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THE FUTURE OF NON-STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN EUROPE: OPTIONS AVAILABLE

What is the precise definition of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW)? Should NSNW talks be held in bilateral or multilateral format? What would be more effective? And will the initiatives on NSNW reductions in Europe yield any tangible results? These and other questions have been discussed by: Lt-Gen (Rtd), PIR Center Senior Vice-President, Evgeny Buzhinsky; Senior Research Fellow of the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies (Moscow), Anatoly Dyakov; Acting Head of the Main Department for International Military Cooperation at the Russian Ministry of Defense, Evgeny Ilyin; PIR Center's Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation Program Coordinator, Alexander Kolbin; Deputy Director for Science and Research at the Institute of Strategic Stability (Moscow), Viktor Koltunov; First Secretary of the Department for Security and Disarmament at the Russian Foreign Ministry, Mikhail Kustovsky; PIR Center President, Editor-in-Chief of the Security Index journal, Vladimir Orlov; Advisor to the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Alexander Radchuk; Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environmental Studies (Moscow), Vladimir Rybachenkov.¹

EVGENY BUZHINSKY (PIR CENTER): The American and European proponents of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW) reductions—especially reductions affecting the Russian NSNW arsenal—stepped up their rhetoric in 2010. The new Strategic Concept adopted by NATO at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 and the U.S. Senate's resolution on the ratification of the New START treaty (December 2010) include paragraphs which allege “a disparity between the U.S. and Russian NSNW stockpiles.” It is not clear, however, why it is alleged that the Russian stockpiles are much larger; neither Russia nor the United States has ever published official figures about the numbers of non-strategic nuclear weapons in their arsenals.

NSNW: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Western concerns about the Russian NSNW stockpiles boil down to two main arguments. First, in the event of a serious military conflict, non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed with conventional forces may be used at an earlier stage during the conflict, thereby increasing the risk of further nuclear escalation. Second, non-strategic nuclear weapons—especially older designs—are not equipped with reliable measures against unauthorized use; they are also compact, making them an attractive target for terrorists.

Neither of these two concerns has merit. On the first point, NSNW can be used against an aggressor only as a measure of last resort, in the event of a serious threat to Russia's territorial integrity and sovereignty; such use requires direct authorization from the Russian president. The second point is equally groundless because at present, all NSNW are being stored at central depots; they are equipped with reliable measures against accidental or unauthorized use. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that there has not been a single proven case of Russian nuclear ammunition being lost or stolen.



The definition of NSNW covers all nuclear weapons, with the exception of:

- ❑ strategic nuclear warheads for ICBMs and SLBMs, as well as nuclear bombs and cruise missiles deployed on strategic bombers, as defined by the New START treaty;
- ❑ nuclear ammunition which has been removed from central storage depots prior to being dismantled.

Although Russia has never released official figures about the size of its NSNW stockpiles, it is believed that Moscow has about 3,700–5,400 tactical nuclear weapons, of which 2,000 are ready for combat use. These include various types of cruise missiles, free-falling bombs, and torpedoes. The Russian NSNW arsenal has been reduced by at least 75 percent since 1991, from 15,000–27,000 weapons. In the 1990s all the remaining tactical nuclear munitions were moved to central storage depots.

NSNW play a uniquely important role in Russian military strategies. In the current situation, these weapons are almost the only guaranteed instrument for ensuring Russia's independence and territorial integrity in the event of a serious regional conflict.

The Russian nuclear forces have a twofold role, which consists of traditional nuclear deterrence and limited use to repel a massive conventional attack. Both of these tasks are reflected in the Russian Military Doctrine.

The main reason why Russia has long-range NSNW is because the United States and NATO have a large superiority in high-precision long-range conventional weapons. The Russian leadership is taking steps to correct the situation by acquiring a similar high-precision, long-range conventional capability. But until those steps have yielded results, Russia is forced to rely on limited use of nuclear weapons with a similar range.

The Russian Navy is especially reliant on NSNW because in accordance with the Russian Naval Doctrine until 2020, the Russian Navy is tasked with “protecting Russian territory from the sea, guarding and defending the Russian maritime borders and the airspace over those borders.” The number of ships and submarines in service with the Russian Navy has fallen substantially since the early 1990s. Also, we have to take into account the experience of recent military conflicts, during which the main strikes against targets on the adversary's territory were delivered by cruise missiles launched from ships and submarines, as well as by high-precision bombs dropped from naval aviation aircraft. That is why it is entirely justified for the Russian Navy to rely on NSNW.

