

Russia and NSNWs Reductions: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

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The paper analyzes current Russia’s position on the issue of nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs) reductions. It concludes that Russian position on the NSNWs reductions is rather complicated for the moment and controversial to some extent. The paper also describes possible initial steps to take off the “extra” Russia’s preconditions from the agenda and to facilitate the dialogue between the U.S./NATO and Russia to reach better understanding and rapprochement of their NSNWs deployment postures.

The May 2012 statement by Dmitry Medvedev, then already acting as the appointed Russia’s prime-minister, once again raised the question of roles, which Russian military-political leadership assigns to nonstrategic nuclear weapons in ensuring national security. On 17 May 2012 Mr. Medvedev, speaking at the International Legal Forum in Saint-Petersburg on the issue of the state sovereignty, pointed out that “the concept of state sovereignty should not be undermined even if for the sake of achieving some immediate political gain [...] Military operations against foreign states bypassing the United Nations, declarations of illegitimacy of certain political regimes on behalf of foreign states rather than the people of the country involved and imposing various collective sanctions, again bypassing international institutions, are some of the examples. [...] *Such actions, which undermine state sovereignty, can easily lead to full-scale regional wars even - I am not trying to scare anyone here - with the use of nuclear weapons.* Everybody should remember this especially when we analyze the concept of state sovereignty” [emphasis added – AK]¹.

Although such statements once again reflect the weakness of Russia in the sphere of conventional forces and show exaggerated fears of Russian political leadership, one should bear in mind that these words also serve as another reminder of Russian nuclear de-escalation doctrine which assigns to NSNWs one of the major roles in ensuring Russia’s national security and prove that today’s Russia seeks to maximize its military and political security by whatever means it has available.

In the same month the NATO Summit in Chicago adopted the new Alliance’s Defense and Deterrence Posture Review. The Summit was deemed an important event to play a role in determining the future of NSNWs in Europe. However, the Chicago Summit preferred to preserve the existing status quo, having concluded that the Alliance’s nuclear policy still “meets the criteria for an effective deterrence and defense posture”². Although NATO once again did not exclude its potential readiness to reduce in future its reliance on nonstrategic nuclear weapons based in Europe, on the current stage its

¹ Medvedev: vmeshatelstvo drugih stran mozhet privesti k voyne, May 17, 2012, RIA Novosti, <http://ria.ru/world/20120517/651216281.html>

² NATO Defense and Deterrence Posture Review, Press Release (2012) 063, May 20, 2012, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-A50EE0F8-36D47714/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm?mode=pressrelease

actions will be limited to further examining how the burden sharing would work if NATO's reliance on NSNWs will be reduced.

Russia, in its turn, persists in making the NSNW issue dependable on progress in the dialogue on a wide range of problems including missile defense, militarization of the outer space, disparity in conventional forces in Europe – and continues demanding the complete withdrawal of the U.S. NSNWs from Europe as a prerequisite for starting any talks what further complicates the issue.

Because of NATO's Chicago decision to preserve the status quo and current Russia's position one might conclude that any possible talks or consultations on NSNWs are completely deadlocked at the moment.

As of today, Russia is assumed to have a larger arsenal of NSNWs than the U.S. while the United States is the only nuclear-weapon state deploying its NSNWs outside its national territory. Now the majority of experts share a common estimation of two sides' NSNWs arsenals. Russia reportedly possesses 2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons assigned to non-strategic nuclear-capable delivery vehicles, the most part of which reportedly are located in the European part of the country³. The U.S. NSNWs inventory currently consists of nearly 760 warheads of which around 200 are deployed in Europe on the territory of five NATO member states⁴.

In such context, in recent years the US/NATO has sought Russian agreement to increase transparency on Russian NSNWs in the European part of the country and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO member states; and Russia, in its part, has insisted on the complete withdrawal of the U.S. NSNWs from Europe. But this endless circle does not promise much room for negotiations.

