which could put pressure on Russia to follow suit.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section assesses the state of the current NATO-Russia relationship. The second section examines the bilateral arms control relationship and prospects for future progress. The third section proposes options to reduce the risks of conflict between NATO and Russia and strengthen strategic stability. The fourth section makes the case for unilaterally adjusting the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and responds to arguments against such an adjustment.

A NATO-Russia Relationship in Turmoil

Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the ensuing hostility over eastern Ukraine has been the driving factor in the deterioration of NATO-Russia relations, and has spurred western sanctions and increased military exercising on the European continent. In addition, the United States and Russia continue to butt heads in Syria as they attempt to pursue two different strategies in that country. Syria’s apparent use in April 2017 of a banned nerve agent, in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the U.S. decision to attack a Syrian air base with cruise missiles in response, further roiled the troubled waters.

To make matters worse, the unanimous conclusion of the U.S. intelligence community that Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and allegations of Russia interference in the political processes of other western democracies has enraged the U.S. body politic and added an even more toxic element to the relationship.

The major obstacle to stable and productive relations between NATO and Russia is the Russian perception of the alliance and its activities (based on the confrontational ideology of the current Russian leadership), as well as disregard for Moscow’s sensitivities by NATO members, most notably in the

area of the eastward expansion of the alliance. Russia believes that NATO has too frequently taken Moscow for granted, disregarded its interests or grievances, and failed to consult it before making major decisions. This state of affairs has led to misperceptions, lack of trust, and the abrogation of numerous previously reached agreements.

The most dangerous military aspect of the current stand-off continues to be the build-up and exercising of NATO and Russian military forces and capabilities in close proximity to the common border areas between NATO and Russia's eastern flank. The number of close encounters between alliance and Russia military forces has increased markedly in recent years. Each side has been trying to guarantee effective defense at an increasingly higher level, in contrast to an arms control approach in which the parties would seek cooperative security at the lowest possible level.

This is not to suggest that the tension has reached the point of a new Cold War. Such an analogy obscures more than it reveals. But continuing down the current path of disagreement is likely to further undermine the security situation in Europe and increase the risks of unintended escalation and conflict.

For its part, the Trump administration has yet to articulate a clear policy toward Russia and reportedly continues to review its options. Before and after taking office, President Trump has repeatedly said that he would like to improve relations with Moscow. He has notably failed to strongly criticize Russia for interfering in the U.S. election. And he has sent contradictory messages about the U.S. commitment to defend NATO countries and maintain sanctions against Russia, which are designed to encourage Moscow to abide by the Minsk agreements on the resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This has led many observers to express concern that Trump could make unwise concessions or agreements with Moscow.

As long as the cloud of the continued Congressional and FBI investigations into the Trump campaign's conduct prior to and after the 2016 election campaign continue to hang over the administration, there will be significant domestic political constraints on its ability to seek a grand bargain with Moscow. This could remain the case even if no wrong doing is found.

Under the current circumstances, then, the prospects for a return to the pre-Ukraine and pre-U.S. election meddling status quo are dim in the near-term. While there are opportunities – and an urgent need – to contain and even reduce the most dangerous aspects of the confrontation, competition at levels greater than what existed prior to the Ukraine crisis is likely to remain the new normal.

Near-term U.S.-Russia arms control prospects

Bilateral nuclear arms control and reduction efforts between the United States and the Soviet Union, and later Russia, have greatly benefited U.S., Russian, and global security by reducing the number of nuclear weapons pointed at one another, enhancing stability and predictability between the world's two largest nuclear powers, reducing the cost of U.S. nuclear forces, strengthening nonproliferation, increasing transparency, and contributing to periods of improvement in the bilateral relationship.

Many of these benefits continue to be felt to this day. Yet while it would be an overstatement to declare that arms control is dead, it would not be an overstatement to say that arms control is wounded. As in the case of the larger U.S.-Russia relationship, the challenges to arms control are immense.