Russia and the United States have very different reasons for needing their NSNW arsenals. For the United States and NATO, the value of those arsenals is primarily political; they help to strengthen the transatlantic security ties, and underpin NATO's nuclear capability. For Russia, however, the value of NSNW is primarily military. They help to neutralize the U.S. and NATO countries' superiority in conventional weapons; augment the fighting ability of Russia's conventional forces; and serve as an instrument for preventing an escalation of armed conflicts. What is more, Russia regards its NSNW as a deterrent against third countries which have nuclear weapons and delivery systems capable of reaching Russian territory. The latest reductions in Russia's strategic nuclear capability under bilateral agreements with the United States have also served to increase the role of the Russian NSNW arsenal, which is becoming an important instrument of deterrence against the Eurasian countries which possess nuclear weapons.

ANATOLY DYAKOV (CENTER FOR ARMS CONTROL, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT STUDIES): I would like to comment on Gen. Buzhinsky's remark about the definition of NSNW. Let us imagine, in purely hypothetical terms, that someone has used a nuclear weapon. I think it will not make much of a difference whether the weapon in question was tactical or strategic—the event itself will be on a strategic scale. We should all be clear about it. That is why the distinction between strategic and tactical nuclear weapons is largely artificial.

We are essentially discussing the situation between the United States and Russia. In this context, I would offer the following definition of NSNW. My colleagues and I at the Center for Arms Control, Energy and Environment Studies define non-strategic nuclear weapons as U.S. and Russian nuclear munitions designed for delivery systems which are not covered by bilateral arms control and reductions agreements. Of course, such a definition cannot be used for third countries' nuclear weapons.

MIKHAIL KUSTOVSKY (RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY): The Russian Foreign Ministry has noted increased interest in NSNW-related issues on the part of European countries. Various initiatives and proposals have been voiced, with a whole set of demands addressed primarily to Russia. Calls have been made for reducing the existing stockpiles of NSNW, ensuring transparency, disclosing the location of the storage depots, etc. A similar approach is used in the documents adopted at the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon.

Russia is open for discussion of any issues related to international security. But we do not see the NSNW problem as a priority. In the area of arms control, efforts should focus on the following areas: unilateral steps to deploy a global missile defense system; plans to develop strategic delivery systems armed with conventional warheads; the threat of weapons being placed in outer space; the existing imbalance in conventional weapons; etc. Efforts to maintain strategic stability should be carefully thought out, and they should be made step by step. At this point it is important to see how the New START treaty between Russia and the United States performs, and how the norms and understandings contained in that treaty are being implemented.

As for NSNW, as part of the presidential initiatives announced in 1991–1992, Russia has reduced its NSNW arsenal by three-quarters. All non-strategic nuclear weapons have been moved to the non-deployed category and removed to central storage depots on Russian territory. Meanwhile, the United States still has its nuclear weapons capable of reaching Russian territory deployed in Europe. Since 1996 we have repeatedly urged other nuclear-weapon states to follow our example by removing NSNW to their national territory and by completely dismantling the nuclear weapons infrastructure on other countries' territory, thereby making it impossible to deploy those weapons at short notice. A constructive discussion of the NSNW problem would be facilitated by ending the practice of military exercises which involve NSNW and in which non-nuclear-weapon states take part. A decision by NATO countries to relinquish the concept of joint use of nuclear weapons would be another useful step in that direction. The new NATO Strategic Concept adopted on November 19, 2010 at the Lisbon summit essentially retains the old Cold War-era approaches.

Before we begin to discuss the NSNW issue, it would be useful to do some preparatory work. First and foremost, we need to produce a universal classification of NSNW, and to develop a shared set of definitions. Different countries use different definitions for similar weapons; they describe them as tactical, non-strategic, sub-strategic, pre-strategic, etc. That is especially important because some weapons types, such as air bombs, can be categorized as strategic as well as non-strategic weapons. In other words, it will be difficult to continue further dialogue unless we first resolve the issue of definitions.