Russia's Position on NSNWs Reductions: Three Makeweights to the Issue

While NSNWs is the only weapons category in which Russia maintains a numerical advantage over the U.S./NATO side, it is also the least transparent area of Russian defense policy. There even doesn't exist a term referring to this category of nuclear weapons in Russia's doctrinal documents on national defense and security (at least in their publicly available versions). Correspondingly, it is quite difficult to understand what lies behind the current Russia's position on the issue. At the same time, the position itself, as it appears in scarce verbal statements by Russian officials (this is the only way for the notions of "tactical" and "non-strategic" to become visible in the Russian official defense discourse) seems to be rather complicated for the moment and controversial to some extent.

The initial Russia's preconditions put forward in the early 2000s suggested as a first step for starting any negotiations that the United States should completely withdraw its NSNWs from Europe and eliminate the entire infrastructure that can serve the purpose of deploying the U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe (including former Warsaw Pact countries and the Baltic States from which Soviet NSNWs have been withdrawn in recent past)⁵. Being taken as such, that position probably could serve as a reasonable starting point for talks on the issue. Then one could even argue that since Russia

³ For estimations of Russian NSNW arsenal see: Tactical Nuclear Weapons and NATO, Edited by Tom Nichols, Douglas Stuart, Jeffrey D. McCausland, p. 191, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1103>; Hans M. Kristensen, Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons, p. 8, http://www.fas.org/docs/Non_Strategic_Nuclear_Weapons.pdf

⁴ Hans M. Kristensen, Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons, p. 14, http://www.fas.org/docs/Non_Strategic_Nuclear_Weapons.pdf

⁵ Yuri Baluevski, Tolko na osnove vzaimnogo glubokogo izucheniya strategicheskikh dokumentov mogut bit' postroeny ravnopravnie otnosheniya Rossii i NATO, Index Bezopasnosty, N4 (95), 2010, <http://www.pircenter.org/data/publications/sirus4-10/Interview-Baluevsky.pdf>; Yuri Kapralov, Head of the Department for Security and Disarmament issues of the MFA of Russia, Yadernoe oruzhie ne dolzhno raspolzatsa po planete, April 22, 2000, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2000-04-22/6_mustnot.html;

promised to launch a dialogue on NSNWs issue after the U.S. had withdrawn its nuclear assets to its national territory, the first step is to be taken by the U.S./NATO side.

But in the years of the Bush Administration the majority of the U.S. defense analysts argued that Russia's nonstrategic nuclear weapons did not pose a threat to the United States or its allies in Europe, and the two sides should not pursue arms control measures to address the issue. Some insisted that the U.S. had to re-evaluate the role of nuclear weapons in national security policy and examine the utility of low-yield nonstrategic nuclear weapons, referring to NSNWs as the best way to address the new set of international security threats⁶. This enabled Russia not to put forward so many preconditions since there was no intention on the U.S. side to address the NSNWs reductions issue at all. Moreover, at that time Russia repeatedly accused its U.S. counterpart of "seeking to bring the nuclear disarmament issues out of not only the global agenda, but out of the general public attention area"⁷. After "the-world-without-nuclear-weapons" rhetoric of the Obama Administration moved the NSNWs issue back to the top of disarmament agenda, Russia correspondingly put effort in complicating its stance.

Today the full list of Russia's preconditions to be satisfied for making any talks on the issue of NSNWs in Europe possible includes:

- *first*, the U.S. should completely withdraw its NSNWs from Europe and eliminate the entire infrastructure that can serve the purpose of deploying U.S. nuclear weapons on the continent⁸,
- *second*, Russia needs to complete the reform of its armed forces, including reequipping them with high-precision weapons,⁹
- *third*, the NSNWs issue should be placed into the wider context of a comprehensive arms control and disarmament agenda, that means that any further progress on NSNWs is made dependent on the progress in discussing the whole set of interrelated issues like "plans to place weapons in outer space, to develop non-nuclear armed strategic offensive weapons, unilateral deployment of a global BMD system, the considerable imbalances in conventional arms, especially against the background of dangerous conflicts persisting in many regions of the world"¹⁰.
- *fourth*, any future talks on the NSNWs issue in Europe should be multilateral, with the participation of the United Kingdom and France¹¹.