While some meaningful arms control cooperation continues, such as adherence to New START and implementation of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, there is no ongoing dialogue on further nuclear risk reduction steps.

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Following the entry into force of New START in 2011, Moscow and Washington have failed to start talks to further reduce their nuclear stockpiles. Putin rebuffed President Barack Obama's June 2013 proposal to reduce U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear stockpiles by one-third below the ceilings set by New START, which caps the deployed strategic nuclear arsenal of each country at 1,550 accountable warheads and 700 deployed delivery vehicles.

Instead, Russia wants to address other issues as well, such as the nuclear forces of other nations, America's increasingly accurate conventional weapons, and missile defenses deployed in Europe, which Moscow believes could undercut its own nuclear retaliatory potential and disrupt strategic stability between itself and its old Cold War adversary.

These divisions grew even more pronounced in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and continued fomentation of conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Both sides continue to retain nuclear force postures that would allow each country to launch hundreds of weapons within minutes of a decision to do so. The two countries are also in the throes of ambitious, multi-hundred-billion-dollar efforts to sustain and replace their nuclear arsenals at levels that greatly exceed any rational defense requirement.

In addition, Russia appears to be putting greater emphasis on nuclear weapons in its overall national security policy and reverting to dangerous Cold War rhetoric and veiled nuclear threats. Moscow is also building new nuclear capable systems that are not covered by or violate existing arms control treaties, such as new sea-launched and ground-launched cruise missiles. U.S. and NATO officials have also expressed concern that Russia is lowering the threshold for when it might consider using nuclear weapons, increasing the risks of escalation early on in a conventional conflict.



Picture: Iskander-M (SS-26). Link: <http://missiledefenseadvocacy.org/missile-threat-and-proliferation/missile-proliferation/russia/iskander-m-ss-26/> No changes made.

For now, the two sides continue to respect and implement New START, an agreement which has become even more important as relations have worsened. Neither Russia nor the United States says it wants to scrap the existing nuclear arms control regime, including New START and the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. However, the INF Treaty is under serious and increasing stress. In July 2014, the U.S. State Department officially alleged that Russia is violating its INF Treaty obligations “not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers or to possess or produce launchers of such missiles” and has reiterated this judgment every year since.³ In March of this year U.S. military officials revealed that Russia began deploying a small number of the noncompliant missiles.

Russia denies that it is breaching the INF Treaty and has instead raised its own concerns about Washington's compliance with the agreement. Moscow charges that the United States is placing a missile defense launch system in Europe that can also be used to fire cruise missiles, using targets for missile defense tests with similar characteristics to INF Treaty-prohibited intermediate-range missiles, and making armed drones that are equivalent to ground-launched cruise missiles. Washington has countered that these charges do not constitute treaty violations.⁴

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Failure to resolve the festering compliance dispute could not only threaten the INF Treaty but New START and what remains of the bilateral arms control architecture between Washington and Moscow as well.

To complicate matters further, technological change and advances in conventional weapons and associated doctrines for their use have increased escalation dangers. Russia and the United States, as well as China, are developing hypersonic weapons that fly at or above Mach 5. Such weapons would be able to evade missile defenses and potentially hold at risk hardened targets currently held at risk by nuclear weapons. In addition, Moscow and Washington are expanding their missile defenses and pursuing next generation technologies to improve their defensive capabilities, such as directed energy and cyber weapons. China is also developing a missile defense architecture. All three countries have either demonstrated or are developing anti-satellite capabilities.

These advances appear poised to put new strains on strategic nuclear stability by reducing decision and warning time, increasing the odds of arms racing in the development of these weapons and capabilities to counter them, and reducing the likelihood of further nuclear arms reduction agreements. None of the countries developing these weapons appear to take the concerns of their competitors about them sufficiently seriously to prevent increased risks of instability.