Another thing I would like to stress is that not only the United States and Russia, but other countries as well have NSNW in their arsenals. At this point, these countries are not showing any signs of being ready to discuss the problem and to join the nuclear disarmament process. Russia believes, however, that further progress on nuclear disarmament, including NSNW reductions, will be very difficult to achieve without making that process multilateral.

VIKTOR KOLTUNOV (INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STABILITY): I believe that certain conditions must be put in place first. There must be a willingness to address the missile defense problem; to set up, at the very least, a working group on outer space at the Conference on Disarmament; and to enter into force the adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). At the very least, there must be some signals. Right now, there are no such signals. We must begin addressing the question of further nuclear disarmament steps by holding consultations. There consultations must be in a multilateral format—I disagree with the view that they should involve only Russia and the United States.

I believe that these consultations should aim to produce a mandate for future talks, once the conditions for such talks have been put in place. We already have a precedent: the CFE talks began from a mandate. The mandate for NSNW talks should answer many important questions. First, it is the question of what kinds of weapons should be cut. Attempts to produce a definition for tactical weapons are pointless; coming up with a universal definition is an impossibility, and for several reasons. The same weapons type can be tactical in one set of circumstances, but strategic in another, in a different combat theater. So we should either be talking about all nuclear weapons—or, to follow the example of the INF talks, we should categorize nuclear weapons by indices, etc. Another important question that must be answered is the new levels to be achieved after the reductions.



ALEXANDER RADCHUK (RUSSIAN GENERAL STUFF): The NSNW problem is very multi-faceted. No problem related to nuclear weapons—and especially nuclear arms reductions—has ever been resolved separately from the general political and geopolitical context. Let us recall, for example, that non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed in Cuba became a strategic nuclear factor—after which we began to make progress towards Helsinki, the SALT treaty, and the START treaties. As soon as we had agreed some specific figures, we started making specific nuclear plans and calculations. After the figures, there were questions of usage and application, there were efforts to calculate the number of Pershing missiles to be deployed in Europe, or the number of the Pioneer missiles Russia must deploy in response—in other words, there was a balancing act. It became clear what specific figure is needed for specific nuclear planning.

Does Russia need to pedal the NSNW situation? Let us see. There is a huge nuclear talks lobby, which will be twiddling its thumbs for the next 10 years now that the New START treaty has been signed. What are these people to do now? These are all very respected and reputable people. So what is it about NSNW that worries them so much? If we are talking about NSNW in Europe, then we have already established that these weapons are not covered by the New START treaty. France and Britain are not covered, either. But we are talking about NSNW in the United States–Russia format. In that case, is it NSNW in Europe people are so worried about, or in Russia? I have the impression that it's the NSNW in Russia.

What, then, is the problem? To independent and unbiased experts, the answer is clear. Maybe there is some problem than we are not being told about, but if we start to analyze that problem, it will immediately become clear why. The very fact that we have NSNW is the actual problem. And if we start to discuss the problem of Russia having nuclear weapons, then let us recall that Russia is not only a European country. Half of our country is in Asia. It is the question of the Nuclear Nine. As soon as we start talking about Russian NSNW, we are immediately faced with the problem of all the other nuclear-armed countries. They will inevitably have to be part of any agreement, too.

HOW TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM?

VLADIMIR ORLOV (PIR CENTER): Let me point out that NATO is very reluctant even to discuss the notion that nuclear weapons, regardless of their specific type, should not be deployed outside national territory. In early February the EU held a large conference in Brussels, a conference of the so-called EU Non-Proliferation Consortium. The NSNW issue dominated during some of the sittings held as part of that conference—and some of the opinions voiced were diametrically opposed.

One of the leading security experts, Lord Hannay of Chiswick, a member of the British House of Lords and formerly a senior British diplomat, said that the NATO Chicago Summit (which took place in May 2012) should approve a decision to withdraw NSNW from Europe without any preconditions or provisos, because these weapons are militarily useless and politically counter-productive. To which the head of the NATO WMD Center replied that nothing of the sort should be expected of the Chicago summit. The timing for such a move was not good at all; a change (or potential change) of president in at least three nuclear-weapon states in 2012 was expected, so 2012 was not the best time to raise such an issue.

I believe that we need to hold a serious discussion of the NSNW issue with our European partners.