Such a large number of preconditions might create an impression that the Russian position is overcomplicated, at least for the present moment, while just one demand for withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear bombs from Europe would be more than enough to escape the real negotiations. However, each of these preconditions has its certain logic and justification which demonstrate the full range of Russia's concerns in different areas of European and global disarmament agenda.

⁶ Safe nuclear weapons? BBC Hardtalk with Jack Spencer at the Heritage Foundation and Dan Plesch of the Royal Institute for International Affairs, August 27, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/hardtalk/3185949.stm>

⁷ <http://www.izvestia.ru/news/379413#ixzz1wZ5Zkfv>

⁸ Lavrov Oboznachil Usloviya Peregovorov o Sokrachenii Takticheskogo Yadernogo Oruzhiya, April 19, 2012, <http://vz.ru/politics/2012/4/19/574985.html>

⁹ Putin Vstretilsya v Sarove s Expertami po Globalnim Ugrozam Nazionalnoy Bezopasnosti, Answer to the question of Mr. Evgeny Buzhinsky, February 24, 2012, <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/18248/>

¹⁰ Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, March 1, 2011, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/2de66a92e764dbb8c3257846004dfd44?OpenDocument

¹¹ Vladimir Verkhovtsev. Oruzhie umolchaniya, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 2, 2010, http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2010-02-05/2_red.html

According to Russian officials, **the first and the major problem** that should be resolved before any talks on nonstrategic nuclear weapons in Europe could start is the difference in deployment postures of the U.S. and Russian NSNWs.

It is true that the United States is the only country to deploy its nuclear weapons outside its national territory and in the eyes of Moscow, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, there is no any reasonable justification for presence of the U.S. atomic bombs in Europe. That's why as a first step Russia and the United States should, as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated, "equalize their positions" that means that the United States should withdraw its NSNWs from Europe and eliminate the infrastructure that can serve the purpose of deploying U.S. nuclear weapons on the continent¹².

The presence of the U.S. NSNWs in Europe became most unacceptable for Russia after NATO enlargement was started in the 1990s, when the fears appeared on Russian side about the possible deployment of the U.S. nuclear weapons on the territories of new NATO member states. Those concerns primarily referred to the territories of Poland, former Czechoslovakia, former Eastern Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Baltic States where the Soviet nuclear weapons were reportedly deployed. It is generally assumed that even after the Soviet nukes were withdrawn from these countries, they still possess storage facilities and air fields, which can be used by the U.S./NATO dual-capable aircrafts¹³.

While in 1996 both NATO and the U.S. officials stated several times, that "*NATO has no intention, no plan and no need to station nuclear weapons on the territory of any new members*"¹⁴ (so called "three no's" statement), both the 2000 and the 2010 Russian Military Doctrines express concern over Alliance enlargement. The 2010 Doctrine refers to the tendency of "moving the military infrastructure of NATO members closer to the Russian borders" and talks about the "deployment (or buildup) of grouping of forces of foreign states (or groups of states) close to the state borders of the Russian Federation and the borders of its allies".¹⁵ Another example of Russia's fears appeared in 2002: then an unnamed Russian Defense Ministry official stated that Russia suspected "that some Baltic heads have already expressed their readiness to deploy any type of NATO weapon, including tactical nuclear arms, if those countries join the Alliance".¹⁶ Similar concerns are often expressed in Russia's negotiation position in the NATO-Russia joint meetings, including the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council¹⁷.