It remains to be seen how the Trump administration will approach the arms control relationship with Russia. The administration is conducting a Nuclear Posture Review that is examining U.S. nuclear policy and strategy. The review is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. While the president has said that global nuclear weapons inventories should be significantly reduced, he has also pledged to strengthen and expand U.S. nuclear capabilities, denounced New START, and reportedly responded negatively to Putin's suggestion in a January phone call to extend that treaty.⁵



Picture: A Raytheon SM-6 launched from an Aegis guided missile destroyer. Link: <https://news.usni.org/2015/11/27/aegis-ashore-in-romania-set-for-dec-31-lightoff-bmd-sm-6-nearing-full-fielding> (Photo: US Navy)

In an encouraging development, Secretary of State Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed at their May meeting in Washington to resume talks on strategic stability. The Obama administration had also sought such talks last year, but Russia demurred preferring to deal with the new U.S. administration. What form the talks will take, when they will occur, and who will be involved has yet to be determined.

Progress on arms control and reduction has occurred during good times and bad times in the U.S.-Soviet and later U.S.-Russia relationship. The prospects for success have looked bleak in the past, after which a change in circumstances led to renewed commitment and the negotiation of historic agreements.

Can the current gaps between the two sides be bridged? According to some experts, Russia still has strong incentives to engage in arms control with the United States and to cap the size of U.S. nuclear forces.⁶ They argue that Russia is unlikely to want to see New START expire in 2021 (or 2026 if the treaty is extended by five years) without something to replace it.

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Russia also faces significant financial constraints, as a drop in global oil and natural gas prices, the growing costs of the war in Ukraine, and the impact of Western sanctions have taken a significant toll on Russia's economy. The need for reductions in Russia's defense budget could prompt Moscow to look for ways to reduce the cost of its nuclear forces.

It's also possible that the Trump administration could choose arms control as a way to seek to improve the U.S. relationship with Russia. In the past, Republican administrations have faced less political resistance in the pursuit of arms control than their Democratic counterparts.

Yet the most likely outcome is that the aswerved current stalemate will persist for the time being. It is hard to imagine the two sides negotiating a far-reaching new arms-control framework to go beyond New START given the INF compliance dispute and the domestic political constraints facing the Trump administration.

A Two-Pronged Approach

There is an urgent need for the United States and Russia to pull their relationship back from the brink.⁷ An early agenda for bilateral engagement should focus on options to reduce the risks of unintended conflict, lessen incentives for escalation, including to the possible use of nuclear weapons, reinforce existing arms-control mechanisms, and eliminate obstacles to new risk-reduction initiatives. In addition, the United States should be prepared to right-size U.S. nuclear forces to the lowest level necessary to meet deterrence requirements, which could put pressure on Russia to follow suit.

Reducing the Risks of Conflict and Strengthening Strategic Stability

To improve relations between NATO and Russia, it is imperative that each side tone down accusations that recall or revive the

squabbles of the Cold war period. Clichés like the currently re-created image of Russia as an “enemy” in Europe, only add fuel to the fire of state propaganda and do little to mitigate the tension in the relationship.

The path to rebuilding NATO-Russia relations must ultimately include a stabilization of the Ukraine conflict. Russia and Ukraine must commit to the Minsk II peace agreement, and Kiev must remain committed to implementing far-reaching reforms, fighting corruption, and challenging ultra-nationalism. Resolving the conflict in Ukraine is undoubtedly crucial for the stability and future improvement in the security situation in Europe.

Yet regardless of the outcome in Ukraine, it is still critical to take the edge off of Russia-NATO relations through step-by-step, prudent measures aimed at fostering a climate of mutual trust, and cooperation in the security sphere.

NATO's response to the current Russian challenge can't be purely a military buildup. It should be a dual-track approach. On the one hand, NATO should propose a package of verifiable arms control measures that could guarantee NATO's security and thus enable it to refrain from continuing to reinforce its military forces in Europe. On the other hand, NATO should send a clear signal that there would be a clearly defined buildup to strengthen collective defense if no such agreement on cooperative security at a low level could be reached within a reasonable timeframe.