VLADIMIR RYBACHENKOV (CENTER FOR ARMS CONTROL, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT STUDIES): Is the removal of American NSNW from Europe a realistic possibility? The paradox is that many U.S. military specialists believe the presence of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe does not offer any benefits. For example, Gen. James Cartwright, the [former] Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently said that U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe do not serve any real purpose that is not already being served by strategic forces. Also, amid continuing U.S. defense spending cuts, and in view of the shifting defense priorities, with nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism seen as the key threats, the importance of tactical nuclear weapons is diminishing.

Nevertheless, there are still people in the U.S. establishment who believe that NSNW must be kept as a means of preserving transatlantic ties, and, more importantly, as a means of satisfying the requirements of the new NATO members. That is especially true of the small Baltic states, which believe that relinquishing U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe is a red line which must not be crossed.

Russian–U.S. relations are beginning to deteriorate. The reset is over. In such a situation, there is no point discussing a new round of talks on arms reductions. Gen. Miller, the former deputy defense secretary, and Ted Warner, who was a deputy of Rose Gottemoeller at the disarmament talks, have said very clearly that the removal of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe is out of the question. And there is no reason to believe that this issue will be resolved in Chicago.

DYAKOV: Whether we like it or not, for historical reasons—due to the fact that the United States has a concept of “extended deterrence”—some of the U.S. tactical nuclear weapons are deployed in Europe. That is why it is safe to say that there are three parties in these talks. But NATO has 28 member states, so that gives you an idea of how many participants there are, potentially. Is it worth entering into talks with so many participants?

The process of strategic arms reductions is now under way, and that is a clear necessity. Sooner or later there will come a point when the number of tactical nuclear weapons will be about the same as the number of the remaining strategic nuclear weapons. Whether we want it or not, we will have to put NSNW on the agenda of the talks.

What are the American interests in this situation? I have recently reviewed a rather old but fundamentally important paper, the 2009 report by Karesh-Leging, which essentially laid the foundations of the latest U.S. Nuclear Posture Review. The report often refers to NSNW. In particular, it argues that the United States must keep track of the Russian tactical nuclear weapons because Russia has some high-precision weapons—namely, the short-range Iskander missiles. Using Iskander missiles with nuclear warheads gives Russia new capabilities for threatening the use of nuclear weapons in order to influence regional conflicts. But the report admits that Russia has to rely on NSNW owing to the existing imbalance in conventional weapons. This is quite a serious piece of work, although not all of its proposals have made it to the Nuclear Posture Review. Hence the conclusion which was made by the Republicans during the discussion and ratification of the New START treaty, i.e. the conclusion that NSNW must be on the agenda during the next round of the talks.

The already mentioned Senate resolution on the ratification of the New START treaty says that the U.S. administration should seek the inclusion of NSNW on the agenda of the next round of talks on arms reductions, and that deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons should be discussed as a single package. For a long time we have been debating the issue of the American break-out potential. In essence, we were talking not about cuts but about reducing the level of combat readiness, whereby the warheads are removed but the delivery systems still remain. The Americans are proposing more or less the same thing, i.e. the delivery systems still remain. So if we discuss reductions, it will mean that the Russian capability is reduced. Such a reduction jeopardizes the strategic parity which currently exists, and which Russia has always aimed to preserve.

As for the Russian position, speaking at the Munich conference in 2011, then Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov said that, on the whole, we accept that the NSNW problem will have to be discussed—but on several conditions. These conditions have already been outlined during our discussion today. Let me add one more condition. I think that the conditions should include the fact that actually we need to think about building a new security architecture in Europe. Russia has already made proposals to that effect—but the Western reaction has been lukewarm.

As a result, right now there are no reasons for us to enter into talks or consultations on the NSNW issue. In 2004 we worked on a study which focused on NSNW—and back then we arrived at the same conclusion.

ORLOV: I would like to draw your attention to one notion voiced today—the notion that the issues we are discussing today, including the NSNW issue, could be addressed in the broader context of a new security architecture in Europe. Russia’s first attempt, which was announced by Dmitry Medvedev—the European Security Treaty proposal—has not been successful. Maybe we have not done everything we could have, but as of today no progress has been made. The old European security architecture does, on the whole, need replacing. And the mechanism of replacing it should not be limited to purely military issues.

