

NSNW Transparency and Confidence Building: Adapting Concrete Measures to Different Goals

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Moving ahead with work on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) related to non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) requires a sufficiently shared understanding between NATO and Russia of why progress matters and what political and security benefits it may produce.¹ Awareness of the goals associated with TCBMs might also shape the direction of any joint NATO-Russia efforts. It may allow them to set a list of available TCBM options that could be the focus of first steps.

This paper outlines three possible goals of a joint NATO-Russia effort: 1) strengthening mutual understanding about nuclear postures; 2) facilitating future arms control talks; and 3) building NATO-Russia trust in the nuclear field. It also lists concrete TCBMs that might be related to each goal. The three goals described in the paper are partly overlapping. However, each requires some specifically tailored TCBMs that would not always necessarily be relevant to the others. The point of this paper is also to emphasise that, even if NATO and Russia approach NSNW TCBMs from different strategic standpoints, there are ways in which their interests could be reconciled sufficiently for gradual progress related to these three goals.

Strengthening mutual understanding about nuclear postures

Both NATO and Russia can engage in talks on TCBMs for NSNW without offering significant political concessions. On the one hand, Russia may present work on TCBMs as a preparatory step to resolving the problem of U.S. NSNW in Europe and also as an element in facilitating future discussion about the interrelationship of NSNW and other issues, which, in Russia’s view, affect strategic stability. On the other hand, NATO members do not have to agree to define any particular end-state, such as the removal of U.S. weapons back to the U.S. Talks on TCBMs could move the issue of NSNW forward without pre-determining NATO’s and Russia’s ultimate choices for further reducing the salience of nuclear weapons in Europe.

The basic purpose of a dialogue on TCBMs for NSNW could be increasing mutual understanding on NATO-Russia nuclear postures. For example, so far NATO and Russia have not managed to create common nuclear glossaries, including a common definition of NSNW. Also, NATO members express worries about the security of the Russian NSNW arsenal, which may result from a lack of appropriate information-sharing. If building understanding were regarded as a basic goal of efforts on TCBMs, NATO and Russia could initially focus on very modest and uncontroversial options,² such as:

- creating common nuclear terminologies;

¹ The author would like to thank those who commented on early drafts of this paper, particularly Łukasz Kulesa, Paal Sigurd Hilde and Paul Schulte.

² For a more concrete and in-depth suggestions of available TCBM options, see the papers for the workshop prepared by P. Schulte and S. Pifer.

- organising seminars about nuclear doctrines;
- hosting joint consultations or seminars on the security of nuclear storage facilities;
- exchanging information about a number or updated percentage of NSNWs dismantled as a result of PNIs (if Russia would not find this option to be too sensitive).

NATO and Russia actions related to building mutual understanding in the nuclear sphere would not necessarily increase mutual trust. For this purpose more ambitious steps would be needed.

Taking into account the NATO-Russia deadlock on NSNW, even modest progress on TCBMs would be, however, an important accomplishment and might be a stimulus to further, more sophisticated forms of TCBMs. It may be perceived as an interim step until the political climate in the NATO-Russia relationship allows for more ambitious goals.

A Preparatory Step to for Further Reductions of NSNW

TCBMs for NSNW could also be used as instruments to prepare the ground for future U.S.–Russia bilateral nuclear arms reduction negotiations.

In addition to needing the political will of both sides, future bilateral formal or informal agreements encompassing NSNW might require solutions to technical obstacles, including the lack of an outline verification mechanism for any future NSNW reductions. Nor, apart from the recognition that any arms control negotiations would be pursued bilaterally between Russia and the U.S. (with parallel consultations between U.S. and NATO allies), is there U.S.-Russia agreement about a framework for a future negotiation process. It is unclear whether U.S. proposals for negotiations, encompassing strategic, non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed warheads, will be accepted by Russia and whether there are any viable alternatives.

The work of NATO-Russia TCBMs could therefore be primarily focused on options that would make any future negotiations easier, less time-consuming and more likely. Joint work could include:

- consultations aimed at identifying the most practical framework for future bilateral U.S.-Russia arms control negotiations encompassing NSNWs;
- defining exchanges of data indispensable for future U.S.-Russia negotiations. The U.S. (together with NATO allies) and Russia should consider which information is really needed for this. For example, the lack of prior information-sharing over the exact numbers and locations of NSNW would not preclude U.S.-Russia negotiations about concrete numerical NSNW ceilings, or geographic restrictions for NSNW storage bases;
- consultations and joint work on possible verification mechanisms that could be useful in future U.S.-Russia negotiations. Work could be fuelled by the experiences of some NATO member states, for example the UK-Norway Initiative on the verification of nuclear disarmament.³

An Instrument to Alleviate Concerns over NATO and Russian Nuclear Postures

The introduction of TCBMs for NSNWs could also be pursued as a way of alleviating mutual NATO-Russia concerns over their nuclear arsenals. TCBMs could enhance predictability and decrease the risk of possible misperceptions and wrong assumptions about the other side's nuclear posture and the intentions behind it.

