

## **Foreign Policy**

### **A bear in the woods**

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What are nuclear weapons good for? In the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the answer was simple: deterrence. We put Moscow at risk of destruction to prevent our own annihilation. A 1984 television advertisement for Ronald Reagan's re-election campaign warned Americans to be wary, saying the Soviet threat was out there somewhere, "a bear in the woods." But today, the Soviet Union is gone--and there's an urgent need to re-examine the concept of deterrence.

The bear? Well, Dmitry Medvedev was wearing blue jeans during his visit to Palo Alto last week. The Russian president read his speech aloud at Stanford University from an iPad and signed up for Twitter. He was attempting to drum up support for building a Russian equivalent of Silicon Valley in a town outside of Moscow. If he manages to succeed at this feat, will the town be put on the target list for U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles? Let's hope not.

In fact, both countries still have thousands of ballistic missiles on launch-ready alert based on a concept of deterrence that is out of date. Last week, a group of Russian and American specialists sat down to talk about the future of nuclear arms control, and many of them touched on the need to rethink deterrence. The session was sponsored by the PIR Center, a think-tank on security and nonproliferation issues in Moscow, and the Ploughshares Fund, a foundation supporting efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons.

In a few months, the new strategic nuclear arms treaty between the United States and Russia will probably be ratified. Then what? The agenda for the next arms control talks is long and troublesome: missile defense, tactical nuclear weapons, nukes in reserve, conventional weapons, and more. But the biggest question remains: who is the bear in the woods today, and do nuclear weapons deter them in any way?

Strobe Talbott, president of the Brookings Institution, a former Deputy Secretary of State, journalist and author who chronicled the Cold War arms race, urged the group to answer profound questions: "What exactly is deterrence? What is strategic stability?" And Vyacheslav Trubnikov, who headed Russia's foreign intelligence service in the late 1990s and later was first deputy foreign minister and ambassador to India, called for a major effort to discard the old vocabulary and find "terms with new meaning."

For example, take the tactical or short-range nuclear weapons left over from the Cold War. They had a clear purpose when positioned on the front lines in Europe in those days, but now have very little military utility. There are several hundred in the West, including in Europe, and Russia has many more within its borders. What do they deter? Likewise, the United States maintains a large arsenal of nuclear warheads in reserve, a hedge against future threats. But what are those threats?

In the words of the recently-published U.S. nuclear posture review, both countries "still retain many more nuclear weapons than they need for deterrence." Instead of incremental arms control talks, it would be wise to first rethink deterrence. How does it work in an age of terrorism and proliferation of nuclear materials and missiles? With a fresh sense of the genuine risks we face, both countries could certainly find a way toward far fewer nuclear weapons than they possess today.

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