ALEXANDER KOLBIN (PIR CENTER): The conditions for launching talks on NSNW reductions in Europe are not yet right. The United States believes that the latest conventional weaponry will make it less reliant on nuclear weapons. Russia, meanwhile, is responding to America’s break-neck progress in the development of new conventional weaponry by increasing its reliance on nuclear weapons.



Based on that logic, Russia will have to meet many more conditions before beginning the talks. In the meantime, the United States is not only putting forward conditions, but also energetically discussing at the level of experts several possible approaches to future reductions. When the time comes for negotiations (and I have no doubt that it will), Russia may well find that it has fewer options to choose from.

On the whole, even though our position on NSNW lacks transparency, if we analyze those few public statements that have been made by our civilian and military leadership, we can conclude that Russia's conditions are as follows.

First, any future disarmament talks which involve nuclear weapons must also take into account a whole set of other problems. They cannot be held in isolation from a much broader context which currently includes the problem of militarization of space; the problem of the deployment of a global missile defense system by the United States; the modernization of the CFE regime; the problem of strategic non-nuclear weapons and high-precision weapons; and disparity in conventional weapons. Moscow can never accept a deal whereby in return for the removal of 200 U.S. nuclear bombs from Europe, Russia will have to cut or remove from the European part of its territory the much larger Russian NSNW arsenal.

Second, it has repeatedly been said in Russia that before entering into any talks on the NSNW issue, we must see the completion of the implementation of the New START treaty. That means that the talks cannot begin before 2018. By that time Russia will probably be even less inclined to discuss NSNW than it is now, owing to several developments. These include the expected completion of the fourth phase of the deployment of the U.S. missile defense system in Europe; the replacement of the F-15 and F-16 bombers currently in service with the U.S. Air Force with the more advanced F-35 model; and the completion of the program to extend the service life of the B-61 bombs.

Third, other nuclear-weapon states besides Russia and the United States must also take part in the talks. There are two nuclear-weapon states in Europe, France and Britain. France has what amounts to non-strategic nuclear weapons, but it says that those weapons are actually strategic. Britain also says that it does not have any NSNW in its arsenals. Another demonstration of the fact that the two countries have no intention of putting any part of their nuclear arsenals up for NSNW negotiations was the 2008 European plan for nuclear disarmament. The document has been signed by all 27 EU members. It clearly states that before multilateral (rather than bilateral) nuclear disarmament can be put on the agenda, lower levels of nuclear weapons must be reached in the framework of bilateral Russian–U.S. talks, and that NSNW must also be subject to future reductions. New issues may also emerge in connection with the gradual integration of the French and British nuclear forces, which was announced in late 2010.

Finally, the most important condition is that the United States must withdraw its NSNW from Europe and dismantle all the requisite infrastructure. Of course, our concerns about the infrastructure are not groundless. The NATO 2020 report, which was written by a group of experts in 2010 as part of preparations for adopting the new NATO Strategic Concept, said that any changes in the NATO nuclear policy, including decisions on the geographical distribution of the alliance's nuclear weapons in Europe, must be authorized by NATO as a whole. In the end, that phrase did not appear in the text of the Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon. But it does run counter to the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security signed by Russia and NATO, which says that NATO has no intentions, plans, or reasons for deploying nuclear weapons on the territory of the new members of the alliance.

As for the United States, first, Washington does not link NSNW reductions to modernization of the CFE or the removal of its NSNW from Europe. Neither does it want to include the nuclear disarmament problems in the overall disarmament agenda. Also, for now—officially at least—the United States is talking only about bilateral consultations with Russia. As for the Russia–NATO talks, the Americans believe that the agenda of any such talks should not include French or British nuclear weapons. The only thing Washington is prepared to do is to hold consultations on the NSNW issue with its allies.

On the whole, we can assume that the Americans will probably remove their NSNW from Europe in a gradual fashion, while at the same time increasing transparency with regard to the numbers of those weapons, their deployment locations and deployment status—up to the point of removing those weapons completely. For now, the position adopted by the United States is less rigid than Russia's position. It says that Russia must remove its NSNW farther inland, away from the borders

with the NATO countries, before the American NSNW can be removed from Europe; nevertheless, the American NSNW are already being removed from Europe. This is already happening. It is believed that in 2000–2006 Washington removed nuclear weapons from Greece and from the Ramstein base in Germany, followed by the removal in 2008 from Britain. The military value of NSNW is not at all obvious. The American and British strategic nuclear arsenals can take care of all potential NSNW targets; NATO's non-nuclear deterrence capability in Europe is growing all the time; and NATO's borders have been pushed back eastwards.