Currently, this seems especially important for NATO members neighbouring Russia. Their anxiety is combined with uncertainty about the overall size of Russia's non-strategic nuclear forces and their role in Russia's military doctrine. Although TCBMs are currently advocated by NATO, they may also be valuable for Russia by, for example, reducing possible concerns about undeclared changes of NATO's nuclear posture and capabilities, including the B-61 LEP and DCA role for F-35.

³ For more, see the paper prepared for the workshop by E. Enger.

The scope of initial TCBM measures might have to be limited to considerations of the political and security value attached to NSNWs by NATO and Russia.

Although NATO is the side promoting TCBMs for NSNWs, its room for manoeuvre would be constrained by the desire to maintain Alliance cohesion. NATO members would most probably not agree on a unilateral withdrawal of B-61 bombs back to the U.S. They would also wish to avoid bringing into the discussion the issue of independent French nuclear forces, which Russia may seek to define as NSNW. And some European states hosting U.S. weapons may also narrow the scope of available TCBMs that could be offered to Russia.

As Russia sees NSNW rather differently from NATO, its reasons for reluctance to agree particular TCBMs would be different.⁴ It is probable that Russia would initially be sceptical of any steps that may decrease the perceived deterrent value of its NSNW or apparently increase its vulnerability. Russia might also be anxious that agreeing on too many wide-ranging TCBMs for NSNWs may weaken its bargaining position with NATO in other fields. Russia might calculate (even if those expectations are not realistic by Western assumptions) that revealing too much information on its NSNW arsenal would decrease the chances of NATO members offering future concessions over missile defence or conventional capabilities in exchange for greater Russian openness over NSNW.

Despite these limitations (mentioned above), there is a wide range of TCBM options that could be the subject of an initial NATO-Russia focus as they would not negatively impact NATO or Russian political and security interests. These options include, for example:

- exchange of information about *types* of NSNWs, which may open the way for information-sharing about the modernisation plans of non-strategic nuclear warheads and their delivery vehicles;
- exchange of information about the *alert statuses* of nuclear forces;
- *relocation* of some NSNW storage sites away from NATO-Russia borders;
- *inspections and visits* to nuclear storage sites for inactive weapons.

Steps that may build general trust related to NSNW may simultaneously be useful in preparations to U.S.-Russia negotiations controlling NSNWs. However, that would not always necessarily be the case. For example, relocating weapons away from NATO/Russia borders or allowing visits to inactive storage sites would seem to have limited value to the verification of the actual NSNW numbers (if the U.S./NATO and Russia were all to agree to pursue this).

With progress in NATO-Russia talks and increasing mutual trust, the range of TCBMs aimed at increasing trust could further expand. For example, information sharing over NSNW could be widened to include exact numbers and types of NSNW and the precise locations of their bases.

Conclusions

Different goals associated with NSNW TCBMs require overlapping, but not necessarily identical, sets of measures. NATO and Russia might therefore agree to work simultaneously to achieve all three goals presented in this paper: 1) strengthening mutual understanding of nuclear postures; 2) facilitating future arms control talks; 3) and building trust related to their nuclear postures. If, however, agreement is not achievable on movement towards all 3 goals, NATO and Russia might initially focus on the first, which requires the least difficult TCBMs. Progress in this area might still have a spillover effect leading to work on the second and then the third goal (although different sequencing also be explored).

Work on TCBMs does not require an “all or nothing” approach and need not be a one-off endeavour. The process could start with the least controversial issues, with the most sensitive areas initially put on hold. And associating particular TCBM measures with the three specific goals would be useful in

⁴ For more information about the Russian position, see the papers prepared for the workshop by V. Dvorkin, A. Kolbin and E. Miasnikov.

narrowing choices from the wide range of TCBMs available. It may also facilitate a process of developing new solutions calibrated to specific needs.

Work on any goal related to TCBMs related to NSNW could have positive implications beyond the nuclear field. It could reinvigorate the NATO-Russia dialogue. It could provide a substantive new task for the NATO-Russia Council, demonstrating that NATO and Russia are willing and able to discuss sensitive issues.

Work on NSNW TCBMs could also serve as a laboratory for establishing new modes of NATO-Russia cooperation that may be used to resolve other problems in the mutual relationship. Talks on TCBMs do not have to resemble traditional negotiations in which one side presents its proposal and the other a counterproposal. Different ideas and possible solutions could emerge from joint teamwork between NATO and Russia officials or 1.5 track discussions. The process itself may be as valuable as the final outcome.