

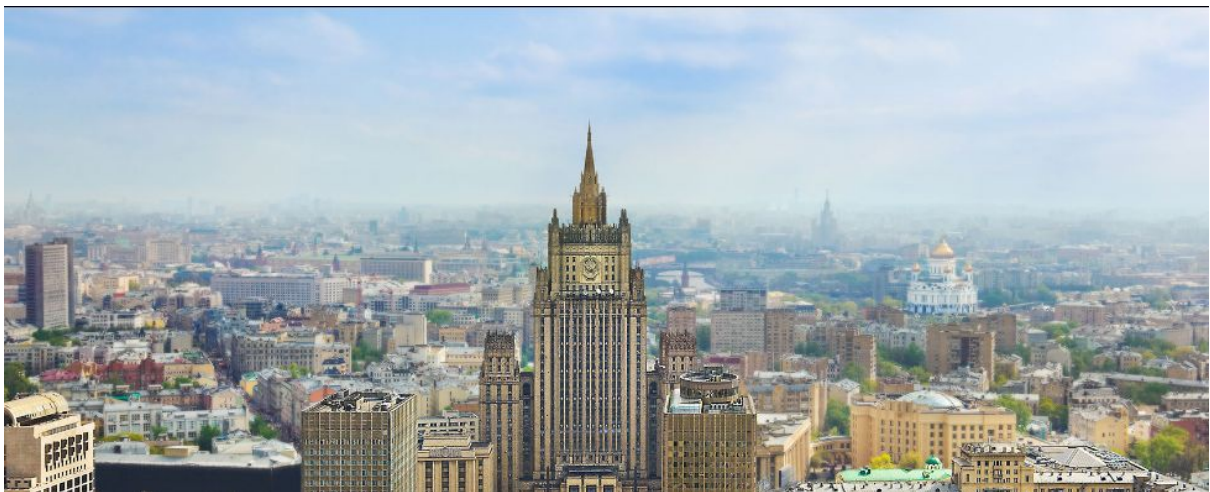
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Russia's vision for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation

Sergey Ryabkov



Russia's vision of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues remains in fact very conventional. It is pragmatic and realistic. We do not feel "constrained by traditional formats and diplomatic protocol". On the contrary, we strongly believe that in many cases using proven formats and keeping to well-established diplomatic routine is the best way to address and resolve outstanding international issues of today and tomorrow. From our point of view, this "traditionalist" – or maybe "no-nonsense" – approach might be

helpful for preventing turning serious and solution-oriented professional discussions aimed at achieving substantive results into road-shows with uncertain purpose, random participation and no clear mandate.

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Key findings



- **We do not see advancing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as a self-sufficient goal.** For us, it is first of all one of the means to assure Russia's national security – in this case, by using political and diplomatic tools. We have a strong conviction that national security is the main driving force behind this process.
- **In the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation Russia is strongly committed to traditional legally-binding instruments, that is to say international treaties and agreements.** They have clear advantage over “Rules-based order” and over unilateral measures, informal understandings or even political commitments, though sometimes such commitments may also be useful.
- **Legally-binding instruments result from negotiations during which parties directly express their concerns and formulate their wishes.** This allows to address real issues without too much bias and to reach a realistic balance between what is desired and what is achievable. Also, verification is really one of the strongest points of legally-binding arrangements that no external oversight may substitute.
- **Presence of legally-binding framework can make situation in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation more stable and more predictable.** This is something it badly needs today, when acute problems arise and when we face systematic attempts by certain States to

disrupt fundamental arms control agreements and regimes and to convert the entire international arms control architecture to fit their particular interests. Aspirations for military domination and search for tools that would allow stronger pressure on political opponents or “competitors” result in scrapping mechanisms that have been contributing to maintaining international security and stability for decades.