Dialogue in the conventional arena should be centered on a range of confidence-building measures and transparency-promoting mechanisms, including:

- Continuing the work of the NATO-Russian Council, which resumed meeting in 2016 after a two-year suspension following Russia's annexation of Crimea. Even if criticized as inefficient in past crises, it is better than the lack of any other venue for dialogue;

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- Conducting a meeting between the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Russian parliamentarians to discuss urgent issues pertaining to European security and bilateral relations issues;
- Holding military-to-military discussions on practical measures to avoid dangerous incidents, particularly between nuclear-capable military forces (as suggested in the April 2015 report of the Deep Cuts Commission); and⁸
- Creation of a joint group of unofficial NGO or academia-provided experts who can examine new mechanisms and new tenets for ensuring security in the Euro-Atlantic theater.

In the nuclear arena, the strategic stability talks agreed to by Tillerson and Lavrov should be used to address the growing number of factors that influence U.S. and Russia thinking about nuclear force policy, including: missile defense, third country nuclear forces, advanced conventional weapons, the cyber domain, and more. As Steve Pifer of the Brookings Institution wrote recently, “Strategic stability is becoming a multilateral, multi-domain concept.”⁹

To be most effective, the talks should include representatives from the White House, Kremlin, and military establishments of each country.

In addition, the talks should focus on alleviating a number of urgent pressure points on the existing arms control architecture. Doing so could set the stage for negotiations on future nuclear arms control agreements.

A top priority of the discussions should be for the two sides to forge a better common understanding of strategic stability and how it can be bolstered by arms control and more frequent dialogue. Washington and Moscow have different views on the role of nuclear weapons, factors that impact the strategic balance, and triggers that could lead to war. These different histories and contexts that underlie these views are ill-understood by both countries and are shrouded in misperception

and mistrust.¹⁰ An early deliverable from such engagement could be for Trump and Putin to issue a joint statement reaffirming the 1985 statement by U.S. president Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

A second urgent priority should be to address an extension of New START and its verifications provisions by five years until 2026, as allowed by the treaty.¹¹ The agreement, which verifiably caps the deployed strategic nuclear arsenals of each side, has increased in value as U.S.-Russia relations have deteriorated. Failing to try to extend the treaty would be a major unforced error that would only further alienate the two superpowers and inflame tensions.

Third, the two countries need to work to preserve the INF Treaty. If the compliance concerns threatening the treaty are not resolved, it could unleash a costly new arms race in intermediate-range missiles, which will undermine security in Europe and Asia, and make continued strategic arms control measures practically impossible.

As noted in a Special Briefing Paper published by the Deep Cuts Commission in April 2017, the key obstacle to resolving the compliance concerns is not the absence of options to do so, but Russia’s unwillingness to acknowledge U.S. concerns.¹² To increase pressure on Russia and make it harder for Russia to deny a violation exists, the United States should be more transparent with the American people and U.S. allies about the nature of the violation, something the Obama administration was reluctant to do. Washington should also use the Special Verification Commission to devise inspection measures to address Russia’s compliance concerns.

In addition, the United States should make it clear to Russia that so long as Russia remains in violation of the INF Treaty, the United States will pursue steps to reaffirm and buttress its commitment to the defense of those allies threatened by the treaty-noncompliant missiles.

Right-Sizing U.S. Nuclear Forces

As it seeks to engage Russia on a set of near-term deliverables to stabilize the relationship, the United States must also address the military sufficiency and affordability of its own nuclear force posture. The maintenance of the status quo, which involves retaining an excessively large nuclear arsenal at a mammoth financial investment, carries significant risks. As the Trump administration conducts its Nuclear Posture Review, it should seize a bold opportunity to right-size U.S. nuclear forces to 1,000 New START accountable deployed warheads and 500 deployed strategic delivery systems by 2021 and likewise adjust current U.S. nuclear modernization plans, which will compete with other military priorities in a constrained budget environment, to comport with this lower level. As long as the treaty remains in force, Washington could use the existing New START monitoring and verification regime to demonstrate to Russia that it had in reduced to this lower level.