The second Russia's precondition states that before any talks on NSNWs could take place Russia needs to complete the reform of its armed forces, including reequipping them with high-precision,

¹² Lavrov Oboznachil Usloviya Peregovorov o Sokrachenii Takticheskogo Yadernogo Oruzhiya, April 19, 2012, <http://vz.ru/politics/2012/4/19/574985.html>

¹³ Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons: Problems of Control and Reduction by Anatoli Diakov, Eugene Miasnikov and Timur Kadyshchev, Publication of the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, Dolgoprudny, 2004, p. 45

¹⁴ NATO insists it has 'no plans' for nuclear expansion, Disarmament Diplomacy, Issue No. 11, December 1996, <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd11/11noplan.htm>

¹⁵ Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, February 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461

¹⁶ Christine Kucia, Baltics Deny Plans to Deploy NATO Nuclear Weapons, Arms Control Today, October 2002, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002_10/balticsoct02

¹⁷ Rossiya mozhet poiti na sokrachenie kolichestva takticheskogo yadernogo oruzhiya, November 17, 2010, http://deita.ru/society/dalnij-vostok_17.11.2010_158725_rossija-mozhet-poiti-na-sokraschenie-kolichestva-takticheskogo-jadernogo-oruzhija.html?print

long-range conventional weapons. Correspondingly, “in the meantime it has to rely on the limited use of nuclear weapons of comparable range”.¹⁸

It is noteworthy that the former Head of the International Treaty Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Defense Lieutenant-General Evgeny Buzhinsky, who is often considered to be the leading proponent of greater NSNWs transparency among the members of Russia’s defense establishment, while discussing the NSNWs issue with Russia’s prime-minister Vladimir Putin in Sarov in February 2012 stated that “while Russia lags behind its counterparts in terms of high-precision weapons and drones, there is no sense to move towards further reductions” in Russia’s nuclear arsenal. Mr. Putin then agreed with Buzhinsky’s logic.¹⁹

Nevertheless it is unclear when exactly Russia will obtain non-nuclear capability which would be strong enough to make further reductions possible. The process could take no less than a decade²⁰ and it is not for sure that Russian forces will manage to reach the appropriate level since Russia’s main competitors will not stand still waiting until Russia will modernize its conventional forces.

Moreover, a good rule of thumb states that in recent years the continued introduction of advanced conventional weapons technologies by major military powers resulted in further increasing the role of nuclear weapons in the Russian defense posture. Taking this into account, it is unclear how Russia will manage to address the major collision of its second precondition for talks on NSNWs to be started - to develop its conventional forces with the purpose of declining its reliance on nuclear weapons within the context of constantly developing conventional forces of other states, which in the past made Russia to increase its reliance on nuclear weapons.

The third precondition states that any future negotiated NSNWs agreement should be integrated into a wider context of a comprehensive arms control and disarmament agenda that includes “plans to place weapons in outer space, to develop non-nuclear armed strategic offensive weapons, unilateral deployment of a global BMD system, the considerable imbalances in conventional arms, especially against the background of dangerous conflicts persisting in many regions of the world”.²¹

But implementation of the third precondition would require taking into account almost all politico-military concerns that Russia expressed since the end of the Cold War, as well as participation of the majority of the Eurasian powers, and would create negotiation matrix too comprehensive even for the U.N. Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, which so far wasn’t the best example of how to resolve disarmament issues on multilateral level.

Finally, **the fourth Russia’s precondition** states that any future talks on the NSNWs issue in Europe should be multilateral, with the participation of the United Kingdom and France²².

France reportedly possesses around 50 short-range cruise missiles that fall into the non-strategic category²³. However, currently France does not consider any part of its nuclear weapons to be

¹⁸ Evgeny Buzhinsky, On the issue of non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons, Russia Confidential, Issue N3, vol.2, March 2012, <http://www.pircenter.org/index.php?id=3991>

¹⁹ Putin Vstretilsya v Sarove s Expertami po Globalnim Ugrozam Nazionalnoy Bezopasnosti, Answer to the question of Mr. Evgeny Buzhinsky, February 24, 2012, <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/18248/>

²⁰ Sosnovsky, O yadernom sderzhivani v sovremennih usloviyah, Observer, N11(178), 2004, http://www.rau.su/observer/N11_2004/11_07.HTM

²¹ Statement by H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva, March 1, 2011, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/2de66a92e764dbb8c3257846004dfd44?OpenDocument

²² Vladimir Verkhovtsev. Oruzhie umolchaniya, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, June 2, 2010, http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2010-02-05/2_red.html

nonstrategic or tactical. The same is true for Britain, which for some time described the role of its strategic Trident missiles as “sub-strategic”, but recently stopped referring to such a mission.²⁴ Taking this into account, it will be quite difficult, or almost impossible to persuade these two countries to consider any part of their nuclear arsenals as a part of Russia-U.S. possible deal on NSNWs.