People often ask the question of whether NSNW are a stronger bargaining chip for the United States or for Russia. Clearly, the United States is in a stronger position in that regard because it does not lose anything in terms of its own security by removing NSNW from Europe—the Americans themselves are saying this out loud. Russia, however, becomes more vulnerable in terms of security by reducing its NSNW arsenal. The latest demonstration of that fact is the article by Vladimir Putin on the subject of the Russian defense industry, and the statements he made in Sarov on February 24.

It appears that the most we can reasonably hope for at this moment is “talks about launching the talks.” A lot of work needs to be done to develop a common set of definitions. There are no simple or easy ways of resolving the problem of NSNW reductions and liquidation. We need to come up with the definitions, to develop control mechanisms, etc. No information exchange can be very successful without verification mechanisms. In any event, controls can work only if there is mutual trust.

There are several steps that could be undertaken in the immediate future. First, talks must begin between Russia and the United States—that is the most important thing, especially since at the first stage this is a problem for Russia and the United States, a problem of their NSNW on the European continent. Besides, if we try to make the talks multilateral from the very beginning, this will make it more difficult to develop control mechanisms and confidence-building measures. It will substantially prolong the talks (unless of course that is exactly what Russia actually wants). We need to make use of the experience of the INF talks, and the experience gained during the removal of Russian NSNW from the Warsaw Pact countries and the former Soviet republics. Clearly, France and Britain's participation is necessary in any consultations/talks on NSNW in Europe—but to begin with they should be observers rather than full participants. During the early stages at least, participation of third countries would only complicate the talks.

Another useful thing we could do is to formalize the existing presidential initiatives of 1991–1992 as a legally binding treaty—ideally with a verification mechanism. Such proposals have already been voiced by experts. There is no denying that because these initiatives are not legally binding, countries make their policy plans based on the worst-case scenarios. We could formalize the texts of these unilateral statements in a legally binding way. We could exchange information about the figures achieved following the implementation of the presidential initiatives. The United States and Russia could make a joint statement reaffirming their continued commitment to the unilateral statements made in 1991–1992. The NATO-Russia Council could once again become an important platform for exchange, the way it was back in the 1990s.

One more necessary step is negotiations on banning the deployment of NSNW in third countries, with a simultaneous removal of American NSNW from Europe back to the United States, with a complete and irreversible dismantlement of the entire NSNW infrastructure in Europe. But Europe cannot be turned into some kind of NSNW-free zone—not only because of the French factor, but also because various Russian NSNW delivery systems all have a different range, and some of them can reach NATO territory even if they are deployed east of the Urals. In addition, redeployment of Russian NSNW to bases east of the Urals—which is what the United States and some NATO countries are calling for—would complicate relations between Russia and China, Russia and Japan, and the United States and Japan. It could also meet with a negative reaction among the Russian public because questions of storage conditions and of the location of the depots, and questions of NSNW numbers, which are currently being kept off the agenda, will become a subject of more or less public debate in Russia.

TRANSPARENCY IN U.S.–RUSSIAN NSNW TALKS

BUZHINSKY: At this stage the only realistic step on NSNW is to agree some confidence-building measures. That will require progress in resolving the existing differences in the area of arms



control, including missile defense, non-nuclear strategic offensive weapons, and the non-placement of weapons in space.

There is a set of confidence-building measures which Russia and the West could agree in order to increase transparency with regard to NSNW: greater transparency, “separation” of ammunition and delivery systems, ensuring the security of nuclear ammunition, and commitment not to increase stockpiles.

Greater transparency. Russia and the United States have sufficiently accurate information about the location of the depots where non-strategic nuclear ammunition is being stored—but the information about their numbers is far less accurate. As a first significant step, Russia and the United States could release official figures about the size of their NSNW stockpiles and the numbers of tactical nuclear weapons currently awaiting their turn to be dismantled.

“Separation” of ammunition and delivery systems. All Russian non-strategic nuclear warheads are being stored separately from the delivery systems. By way of another confidence-building measure, the two sides could agree the text of official statements saying that nuclear munitions are being stored separately from the delivery systems, and that neither Russia nor the United States has any plans to change the situation.