Such a reduction would be in keeping with lower U.S. requirements for deterrence, put pressure on Russia to follow suit, help to facilitate a much-needed dialogue with China on strategic stability, save tens of billions of dollars that could be repurposed to more relevant national security needs, and help to dampen the flames of an ongoing and worsening global technological nuclear and conventional weapons competition that could undermine stability and increase the chances of nuclear use.

A widely-held belief in Washington is that the history of arms control demonstrates the rareness of independent nuclear reductions. Indeed, the most visible examples of changes to the size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile have been reductions made under formal arms control treaties with Russia (and, previously, the Soviet Union). These accords placed balanced and equal limits on the deployed strategic nuclear arsenals of each side, and in the case of the INF Treaty, the intermediate range nuclear forces of each side.

But this selective reading of the history tells only part of the story.

The reality is that U.S. presidents have adjusted the number and types of nuclear weapons via multiple avenues, including formal treaties, non-treaty reciprocal measures, and independent actions. In reality, treaties have been the exception rather than the rule. Post-Cold War Republican presidents in particular have been prone to cutting nuclear weapons without treaties – and weren't criticized for doing so.

Since the end of the Cold War, the size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile has dropped steadily – from about 22,000 warheads to roughly 4,000 as of September 30, 2016. But most of these reductions haven't been codified in treaties. Since the beginning of the nuclear age, only four treaties have been implemented that limit or reduce offensive nuclear forces: the INF Treaty, the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), and New START.

These pacts have limited or reduced the number of nuclear warheads and delivery systems, but have not required that the nuclear warheads themselves be destroyed.

With the exception of the INF Treaty, which eliminated all ground-launched nuclear missiles with a range between 500 kilometers and 5500 kilometers, no arms control treaty has dealt with non-strategic (or shorter-range) nuclear weapons, or with non-deployed weapons (those held in reserve). Together, these two categories of weapons make up the majority of the U.S. arsenal, meaning that most of the nuclear stockpile is, and has always been, governed by independent presidential discretion, not treaties.

In June 2013 after an extensive interagency review of nuclear deterrence requirements, U.S. military leaders concluded, that the U.S. nuclear arsenal will be “more than adequate” to meet security objectives when New START is fully implemented in 2018,

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and the force can be reduced by up to one-third, from 1,550 New START-accountable deployed strategic warheads to about 1,000 (or about 1,300 actual warheads when counting gravity bombs and ALCMs stored deployed at bomber bases).

Yet the Obama administration did not immediately reduce the size of America's nuclear force, despite the review's conclusion that deterrence could be achieved by even a unilateral reduction. Instead, in a June 2013 speech in Berlin, president Obama invited Russia to negotiate a further one-third reduction of each country's strategic nuclear arms.

As a result, the United States today has more nuclear weapons than it needs to guarantee its security and that of its allies and friends.

The Trump administration should reaffirm the conclusion of the 2013 review and announce that the United States will take the following steps to adjust the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal:

- Reduce by 2021 the deployed strategic nuclear force to 1,000 New START accountable warheads and 500 deployed strategic delivery systems, invite Russia to do the same, and propose that the two sides agree to resume formal talks to regulate all types of strategic offensive and defensive weapons systems (nuclear and non-nuclear) that could affect strategic stability;
- Order the retirement of roughly 1,000 hedge or reserve warheads, bringing the total stockpile down from approximately 4,000 warheads to 3,000;
- Adjust current U.S. nuclear modernization plans to support a force of 1,000 New START accountable warheads and 500 deployed strategic delivery systems; and
- Undertake a rigorous review of what conditions would need to be met to reduce below 1,000 deployed warheads, 500 deployed delivery systems, and 2,500 total warheads.