- **INF Treaty became an obstacle for USA, so this obstacle was removed.** It is clear for us that the real purpose of the pathetic set-up related to this Treaty was to create an opportunity to get rid of its restrictions and to clear ground for building additional military capacity intended first of all to exert pressure on China that the US believes to be its major military opponent and economic competitor.
- **Russia has come out for extension of the New START Treaty.** It is clear that remaining time is already too short for negotiating a follow-up agreement, and that otherwise in just sixteen months we will remain without any means at all to ensure mutual transparency and predictability between our two countries in the area of strategic nuclear weapons. Extension would maintain the existing regime of regular data exchanges, notifications and inspections that Russia and US carry out at their respective military facilities.
- **Missile defense issue is not only Russia’s strategic stability and arms control everlasting headaches.** NATO is also striving to create a capacity that would allow it to penetrate what is called “A2/AD capabilities” or “bubbles” that is, to engage and destroy in Russian territory targets protected by anti-aircraft and missile defense. So, this problem works both ways meaning it requires common attention.
- **Russia is strongly opposed to diverting international arms control and non-proliferation regimes from their initial legitimate purpose and turning them into political tools.** Sad results of such an abuse may be seen at the OPCW. We also witness disturbing trends that risk reducing to zero the efficiency of what is called “the UN disarmament triad”. UN disarmament machinery reflects general deterioration of international situation that is aggravated by lack of dialogue.
- **Russia will continue to support initiatives aimed at strengthening BTWC regime and making the Convention**

more efficient. We have made a number of proposals in this sense and call on all other members to support them. But the issue of the Protocol is still pending.

This text is based on a presentation by the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Ryabkov at a meeting with the students of the dual-degree Master Program in Nonproliferation Studies, carried out jointly by MGIMO University, PIR Center, and Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. The meeting took place in Moscow in December, 2019.

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About the Author

Sergey Ryabkov is Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, responsible for bilateral relations with North and South America, non-proliferation and arms control, Iran's nuclear programme and Russia's participation in the BRICS association. In 1982, graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Served at several positions both at the central office of the Russian Foreign Ministry and abroad. In 1995-1999, was the Head of the OSCE Unit of the Department of European Cooperation. In 1999 – 2001 – Senior Counsellor (political) of the Russian Embassy to the U.S. In 2002-2005, served as the Minister Counsellor (Deputy Chief of Mission) of the Russian Embassy to the U.S. In 2005-2008 – the Director of the Department of European Cooperation. Since 2008 - Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

About

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Russia's vision for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation

*Sergey A. Ryabkov,
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*

Russia's vision of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation issues remains in fact very conventional. It is pragmatic and realistic. We do not feel "constrained by traditional formats and diplomatic protocol". On the contrary, we strongly believe that in many cases using proven formats and keeping to well-established diplomatic routine is the best way to address and resolve outstanding international issues of today and tomorrow. From our point of view, this "traditionalist" – or maybe "no-nonsense" – approach might be helpful for preventing turning serious and solution-oriented professional discussions aimed at achieving substantive results into road-shows with uncertain purpose, random participation and no clear mandate.

We also do not see advancing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as a self-sufficient goal. For us, it is first of all one of the means to assure Russia's national security – in this case, by using political and diplomatic tools. The Foreign Policy Concept of 2016 specially emphasizes this particular function of Russian diplomacy and gives it an undisputable "number one". So, we have a strong conviction that national security is – and should be – the main driving force behind this process.

By the way, this concept is also reflected in the NPT review process disarmament-related formulas: "in a way that promotes international stability, peace and undiminished and increased security" and "based on the principle of increased and undiminished security for all".

As a matter of fact, it would be completely unreasonable to expect any automation or self-sustained dynamics in areas, where progress depends on and is determined by evolving security environment. And evolutions that we currently see are anything but encouraging.