Ensuring the security of nuclear ammunition. Based on their joint experience as part of the mutual threat reduction program and the NATO-Russia Council, Russia and the United States could undertake the following measures:

- assess the risks of terrorists gaining access to nuclear ammunition storage depots and stealing nuclear weapons;
- assess measures to improve the security and safety of nuclear ammunition storage depots;
- conduct joint training events aimed at preventing theft of nuclear ammunition and fissile materials.

Commitment not to increase stockpiles. As a first step towards limiting NSNW stockpiles, Russia and the United States could declare a commitment not to increase those stockpiles.

The new NATO Strategic Concept contains a proposal that Russia should move its NSNW to storage depots far away from its western borders with the NATO countries. Obviously, such a proposal would be too costly to implement. Besides, it does not make much operational sense for Russia because such a step would significantly weaken the capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces—and especially of the Russian Navy’s Northern Fleet.

The NSNW confidence-building measures I have outlined would facilitate progress on a broader range of political and security issues.

There is also another sensitive problem which will have to be resolved if the United States and Russia agree to undertake confidence-building steps. There is no doubt that Russian transparency with regard to NSNW is important to the European countries. But Russia would hardly welcome Washington’s intention to share information about the Russian NSNW stockpiles with its NATO allies. One possible solution would be to make France, Britain, and the NATO nuclear capability part of the confidence-building process.

DYAKOV: The United States and NATO realize that negotiations are hardly possible. The only realistic possibility is unilateral steps aimed at increasing transparency. At least two key steps need to be made.

First, Russia and the United States should release official figures about the numbers of NSNW that have been eliminated. I would like to ask my fellow experts: would such a step really do any damage to our security? I invite people from the MoD to convince me that such a move would undermine our security. I am ready to listen to their arguments.

Second, we could end all speculation in the West about Russia allegedly having deployed its NSNW close to its western borders. In actual fact, both we and the Americans know very well where those weapons are being kept. Which is why, as a first step, we could take inspectors to the forward bases where those weapons used to be kept, and show them that there is nothing there anymore. That could be the first step—and then we shall see what we shall see.

And the last thing I would like to say today: at some point in the future, sooner or later, both sides will begin verifiable reductions of strategic as well as tactical munitions, and they will need verification measures. That is why Russia and the United States could continue the work on developing transparency measures which was undertaken in the 1990s.

BUZHINSKY: I would like to add that the United States is also concerned with making sure that nuclear stockpiles are not ramped up. U.S. profound expert Steven Pifer's idea about a single ceiling has gained a lot of traction. The essence of the idea is that the sides should agree an overall limit of 1,500 or 2,000 nuclear weapons, and then decide for themselves how to distribute that allowance between their strategic and tactical weapons. They can choose to have 100 strategic and 1,400 non-strategic weapons, or vice versa. But this idea is made impractical by the U.S. concept of operationally deployed warheads and by the concept of a strategic balance.

Senator Sam Nunn has proposed a way of overcoming this impasse; the idea is essentially to move along four separate tracks. I was in Munich when that report was being discussed. It found no support among the Russian participants. It is good as a slogan.

EVGENY ILYIN (RUSSIAN MINISTRY OF DEFENSE): The NSNW problem is very complex, but it is an attractive subject for discussions and assessments.

In our assessment, NSNW are not a destabilizing factor at this moment. First, their readiness status is a lot lower compared with strategic nuclear weapons. All non-strategic nuclear weapons are being kept at storage depots, and the risk of their unauthorized use is essentially zero. Second, the Russian Military Doctrine clearly describes the situations in which the use of NSNW can be authorized by the president.

As for the need for consultations, talks, or voluntary transparency measures concerning nuclear weapons, I would like to say that there has been an interesting discussion as to who needs this more—ourselves or the Americans? What is the MoD's opinion about the effects of NSNW reductions or limitations on our country's defense capability? The political goal of achieving a nuclear zero has been declared, and no one denies that. But what practical contribution can be made to increasing our defense capability or reducing the likelihood of conflicts in Europe by imposing limitations on NSNW, or by greater transparency? It would be useful for us in the MoD to hear some arguments in that regard.

