



## Prospects for U.S.-Russian Arms control and Disarmament: A Russian Perspective

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### Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century confirmed once more that for the time being the state of U.S.-Russian relations is still the central factor which defines the “degree of possibility” for the solution of world-level and regional security problems. These relations also define the framework of the arms control and disarmament process.

After the London Medvedev-Obama summit on 1 April 2009 there appeared again some positive prospects for U.S.–Russian arms control. It should be emphasized that despite some expectations no “revolution” happened in London—the presidents of the two countries did not revitalize once more partnership relations (as happened twice in modern Russian history—the last time in 2001 in Ljubljana by Putin and Bush).

Objective analyses recognize that serious destructive processes have been at work within the arms control system that was constructed through rather complicated cooperation over dozens of years. The modern achievements look even more modest if they are considered in the context of the obligation assumed by the nuclear-armed states more than 40 years ago in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. According to Article VI of this treaty, “each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

One need not be a very discerning expert to see that in the 40 subsequent years only Moscow and Washington engaged in nuclear arms control. But this did not change their relations significantly for the better. Moreover, these relations were subject to recurrent serious crises, making less possible the effective solution of central and regional world problems, including arms control. At the same time the constant non-engagement of other nuclear states in arms control lowered significantly the chances to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

### Principal Complications of Bilateral Relations

Russian-American relations have accumulated, especially recently—during the Bush presidency—a substantial negative potential. In fact the political elites of the two countries occupy at present diametrically opposing positions. With the new U.S. president there came into office a

vast group of well-known professionals who are enthusiastic about restoring close bilateral U.S.-Russian cooperation and partnership. Meanwhile the Russian political class became irritated and disillusioned about the results of previous and especially recent (Putin-Bush) attempts at cooperation, and the decision-making bureaucracy is mostly “tuned” upon the anti-American wave-length.

Such moods appeared mostly due to the shortsighted and non-partnership-like policy of the United States and, in some cases, of the West as a whole. Some of the factors that played (and are still playing) a decisive negative role are analyzed in this paper. This analysis helps to answer the principal question—why is arms control, including its nuclear component, in such poor condition?

The general political background which served as a constant obstacle to moving further in the arms control process was the absence of normal cooperation, to say nothing of closer relations. Two attempts (under Yeltsin and Putin) to pursue partnership were undertaken but these attempts failed. Everyone may have his own personal impression of Putin and his period of presidential foreign policy but we should acknowledge that he personally was the initiator of the second round of partnership in 2001. In 2007 in his Munich speech the principal theme that was heard was his personal disillusionment about partnership and cooperation with the West.

In between there were several events which were perceived by Moscow in the context of neglecting (or opposing) its interests and concerns. These included the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty, the launching of the Iraq campaign in the form of breaking the foundations of international law, continued NATO enlargement, and the declared plans for U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) deployment in Europe, which caused an especially nervous reaction in Moscow. The last blow to the hope to support a declaratory partnership in the Bush era was rendered by the Georgian conflict.

The really tragic role in Russian-Western relations undermining the mere possibility of realistic partnership was played by the NATO enlargement policy—especially the way how it was (and is) executed. The Kremlin was always informed about the new “enlargement steps” but was never consulted as a partner. It is necessary to recall that Russia and the North Atlantic Alliance in the major joint documents (the Founding Act of 1997 and the Rome Declaration of 2002) assumed the obligation to “work as equal partners.”

In May 1994 some experts (including me) gave testimony in the State Duma (Russian Parliament). I strongly supported partnership with NATO and Russia’s joining the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program on the premises that the enlargement policy which was actively opposed by Moscow would be postponed for the time being. I based my support for PFP on the promises that were given to me (and not only to me) in Brussels by high-ranking NATO officials that the PFP then being launched was, literally, “an intelligent way out”—giving the countries of Eastern and Central Europe a chance to cooperate closely with NATO in security programs and, at the same time, taking into consideration the concerns of Moscow. Taking these promises into account Russia decided to join the PFP in June 1994 and in August 1994 already after “a strong push from Washington” (another literal quotation from NATO officials) enlargement was declared inevitable. Some people remember that this mere fact compelled the first Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, at the December 1994 OSCE summit in Budapest, to warn against the danger of a “Cold Peace” with the West.

His warning was prophetic—in the late 1990s and in the first decade of the twenty-first century we were often balancing on the edge of a “Cold Peace.” Again, the policy of NATO enlargement in the way it was executed was the principal cause of this situation.