Smart and honest diplomacy can achieve many things. Sometimes it can succeed even without "using neither a cannon nor a ruble", as Russian poet and diplomat Fedor Tytchev has put it in December 1870. Though this formula dates from the XIX century, it still remains relevant and is fully applicable today, when military build-ups and deployments are often considered to be an efficient method of resolving outstanding issues, and when ideas like "peace through strength" or "strong powers competition" are becoming alarmingly popular in certain parts of the World. This is disturbing, because all previous attempts to achieve peace through strength have notoriously failed, and competition is hardly an appropriate basis for building stable and cooperative relationships.

In the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation Russia is strongly committed to traditional legally-binding instruments, that is to say international treaties and agreements. From our point of view, they have clear advantage over "Rules-based order" and over unilateral measures, informal understandings or even political commitments, though sometimes such commitments may also be useful.

First of all, legally-binding instruments result from negotiations during which parties directly express their concerns and formulate their wishes. This allows to address real issues without too much bias – at least in theory, for we have recently witnessed some quite different examples – and to reach a realistic balance between what is desired and what is achievable. This also provides opportunity to develop appropriate verification machinery and to agree on scope and modalities of eventual outreach. This aspect becomes particularly important today given – for example – growing aspirations of non-nuclear weapon States to monitor and verify the process of nuclear disarmament, that is to say reductions and limitations of nuclear weapons carried out by NWSs.

Verification is really one of the strongest points of legally-binding arrangements that no external oversight may substitute. Those familiar with our nuclear arms reduction treaties with the US know that they are largely about verification. These treaties, surely, contain benchmark figures and dates

as well as things like databases and glossaries of terms and definitions, but almost all the rest of their volume is dedicated to verification and transparency. By the way, problems that we currently have with New START Treaty implementation by the United States relate exactly to this particular area.

Unilateral measures do not even come close to these standards. For instance, a country may declare it has unilaterally reduced its nuclear missiles to a number of “X”. The first question is – how do we know it is true? And how the accuracy of such data may be checked? As a matter of fact, there is nothing to support such claims except “you have my word”. Sounds great and sincere, but doubt may still exist, and there is no practical way to dissipate it.

On the contrary, treaties like New START allow to track any particular missile or any particular launcher throughout its entire life-cycle and to have an accurate count of deployed nuclear warheads or other treaty-limited assets, even if sides may disagree on their actual numbers, as they do now. They may also contain mutually agreed guidelines and rules for eliminations or eventual conversions, so that one may be sure about the result of procedures applied. This is at least how it is supposed to work.

Legally-binding international instruments are also more difficult to cancel, even though treaties typically contain an “escape clause” allowing each party to withdraw if it decides that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of the treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests. Fortunately, in the area of arms control using this clause is rather rare. Two major examples are the US withdrawals from ABM and INF treaties that we deeply regret. Such steps may bring freedom for realizing certain military programs and create an illusion of securing an advantage, but they inevitably produce very harmful consequences for international security and stability. At the US Marine Corps they say, that if something is done twice, it becomes a tradition. This gives me real concerns about the New START – the last nuclear arms control treaty involving the US that remains and that is getting nowadays strong criticism in Washington, DC.

Tradition is already there, so there are reasons to expect that this Treaty might be next on the list. I do hope our American colleagues do not intend to cross this box as well, and will allow the Treaty to live at least to its regular term in February 2021. But frankly, I am not sure.

All these concerns exist and are well-founded. Nevertheless, presence of legally-binding framework can make situation in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation more stable and more predictable. And this is something it badly needs today, when acute problems arise and when we face systematic attempts by certain States to disrupt fundamental arms control agreements and regimes and to convert the entire international arms control architecture to fit their particular interests. Aspirations for military domination and search for tools that would allow stronger pressure on political opponents or “competitors” – to use a more “trendy” expression – result in scrapping mechanisms that have been contributing to maintaining international security and stability for decades.