Trump should not give Putin a veto over cuts of unnecessary and expensive US strategic nuclear weapons. Nor should he give Putin an easy excuse to maintain a similarly bloated arsenal of deployed strategic warheads aimed at the United States.

Both the United States and Russia maintain more nuclear weapons than they need for their security. A small numerical advantage by either side would not change the fundamental deterrence equation. If Washington and Moscow aren't deterred by 1,000 deployed nuclear weapons deployed on multiple types of delivery systems, what logic presumes 1,500 would make a difference?

Meanwhile, Washington already deploys approximately 200 more strategic delivery systems than Russia. Such a disparity provides Russia with an incentive to put multiple warheads (MIRVs) on deployed strategic delivery systems to keep up with the United States and to invest in heavily MIRV'ed new systems, such as the proposed Sarmat (RS-28). A U.S. decision to reduce to 1,000 warheads could prompt Russia to rethink its expensive nuclear weapons modernization projects and possibly build-down its deployed strategic nuclear warheads.

But even if Russia is reluctant to join the United States in building down, a U.S. reduction would put Russia on the defensive and force Moscow to explain to a critical international community why it needs to maintain a larger deployed nuclear arsenal than the United States.

Perhaps more intriguingly, a U.S. willingness to reduce its arsenal could incentivize China to take a less passive approach to nuclear disarmament and more openly discuss the size, composition, and operations of its nuclear forces. While U.S. arms control and confidence building efforts have traditionally focused on Moscow, it is past time to place greater attention on starting a meaningful dialogue with Beijing.

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Picture: Russian ICBM (RS-24).
Link: <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russias-new-rs-28-sarmat-icbm-us-missile-defense-killer-19464>
No changes made.

Some observers have expressed concern that China, which possesses a nuclear arsenal of approximately 260 total nuclear warheads and 75 intercontinental range delivery systems, could soon increase the alert level of its forces, deploy nuclear-armed cruise missiles, continue to MIRV its ballistic missiles, and perhaps even abandon its no-first use declaratory policy.¹³ This, combined with advances in U.S. missile defense and conventional strike capabilities, could spiral into an arms race between the two countries and possibly with Russia and increase the risks of a nuclear crisis.

U.S. nuclear policy and posture has an important influence on China's nuclear thinking and decision-making. Further U.S. reductions, combined with other steps to increase strategic stability and build confidence between Washington and Beijing, could help to prevent a possible Chinese transition to a less stabilizing nuclear force posture.

Establishing a serious U.S.-China dialogue on nuclear forces could have the added benefit of stoking Russian concern about being left on the sidelines, as Moscow has in the past viewed bilateral arms control with the United States as a symbol of its great power status and a source of prestige.

Another argument in support of an independent change to U.S. force posture is that every dollar Washington spends to maintain a bloated

nuclear arsenal is a dollar that can't be spent on military capabilities more relevant to strengthening deterrence and assuring allies. It is not in the American interest to engage in a tit-for-tat race with Moscow to rebuild an excessively large nuclear force, especially if it comes at the expense of needed conventional improvements.

By scaling back its nuclear force to 1,000 deployed strategic warheads and making associated reductions to the hedge stockpile, the United States could remove a major obstacle to trimming tens of billions of dollars from the Defense Department's costly and excessive plan for new strategic submarines, missiles, bombers, and warheads over the next decade, which is premised on maintaining New START force levels in perpetuity.

A February 2017 Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report estimates that the United States will spend \$400 billion (in then-year dollars) on nuclear weapons between fiscal years 2017 and 2026.¹⁴ The new projection is an increase of \$52 billion, or 15 percent, over the CBO's most recent previous estimate of the 10-year cost of nuclear forces, which was published in January 2015 and put the total cost at \$348 billion.