All the time the NATO bureaucracy preferred to hide behind the propaganda cliché—that “NATO enlargement is an enlargement of democracy,” or that “NATO enlargement does not threaten Russia”—and declared that NATO’s policy was only undertaken to satisfy the aspirations of the states who want to join the organization. But the same bureaucrats were fully aware that the effect of their policy on Russia was completely different from what was presented. From the very beginning the Russian political elite and general public perceived NATO enlargement either as a direct threat to the military security of the country, or at least as a challenge to its national interests.

In my judgment, the architects of the NATO policy had to choose what they considered more important for the Alliance—execution of the formal decisions and accommodation of almost “everyone who wanted” or normal and even partnership-like relations with Russia. Brussels has chosen the first route and hence the serious complication of relations between Moscow and the West happened to a great extent due to this policy. From Moscow’s perspective, Washington bears the greatest responsibility because, in Russian eyes, the United States is the acknowledged “dictator of NATO.”

The military maneuvers with Georgia undertaken by NATO in late Spring 2009 and NATO’s support for the semi-legitimate Saakashvili regime (which came to power as the result of the “rose revolution”) was another act which further complicated NATO’s relations with Russia. President Medvedev called this decision “shortsighted and non-partnership like.”<sup>[1]</sup> Thus the NATO enlargement policy was constantly undermining Moscow’s confidence in the West and was the principal negative factor seriously diminishing incentives to pursue arms control.

The proposed U.S. BMD deployment in Europe made crystal clear the fact that the sides share the posture of nuclear deterrence, and that in this dimension almost nothing has changed since the time of the Cold War. The “BMD case” also revealed the extremely shaky and in fact very low level of confidence achieved between Washington and Moscow—a level of confidence which could be immediately ruined at practically any time. Then President Vladimir Putin declared that, with the U.S. BMD plan, “for the first time in history on the European continent there appear the systems of the American nuclear strategic complex.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The then Head of the General Staff General Yury Baluevsky went even further, saying that “the cases of Iran today and North Korea in the recent past serve only to camouflage the real designation of the system: the changing of the strategic balance in one’s own favor by the way of creation of conditions for the more effective usage of strategic nuclear forces. The principal aim of the BMD region creation in Europe is Russia.” He emphasized that “many responsible politicians in Europe understand, that the principle of deterrence, which preserved peace in the Cold War period, still remains in force.”<sup>[3]</sup>

The reaction of Russian military officers, politicians and experts to the U.S. BMD plan was very angry and sometimes even hysterical. Their fears may seem to be strange for many people in the West but the way the whole “project” was started by the United States and the European participants, when Russia was not consulted, but only informed after the decision was made, was destined to cause this kind of reaction from Moscow. This is in itself definitely a clear example of non-partnership behavior. The presence of deterrence in bilateral strategic relations is an obvious proof that for Moscow and Washington the time of the Cold War is not the distant past.

Of course on the U.S. part during the whole period there was concern about the irreversible character of democratic changes in Russia. This was by the way the inner stimulus (which is rather rarely acknowledged) which was considered during the initiation of the NATO enlargement process. The Georgian conflict further aggravated the fears of the West regarding the nature of the Kremlin regime.

In the military doctrines of Russia and the United States one may see a growing reliance on nuclear weapons, and an admission of the possibility of limited nuclear war. The sides are still addicted to the launch-on-warning concept, which is a characteristic feature of Cold War planning and which is extremely dangerous for the modern world.

The factors mentioned above were pressing negatively on all spheres of cooperation and especially the most sensitive ones, including arms control. It is not a coincidence that in the first decade of the new century, when some of the factors mentioned above appeared and others gained force, the arms control process was especially actively disintegrating.

## The Status of Arms Control

Describing the present situation there may be noted two principal features and three paradoxes. The first feature is the fact that the Cold War is still defining political-military relations, especially between Russia and the United States. The Cold War is declared to be over, but only some of its principal features have been removed. The nuclear arsenals are still aimed at each other (Russia versus the Western countries; China versus the Western countries and Russia). Under the pressure of deterrence any serious discussion about partnership is senseless. Deterrence also blocks movement to arms control negotiations of a new type—based on more confidence and able to achieve large-scale and dynamic results. Russian and Western military potentials are still considered to be opposing each other not only in the strategic nuclear sphere—Russian politicians and experts are counting the military potential of NATO as being opposed to Russian forces.

