

Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Possible Scope and Conditions for Information Sharing, Transparency Measures and Verification

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Russia’s attitude toward non-strategic nuclear weapons

Russia’s approach toward non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) has been quite consistent for at least since early 1990s. It is not avoiding discussions on NSNW, but it does not consider this issue as a priority. In Russia’s view there are more urgent issues to focus on (missile defense, prohibition of space weapons, fissile materials cut-off, etc).²

Russia insists that all states should withdraw their nuclear weapons back to their national territory prior to beginning substantive negotiations on NSNW. That presumes the United States should return their nuclear bombs back to its territory and eliminate the related infrastructure in Europe in an irreversible manner.

In addition, according to Russia’s attitude, NSNW cannot be discussed separately from other issues that have an impact on strategic stability. Russian approach toward nuclear weapons, and NSNW, in particular, fits very well in a statement “*the nuclear free world is not equal to our modern world minus nuclear weapons*” made in an article published in 2010 in “*Izvestia*” newspaper by Russian “four wise men”.³

Benefits and costs of information sharing regarding NSNWs in Europe

Many of arms control experts, particularly in Russia, agree that at the time being there is very little motivation for Russia to enter into the dialog on NSNW. Unfortunately, the hopes of the last year did not materialize and the environment has not improved since.

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² One of the most recent official statements explaining Russia’s attitude toward NSNW was made by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov in his interview to “*Moskovskiy Novosti*” newspaper: Svetlana Babayeva, “Vy Sprosite Menya v Chem Pozitivnaya Povestka Dnya (Ask Me, What is Positive in the Agenda),” *Moskovskiy Novosti*, October 29, 2012; http://mn.ru/politics_foreign/20121029/329634008.html

³ Yevgeny Primakov, Igor Ivanov, Yevgeny Velikhov, Mikhail Moiseyev, “Ot Yadernogo Sderzhivaniya k Vseobschey Bezopasnosti (Moving from Nuclear Deterrence to Mutual Security)”, *Izvestiya*, October 14, 2010; <http://izvestia.ru/news/367072>

In particular, May 2012 NATO summit in Chicago has concluded, that U.S. nuclear weapons will stay in Europe. U.S.-Russian dialog on the problem of ballistic missile defenses has not made any substantial progress. The entry into force of adopted CFE Treaty remains only a theoretical possibility. There is also a little chance that CTBT will be ratified by U.S., China and other key parties any time soon. FMCT talks are also deadlocked.

Nevertheless, expert discussions on how to deal with NSNWs are continuing and there is a clear trend that their focus is shifting toward developing confidence building and transparency measures.

Russia does not seem to be interested in developing transparency measures either. In particular, officials of the Ministry of Defense frequently raise a question, in discussions with Russian non-governmental experts: "How limits or transparency measures with regard to NSNW can practically contribute to advancement of Russia's defense capability and making an armed conflict in Europe less likely?"⁴

Some proposals to cover U.S. and Russian NSNW by arms control and transparency measures make questionable assumptions on why such measures could be attractive to Russia.

In particular, there is a widely shared belief that Russia might accept a proposal to set up common limits on deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons (both strategic and non-strategic).⁵ The argument is that such an approach would resolve the problem of so called "breakout" or upload potential (non-deployed strategic nuclear warheads placed at storage). However, unlike in the mid of 1990-s, Russia does not seem to be interested in discussing upload capability issue at all. Moreover, Moscow will likely reject the proposal to put strategic and non-strategic nuclear warheads under one ceiling in any U.S.-Russian future bilateral agreement, because non-strategic nuclear weapons play very different roles in the defense postures of the two sides. Unlike the United States, Russia has other neighbors with nuclear capabilities, and it cannot ignore this factor, so that NSNW is more a multilateral issue than a bilateral one.

An argument is also made that limiting NSNW can be a cost saving measure for Russia. It is true, that this decade Russia is going to spend about 20 trillion Rubles (\$ 600-700 Billion) on state orders for the Ministry of Defense. However, most of the planned spending has nothing to do with NSNW development. The priority is modernizing conventional forces, air and space defenses, and strategic forces. Most likely, the opposite is true. Agreement to implement transparency measures with regard to NSNW might impose additional financial burden on Russia.

Finally, some believe, that Russia might be interested in discussing NSNW, because achieving progress in such a discussion would force NATO to reconsider its nuclear policy and end the practice of deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. In fact, the presence of U.S. nuclear bombs in Europe would be the best pretext, if Russia wanted to avoid discussion on NSNW. A radical change in NATO policy might put Russia in extremely awkward position.

⁴ "Buduscheye Nestrategicheskogo Yadernogo Oruzhiya v Evrope: Vozmozhny Varianty (The Future of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Europe: Options)", *Index Besopasnosti*, N3-4, vol 18, 2012, pp. 169-180; <http://pircenter.org/articles/758-buduschee-nestrategicheskogo-yadernogo-oruzhiya-v-evrope-vozmozhny-varianty>

⁵ Steven Pifer and Michael O'Hanlon, "Nuclear Arms Control Opportunities: An Agenda for Obama's Second Term," *Arms Control Today*, December 2012; http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2012_12/Nuclear-Arms-Control-Opportunities-An-Agenda-for-Obamas-Second-Term

What might really attract Russia to start discussion on TNW transparency measures in Europe with NATO is the combination of two factors - NATO's willingness to limit BMD deployments and develop a legally binding treaty on European security, proposed by Russia. Unfortunately, there are no signs that such developments could occur in the nearest future.