In fact, the CBO's latest projection suggest that the cost of nuclear forces could greatly exceed \$1 trillion over the next 30 years.

What makes the growing cost to sustain the nuclear mission so worrisome for military planners is that costs are scheduled to peak during the mid-2020s and overlap with large increases in projected spending on conventional weapon system modernization programs. Numerous Pentagon officials and outside experts have warned about the affordability problem posed by the current approach and that it cannot be sustained without significant and sustained increases to defense spending or cuts to other military priorities.

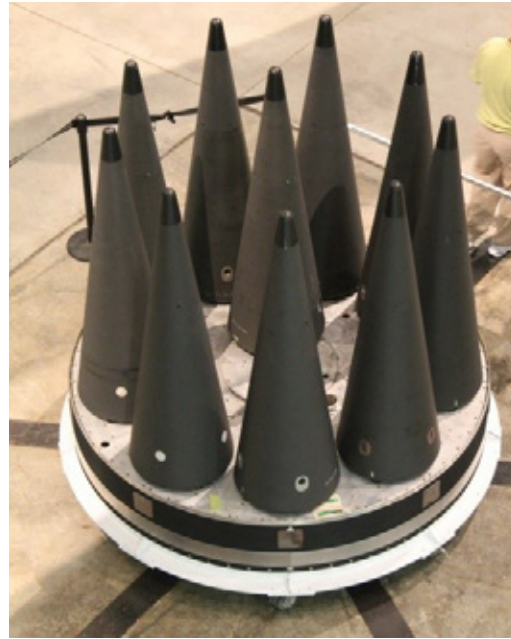
While U.S.-Russia relations are currently strained, the decisions the United States is making now about rebuilding the nuclear arsenal are decisions that will be with us for decades to come. Decisions about force needs must consider the longer term, not just the crisis of the moment, and must weigh the opportunity costs.

The Trump administration must seriously examine options to reshape and rescale the plans and adequately fund a smaller number of projects that would still leave the United States with a capable and credible deterrent until further reductions are possible.

By contrast, if the Trump administration decides to accelerate or expand the scope of the nuclear weapons replacement and upgrade effort, it won't strengthen deterrence against Russia or China, but will put ever greater strain on the budget and generate significant controversy in the U.S. Congress.

A number of objections are often raised against reducing the U.S. nuclear arsenal. One of the most prominent is that such cuts would be a signal of weakness in the face of a more confrontational Russia and assertive China.

But this is not a reason to maintain a nuclear force in excess to U.S. security requirements, especially since sustaining such force could come at the expense of maintaining and strengthening the conventional military capabilities that are more relevant to buttressing deterrence and assurance.



Picture: MIRV. Link: <http://analysans.net/china-reportedly-tests-10-mirv-df-5-c-icbm-not-a-dramatic-shift-in-nuclear-posture/> No changes made.

Meanwhile, the concern that many analysts have about Russia is that it might choose to use a small number of nuclear weapons in an attempt to stave off defeat in a conflict with superior NATO conventional forces – though it is not clear that such deescalating strikes are part of formal Russian doctrine. The United States is no more or less likely to be able to deter and if necessary respond to such a scenario with 1,500 or 1,000 deployed strategic warheads.

Would a unilateral reduction in U.S. strategic forces increase the threat posed by Russia's tactical nuclear weapons? Moscow maintains hundreds more tactical (or non-strategic) nuclear warheads than Washington. But while the disparity in tactical nuclear weapons is a concern, most Russian non-strategic forces are aging, have very short-ranges, and some are still used for missile defense. Moreover, most of the warheads are in central storage and are dedicated as much if not more to China than NATO. Previous presidents have drastically and unilaterally reduced the number of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons without any demand for Russian reciprocity.

In the case of China, even after dropping to 1,000 deployed strategic warheads, the United States would still enjoy a 10-1 advantage.