The second feature is that the state of relations between Russia and the United States (the “atmosphere” of bilateral relations) still principally defines (to a large extent as during the times of the Cold War) the possibilities for success in defining solutions for global issues and in many cases for regional security and arms control issues.

The political cycle in U.S.-Russian relations (Bush-Putin) that ended in 2008 was marked by several paradoxes. The first paradox was the contrast between the declared commitment to partnership and the real policy, based on the perceptions of rivalry and often on the principle of opposing the ambitions and political decisions of each other.

The second paradox was in the striking contrast between the enormous capabilities of the United States and Russia and the microscopic results achieved through cooperation. The third paradox can be found in the apparent deep gap between the long-term strategic tasks of both countries (in providing security, including where a number of badly needed goals may be achieved only cooperatively) and the realities of their deteriorating relations.

All these factors have prevented the arms control process from developing effectively. Even in multilateral arms control, the not very satisfactory relations between Russia and the United States retain an important influence. The non-ratification of the 1999 Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe by most of the states-parties symbolized the inability of the Western countries to come to an agreement with Russia. In its turn Moscow in 2007 declared a moratorium on its participation in the Treaty, which made the whole situation even worse.

But Washington could exert a positive influence on the situation as it did in 1996, when the states-parties to the 1990 CFE Treaty agreed to relax the restrictions affecting Russia and Ukraine in the flank region defined in the treaty. This time nothing has been done, due to the poor state of bilateral political relations.

The situation with the bilateral INF Treaty appeared to be unsatisfactory too. Russian representatives hinted that Moscow might consider withdrawal from the INF Treaty in some

circumstances (deployment of U.S. BMD in Europe, for instance). This added to the fears of some states that security, on the regional level especially (which is defined by the technical characteristics of the missiles limited by the INF Treaty), might be endangered. The subsequent appeal to internationalize the INF regime, to make other countries join it, seems to be more propagandistic than realistic.

Despite the promises given by Obama during his presidential campaign, the United States still has not joined the CTBT. Russian officials constantly point to this fact. Also this reflects the concerns of a number of countries and stimulates their fears that the nuclear arms race may be prolonged with new force.

The situation with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was signed in 1968, at the beginning of the twenty-first century has become even more critical than before. The indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 left beyond its limitations three states (India, Pakistan and Israel) with nuclear weapons at their disposal.

The critical situations with the North Korean and Iranian nuclear potentials (with all their inner differences) have even more greatly emphasized the crisis of the whole non-proliferation system—the inability of the world community to take effective measures against the rude violators of the Treaty regime. The political disagreements and disputes between Russia and the Western countries undermine the unanimity of the international community, and prevent the stiffening of international sanctions. This is very skillfully used by the violators in their activity.

Due to the oral obligations undertaken by the presidents of Russia and the United States at the beginning of the 1990s which cannot be verified, by now the sides are unaware of the number and locations of the non-strategic nuclear weapons of the other side. To start negotiations on this issue is very difficult due to the complications with verification. This does not add stability to the situation because these weapons could be the instruments of the limited nuclear war the possibility of which is openly admitted by the two sides.

Russia's reaction to the prospect of U.S. BMD deployments in Europe was described above. It was really a certain "moment of truth" for both sides. The position of Russia at present is to return to the traditional classic formula previously adopted by the sides—that is, to correlate reductions in strategic offensive armaments with restraint in defensive armaments. The 1972 ABM Treaty (from which the United States withdrew unilaterally) in its time provided the legal basis for this. This problem will have to be resolved by the negotiators, and at present this is the condition of Moscow.

The beginning at last of the negotiations on START may be considered a positive sign. But such a development was practically inevitable irrespective of who sits in the White House and in the Kremlin. Without the START 1 Treaty, which expires at the end of 2009, the sides would face the perspective of drastically diminishing military confidence and an economically exhausting arms race. Still the negotiations on only one sector of armaments may serve as an ignition for the much broader arms control and security negotiations which have long been highly demanded. But decisive improvement of the situation is impossible without very close attention and progress on a number of interrelated issues which comprise the concerns of Moscow and Washington.

The success of U.S.-Russian arms control efforts may again, as several decades ago, define the future of world security. It appears once more that without the serious and successive engagement of the traditional instruments of building positive relations between states (including the arms control process) it is impossible to move to a higher stage of relations, such as partnership. The first decade of the twenty-first century has compelled us to understand this indispensable fact once more.

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