I have heard several specific proposals today, which could be useful as voluntary or negotiated transparency measures, and which could be introduced in the near future. I am talking primarily about separating warheads from delivery systems—but in fact that measure has already been introduced; warheads and delivery systems are already being stored separately. The second issue is improving safety and security at the storage facilities. The official position of the Russian leadership is that adequate safety and security measures are already being provided using our own resources. According to the chief of the Russian General Staff, who was speaking at a NATO-Russia Council meeting, we are providing adequate safety and security measures for nuclear weapons; we are entirely capable of providing those measures on our own, now and in the future. Another proposal is to exchange information about the numbers of weapons that have already been dismantled. As far as demonstrating that the two sides are ready for dialogue is concerned, such a step is entirely possible. But in my view, as an expert, that step would not have any practical implications. On the whole, I believe that releasing the official numbers has become something of an obsession. So let's say we have this figure—what does it matter if it changes by 100 weapons in this or another direction?

Any arms reduction process must pursue three goals: reducing the likelihood of a conflict; making the Armed Forces cheaper to maintain; and improving the sense of shared security. As far as shared security is concerned, making declarations and releasing figures may well help that process. But the first two goals, which I think are the most important, will not be served in any way by declaring the numerical indicators. From the MoD's point of view, our objective is to increase our country's defense capability, not to reduce it; at the very least, we should not do anything to harm it.

Finally, let me say a few words about confidence-building measures. In my view, these measures must be specific, and they must have a clear goal. At this moment, having listened to the experts' opinions, I can say that the discussion has been useful. We have discussed the things that can be done in the immediate future, the things we can expect. But we must set more specific goals. There must be a clear understanding of how all the proposed measures will help to augment the



Russian defense capability, among other things. I'm afraid I must disagree with the colleague who said that whether we want it or not, we will have to take these steps. I don't think that is the case. These steps will require both sides' agreement.

If we want it, it will be a bilateral process. But we must see positive outcomes for Russia.

RYBACHENKOV: I am finding it difficult to understand the position of the MoD representatives. They seem to argue that the NSNW problem simply does not exist. But we do need progress on NSNW (information exchange)—if only to keep the process going. Otherwise, how are we going to demonstrate progress in implementing Article VI of the NPT at the 2015 Review Conference?

ILYIN: I am voicing my position as an expert who is currently serving with the MoD. The MoD is responsible for our national security and defense capability. That is why I have asked the following question: "How will the measures you propose—including information exchange and increasing transparency with regard to storage locations—improve our country's defense capability?" As for the need to report at the conference and to come prepared—yes, I agree, we need to come prepared. We have the implementation of the New START treaty to report to the conference. Some people say it is not enough, others believe that it is. If we fully implement the commitments undertaken as part of the New START treaty, it will be a good demonstration of Russia's commitment to the terms of the NPT.

ORLOV: Obviously, there are different opinions in our expert community about the issue on the table, which is very sensitive from the Russian security point of view. There are official Russian approaches, which have been outlined today—and these are not just approaches preferred by some ministries and agencies; they have been approved by the top Russian political leadership.

Speaking at the meeting in Sarov on February 24, 2012, in answer to a question and a commentary by Evgeny Buzhinsky—who is present here today—Vladimir Putin has this to say about NSNW: "We are absolutely not going to relinquish any of the things that we actually need. We are going to relinquish only those things which have become a burden and are no longer of any use to us—it's as simple as that. The things which do not burden us, and which, on the contrary, provide certain security guarantees—we have no intention at all of relinquishing them." That, in fact, is the program for the next few years.

I believe that the proposals voiced by Evgeny Buzhinsky deserve to be looked at very carefully. In particular, I am talking about the idea of choosing the path of greater transparency without doing any damage to our national security—I think these proposals are well worth studying and discussing. Would it cause us any great harm to release the figures? I am not at all sure that it would. It may well be that after releasing those figures on a confidential basis we could do it publicly as well. We must do it based on our own interests, in a deliberate, step-by-step fashion. The practical question is, why not say how many weapons have already been destroyed? I think such a move would facilitate dialogue with our partners in the shared European security space. 

For more analytics on disarmament, please, visit the section "Ways towards Nuclear Disarmament" of the PIR Center website: disarmament.eng.pircenter.org

NOTE

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