Lessons to be learned from previous transparency and verification initiatives

It is important, that the U.S. and Russian experts put significant efforts to address jointly the issue of transparency and verification of nuclear warheads, so that the obtained results could be used as a starting point for implementing commonly agreed measures.⁶

Some nuclear warhead transparency measures were implemented under the INF and START Treaties. The purpose of these measures was proving that parties to the treaties were in compliance with their provisions. Some very limited transparency measures with regard to deployed strategic warheads are currently used in New START to ensure that actual numbers of nuclear warheads deployed on missiles chosen by inspecting side coincide with declared numbers.

During the Presidential Summit of January 1994, the United States and Russia agreed to form a joint working group to "*consider steps to ensure the transparency and irreversibility of reducing nuclear weapons.*"⁷ The working group consisting of U.S. and Russian experts developed and demonstrated a number of promising detection techniques of control over warhead dismantlement activities during 1994-1995. Unfortunately, despite the progress achieved, the work has been stopped by the fall of 1995 because of the lack of interest on the Russian side.

Previous experience suggests that, to be successfully implemented it is important to make sure that transparency measures become not a self-purpose, but a necessary tool in resolving existing security issues among the parties involved.

There is also a common understanding in the expert community that establishing control over NSNW is a complicated process that will require a lot of time and efforts. Besides political problems there are also technical ones since control over NSNW has to include application of transparency and verifications measures over nuclear weapons themselves. Development and use of an inspection mechanism for nuclear warheads is prevented by the fact that their design, manufacturing, and maintenance are among the most tightly guarded secrets in any nuclear-weapon state. For this reason, amount of information to be shared depends on building trust among the parties involved.

Finally, there is also a general understanding that NSNW transparency measures need to be developed cautiously. Only a limited system of verification measures would be implemented in the beginning, and that system would gradually expand over time as the international climate improved and further trust developed between the parties.

⁶ An excellent overview of US-Russian joint work on transparency measures for nuclear weapons can be found in: Anatoly Dyakov, "Nuclear Warheads and Weapon-Grade Materials," (a chapter in "Nuclear Reset: Arms Reduction and Nonproliferation," ed. by Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, pp. 233-256, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2012): <http://www.armscontrol.ru/pubs/en/Diakov-NucWarheads.pdf>

⁷ Joint Statement by the President of the Russian Federation and the President of the United States of America on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Means of Their Delivery (Moscow, January 14, 1994)

Confidence building and information sharing: the first steps

Two potential tracks are suggested to address NSNW in future. The first one is discussing them during negotiations on the New START follow up, another – within the frames of NATO – Russian Council dialog. The work on both tracks can be carried out in parallel.

With regard to the New START follow up negotiations, the issue of NSNW needs to be discussed within the broader framework covering missile defenses and strategic conventional weapons. Ballistic missile defenses are still the key issue. On one hand, reducing the gap in the two sides' attitudes toward missile defense would promote resolution of the two other issues. On the other hand, a lack of progress on missile defense will block the dialogue on nonstrategic nuclear weapons and conventional strategic arms as well as on further reductions of strategic nuclear arms.

The second track (NATO – Russian Council) also assumes creating conditions for the discussions on the NSNW. Besides resolving BMD problem, there has to be some progress on building a new security system in Europe.

A two phases approach to address the issue has been developed in our Center.⁸ Many very similar recommendations can be also found in more recent proposals of other nongovernmental experts.

We believe, that transparency measures could be implemented in two phases. First, arsenals of U.S. and Russian non-deployed nuclear weapons could be divided into two categories. The first category would include nuclear weapons assigned to deployed delivery systems. These weapons are considered as an active arsenal and most of them are placed at storage sites. The second category would include nuclear weapons with expired lifetimes and slated for disassembly and disposal.

In the first stage of implementing the transparency measures, Russia, the United States and NATO could voluntarily:

- share information about the total number of nonstrategic nuclear weapons eliminated since 1992;
- share information about the number of nuclear weapons associated with different types of delivery systems that were completely eliminated in accordance with the unilateral commitments in 1991 (e.g. land mines and artillery shells);
- share information annually on the total number of nuclear weapons in the first category and on the locations at which the weapons are stored. The sides should undertake commitments that weapons of this category will stay only in declared storage sites;
- declare that they have no plans to transfer weapons from the second (to-be-eliminated) to the first category.

This exchange of information could be implemented confidentially, in accordance with the national legislation of each side.

⁸ Anatoli Diakov, Eugene Miasnikov and Timur Kadyshev, "Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons. Problems of Control and Reduction," Occasional Paper of Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Dolgoprudny, 2004; <http://www.armscontrol.ru/pubs/en/nsnw0406.htm>

Another initiative that could greatly facilitate progress on establishing a verification regime over non-strategic nuclear weapons would be unilateral commitments by Russia and the United States not to conduct research, development and manufacture of new types of such weapons.

In the second stage the sides could:

- exchange information on the number of nonstrategic nuclear weapons associated with each type of delivery system;
- permit visits to the facilities where weapons of the first category are stored. The purpose of these visits would be to confirm that the number of weapons stored does not exceed the declared number;
- provide evidence of elimination of weapons of the second category;
- permit visits to weapons storage facilities of the second category upon completion of weapons elimination procedures.

The implementation of the second phase will require an agreement on the protection of sensitive information provided by the sides (for example location of storage facilities).

In parallel with the implementation of the above initiatives, Russian and U.S. experts could jointly develop technical means and procedures for nuclear weapons verification, so that in case Russia and the United States agree to negotiate monitoring of non-deployed nuclear weapons, the sides would have verification means and procedures at their disposal.