

**“US-RUSSIAN DIALOGUE ON THE NPT REVIEW PROCESS:
LESSONS LEARNED (1970-2017) AND STEPS AHEAD (2018-2020)”**

**US-Russian Working Group Third Meeting
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**Introductory Remarks by Co-Chair of the Working Group
Dr. Vladimir A. Orlov**

A year ago, in Geneva, at the second meeting of our working group, I started my presentation with an optimistic point. I suggested that one of the greatest opportunities between Russia and the US with the new administration in Washington was to work cooperatively on preventing nuclear nonproliferation risks, on successful NPT review process, as well as on arms control agenda. I called it – in Russian - a *fortochka*, which is a *small window*. Window of opportunity. But I also warned that *fortochkas* usually shut down very quickly.

Did we have any progress in last twelve months when US-Russian nuclear nonproliferation cooperation was concerned? Absolutely not.

At a brilliant Moscow Nonproliferation Conference, held in late October 2017, there were hundreds of people from all over the globe including from the United States - but none from the current US administration. The same situation was at the recent Luxemburg Forum to Prevent Nuclear Catastrophe held in Paris. Is it that kind of a dialogue we were expecting? Soviet Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko famously called Soviet-US nuclear nonproliferation collaboration a “silk rope” [«шелковая нить»] which united us irrespective of differences on other strategic issues. Is this still the case? Can we apply that wisdom from the traditional Cold War times in the current situation? Can we compartmentalize nuclear nonproliferation review process, so that it becomes a positive building block, rather than another irritating element in bilateral relationships?

Having just come back from Washington, D.C., I must say that I have heard quite a number of times there that Russia and the US could work together on nuclear nonproliferation *against* those who designed and promoted the Nuclear Ban Treaty. And the Russia and the US could work together *against* North Korea and its nuclear and missile programs. I did not hear as much about where we could work jointly *in favor* of something. There was no positive mood. I could not but compare this to a different example of placing nuclear nonproliferation issues as part of the holistic solution on broader security agenda in Russian-Chinese strategic relationships. With China, we in Russia look at nonproliferation agenda holistically, as part of broader global security agenda, and this helps Russia and China to address nonproliferation

challenges cooperatively, as we share the global security context. With the US, Russia is in a state of strategic rivalry, so pick-and-choose approach to address certain nuclear nonproliferation-related concerns would not work. Please, have no illusions here.

The year 2018 is not about a big chance of *making progress*, it is about *preserving* what we have.

1. When I think whether we would be able to preserve the legacy of the past achievements, a number of issues come to my mind, but the most urgent one is the JCPOA (the *Iran deal*). Russia and the US together with the Europeans and with China have been working on the deal architecture for quite a few years. Now, it is under attack by the Trump administration. How much is it related to the NPT review cycle agenda? I think this is *critical* to the agenda although we may not necessarily hear “Iran deal” mentioned that much at Prepcoms. But there is no doubt that sustainability of the JCPOA will be watched very closely in the corridors of the Palais des Nations in Geneva when Prepcom will start here in late March. Moreover, sustainability of the JCPOA will have indirect implications in dealing with the DPRK regarding its nuclear program. Renegotiating the JCPOA? Adding another document on missiles to it as part of a new package? Is it a good solution? No, it is an invitation to destroy the JCPOA, to eliminate achievements of multilateral diplomacy of recent years. All of us, – European partners, Russia, China, but primarily the US and our Iranian partners, – have to do our best to keep the JCPOA. This task is *vital* for this year.
2. Nuclear arms control. The United States and Russia have to preserve what we have now – the INF and the New START treaties. I will not go much into details, but I do think both treaties are under significant threat.
3. When we look at the multilateral disarmament agenda, CTBT comes up. We have to help the treaty enter into force. It will be really difficult to preach others on signing and/or ratifying of the CTBT when the United States demonstrates lack of interest in this treaty and its entry into force. The question of validity of the CTBT in the absence of its entering into force may emerge again in certain key member states, for domestic political or for purely military reasons.
4. Middle Eastern Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction. In the Middle East we see consecutive actions that make it even less realistic for any effort to preserve the package agreement of 1995, which is all about the lack of leadership. I think the US decision on Jerusalem has further reduced US capability to play a leadership role on the Zone issue although the US does remain responsible as a co-convenor of the long-awaited conference on the zone. Can Russia play a role? I think it can. Russia has traditionally been playing

that role. The idea of the conference was ours, first shaped here in Geneva at a Prepcom of 2008 articulated by the head of the Russian delegation Amb. Anatoly Antonov. Almost 10 years passed. No progress achieved. A lot of disappointment has been poisoning all Zone-related discussions. But Russia will not give up.

Having said that, I have to recognize the fact that one can be inventive here, but cannot be overly inventive – fake progress instead of real progress would only alienate our Middle Eastern partners and irritate them seriously, which is already happening. I am looking at the option of UN Secretary General taking the lead since this is also the responsibility of the Secretary General. We tried to push this idea through the UN Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters a year ago with the previous Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, but it soon became clear it was viewed by the departing Secretary-General as a *hot potato* that nobody wanted to take, particularly in his final year, without any clear solution. This was more than understandable but did not provide a hope for a breakthrough. I am not aware whether the current UN SG will be enthusiastic about leading that process. If not, there is an increasing danger that the Middle East Zone situation is again left just by itself. The deterioration of the situation is about to be seen. Have we forgotten the Egyptians shutting the door and leaving the room here in Geneva at the 2013 Prepcom?

The window of opportunity regarding US-Russian dialogue is closing very quickly. I do not accept the argument that that the transition period in Washington is taking longer than usual, and the real game will start soon. Nor do I think that just separating the nuclear nonproliferation agenda issues from the broader context of security agenda could help. This will just mislead all of us, whether the Korean Peninsula or the Middle East, or even the US-Russian relations are concerned because – I will repeat it again – the US-Russian nonproliferation and arms control relations are more than ever part of a more complex strategic relationship between the two countries.

In this situation one of the few realistic things one can and should do is to keep the *institutional memory*, which is extremely important particularly when unexperienced people assume offices and discuss such sensitive and complex issues as nuclear nonproliferation. What we should do even more actively than before is to pass that institutional knowledge and memory to younger generation. No less important is to keep an active dialogue with that new generation of Russian and American young experts and students.

However, with all that knowledge and memory we are passing over, we should recognize that we are also passing all the problems to them, and it is very unfortunate that the number of these problems is only increasing.