Another argument against new cuts is that it would eliminate bargaining leverage in a future arms control negotiation with Russia. This claim is often accompanied by reference to the “dual-track” decision adopted by NATO that called for U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations on intermediate-range nuclear forces while the United States prepared to deploy new INF missile systems in Europe.

However, not only is this analogy strained (for example, arguably the biggest factor in the successful outcome of the INF talks was the role played by the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev) the global strategic environment is different now than it was in the 1980s.

There is little evidence to suggest that maintaining and planning to modernize the New START level force provided the Obama administration with additional leverage in calling for talks with Russia to reduce by up to one-third below New START. Moreover, the United States will retain bargaining chips even after a reduction, such as parity in numbers of modernized delivery systems and Russian concerns about U.S. missile defense programs.

Finally, some critics claim that further U.S. nuclear force reductions would drive allies that depend on the so-called U.S. nuclear “umbrella” to reconsider their nonnuclear weapon status and seek their own arsenals.¹⁵

Such concerns are unfounded given the retaliatory potential of even 1,000 strategic nuclear weapons, as well as the maintenance of superior U.S. conventional forces. Moreover, for a non-nuclear state, such as South Korea or Japan, to openly build a nuclear arsenal would be a dramatic renunciation of its commitment not to do so under the NPT. The political costs of such a decision would be huge. The United States can continue to assure the security of its allies and partners as it reduces its arsenal and maintains second to none conventional forces.

Furthermore, rather than express opposition to further nuclear force reductions, U.S. allies in Europe and Japan have consistently and repeatedly called on the United States and Russia to achieve even deeper reductions in their nuclear arsenals below New START.

A more legitimate concern is that a reduction in nuclear weapons ordered by President Trump would further spook allies already unnerved by his assault on the underpinnings of the U.S.-led alliance system. Yet holding on to an excessively large nuclear arsenal is not a solution to this problem. In fact, Trump’s unsettling of U.S. allies demonstrates that the real lifeblood of extended deterrence lies in an ally’s confidence in the strength of its political relationship with the United States. If relations fray, then extended deterrence will be perceived to be weak – no matter how many or what kinds of nuclear weapons the United States possesses.

Conclusion

Many observers in the United States, including Democrats, could view any engagement with Russia or changes to U.S. nuclear force posture with suspicion given the ongoing investigations into the Trump campaign’s ties to and possible collusion with Russia. Likewise, key voices in Moscow are sure to oppose any effort to reduce tensions with the United States, even with a seemingly less hostile Trump administration.

But given the stakes, namely preventing U.S.-Russia confrontation and potential nuclear conflict, cooperation on arms control should be judged on its own merits, namely whether it enhances U.S. and Russian security.

The downward spiral in the U.S.-Russia relationship makes the objective of reducing the risks of nuclear conflict all the more urgent. The time to act on this common interest is now, lest a dangerous situation grow even more precarious.

U.S. allies in Europe and Japan have consistently and repeatedly called on the United States and Russia to achieve even deeper reductions in their nuclear arsenals below New START.

Moreover, President Trump has it within his power to trim excess nuclear weapons and avoid spending tens of billions of defense dollars on redundant and unnecessary nuclear weapons systems. By doing so, he

would open the way for further reductions in the role and size of not only America's nuclear forces but Russia and China's as well – and help build a future that's a little more safe and secure.

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About Deep Cuts

The Deep Cuts project is a research and consultancy project, jointly conducted by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, the Arms Control Association, and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The Deep Cuts Commission is seeking to devise concepts on how to overcome current challenges to deep nuclear reductions. Through means of realistic

analyses and specific recommendations, the Commission strives to translate the already existing political commitments to further nuclear reductions into concrete and feasible action. Deep Cuts Working Papers do not necessarily reflect the opinion of individual Commissioners or Deep Cuts project partners.

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