To summarize, among the four Russia’s preconditions listed above only the first one seems to be potentially accomplishable in any observable future. The rest seems to be a kind of makeweight serving the purpose of demonstrating the full range of Russia's concerns in politico-military sphere of the European and global security, preventing further negotiated reductions in its nuclear arsenal and buying time for finding a way out from difficult strategic situation in which Russia finds itself in present days.

How to Separate the Chaff?

Taking into account recent NATO’s Chicago decision to preserve the existing status quo concerning its nuclear assets in Europe and current Russia's stance on the NSNW issue it seems to be unlikely for any negotiations on further reductions in the U.S. and Russia’s NSNWs arsenals to take place at least until 2018 (the year when the new START Treaty is expected to be fully implemented). It is also hard to expect that the U.S. part will withdraw its NSNWs from Europe and Russia in its turn will unilaterally provide its Western partners with concrete data on its NSNWs arsenal in current decade.

At the same time, it seems that the last three Russia’s preconditions mentioned above are rooted in political rather than military considerations and could be resolved by means of political dialogue and confidence-building measures. Such measures, as the initial stage towards future NSNW reductions, could include implementation of the following steps:

- *First*, the U.S./NATO part could once again confirm: the effect of the “three no’s” 1996 statement, its principal readiness to withdraw the U.S. NSNW from Europe in the near future;
- *Second*, both sides (U.S./NATO and Russia) could officially confirm the absence of any military role assigned to their NSNW arsenals deployed in Europe;
- *Third*, the United States and Russia could share with each other data on their NSNW arsenals’ including NSNWs deployment status, places of deployments and numbers;
- *Fourth*, instead of pursuing strictly official negotiations on NSNWs reductions, currently it could be more productive to establish a joint NATO-Russia informal forum within the frameworks of the Russia-NATO Council for the purpose of elaborating a mandate for future talks on NSNW reductions. It could be also useful to examine the process of elaborating the CFE Treaty mandate that took place in the late 1980s, since the CFE treaty was negotiated against similar background of mistrust between the Warsaw Pact member states and NATO and since one of the main CFE Treaty's achievements was the formalization of transparency problem. Of course, provisions of the CFE Treaty mandate were the most common in their nature, *but they laid out the principles of future work.*

Within the frameworks of such informal forum, the expert communities and governments working together could address standard preliminary questions such as the composition of negotiating parties, their goals and methods as well as following issues:

- enhancing confidence regarding the declarations,

²³ Hans M. Kristensen, Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons, May 2012, p. 9, http://www.fas.org/docs/Non_Strategic_Nuclear_Weapons.pdf

²⁴ Hans M. Kristensen, Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons

- finding the ways to make monitoring and verification procedures more feasible than it has been in the past,
- discussing the new accounting rules and verification procedures,
- better understanding the U.S./NATO and Russia's NSNW postures,
- agreeing on concrete transparency measures regarding locations and operational status, exchanges of visits by military officials, clarification of the number of weapons that have already been eliminated by the U.S. and Russia as a result of the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992.

At the same time, it is important to note that even the implementation of such a relatively moderate approach to the issue of NSNWs is hardly possible without "repairing" the atmosphere of (dis)trust between the two parties and without sincere readiness of the U.S./NATO side to take into account and discuss those Russia's concerns that cause current Russia's tough stance on the issue.

Nevertheless, with the described initial "road map" in mind, the U.S./NATO and Russia could begin work together to take off the "extra" Russia's preconditions from the agenda and to facilitate the dialogue between both sides to reach better understanding and rapprochement of their NSNWs deployment postures.