The most recent example was scrapping the INF Treaty. It is clear for us that the real purpose of the pathetic set-up related to this Treaty was to create an opportunity to get rid of its restrictions and to clear ground for building additional military capacity intended first of all to exert pressure on China that the US believes to be its major military opponent and economic competitor. At a certain point INF Treaty became an obstacle, so this obstacle was removed.

Similar reasons may explain persistent ambiguity concerning prospects of the New START Treaty. Russia has come out for its extension. We think that under present circumstances this would be a reasonable solution. It is clear that remaining time is already too short for negotiating a follow-up agreement, and that otherwise in just sixteen months we will remain without any means at all to ensure mutual transparency and predictability between our two countries in the area of strategic nuclear weapons. Extension would maintain the existing regime of regular data exchanges, notifications and inspections that Russia and US carry out at their respective military facilities. It

would also buy time for addressing the issue of new weapons and technologies and eventual arms control measures that might be applicable to them. This is an important subject that we are ready to discuss with our American colleagues in the framework of our bilateral strategic dialogue.

But before extension is considered, there is an urgent need to settle the issue of illegitimate withdrawal by the US from the accountability under the Treaty of a significant number of its strategic assets that the American side has either unilaterally declared as “converted” or simply renamed using language that is not in the Treaty. It is as if calling a “ballistic missile” a “self-propelled flying bomb” would exempt from the Treaty all Russian and American ICBMs and SLBMs as well as their launchers. It is an interesting idea, but quite evidently it would deprive the New START – or any other similar treaty – of any practical sense.

The New START Treaty provides for eventual conversion of certain categories of Strategic Offensive Arms, rendering them incapable of employing nuclear armaments, but it stipulates that this should be done in way so that the other Party can confirm the results of the conversion. Then they stop to count against agreed central limits. Our American colleagues have ignored this rule and today they exceed Treaty limits by more than one hundred accountable units – SLBM launchers and Heavy Bombers. If this capacity is recounted into actual nuclear warheads, it will give the US a more than comfortable advantage of 1200 units. Way too much for a Treaty that allows each side to have no more than 1550. We insist the American side should implement the Treaty the way it was negotiated, signed and ratified, but colleagues do not recognize that they have a problem and insist on their right to read this bilateral agreement in their very special way that we believe is completely wrong. We will continue working with the US on this issue.

One of Russia’s strategic stability and arms control everlasting headaches is the US missile defense. Since Washington pulled out of the 1972 ABM Treaty some twenty years ago missile defense assets and technologies are free from any political and legal constraints and are being developed in the most destabilizing way undermining international security and entailing emergence of new generation of weapons specially intended to overrun them. And it is not only about Russia. NATO is also striving to create a capacity that would allow it to penetrate what is called “A2/AD capabilities” or “bubbles” that is, to engage and destroy in Russian territory targets protected by AA and MD (antiaircraft and missile defense). So, this problem works both ways meaning it requires common attention.

New reasons for trouble appear as plans are announced to deploy missile defense interceptors in space and to carry out missile defense by preemptively hitting adversary missiles on the ground “left to launch”. People who promote such ideas should remember that this particular logic of “preemptive disarming first strikes” has generated the multiplication of “counterforce” nuclear scenarios that were fueling the arms race for decades and that have repeatedly brought the World to the brink of overall nuclear war.

The only way to alleviate the threat of preemptive strikes is to build up the number of assets, make them more survivable and launch them as soon as possible with the first hints of being under attack. I think that one of the biggest strategic concerns of our American colleagues is to avoid what they call “unwanted escalation”. Nevertheless, it seems that in this case it is exactly the ‘unwanted escalation’ that is looming. Especially given the fact that if the New START is not extended, there will be no numerical restrictions preventing eventual build-ups.

“Power competition” does not really go well with maintaining strategic stability and promoting arms control. “Competition” is inevitably based on race for superiority “in the air, on land and sea” – or in space domain. We think that such attitudes are behind the persistent opposition to Russian-Chinese proposal of draft treaty prohibiting placement of weapons in space and to our initiative of making unilateral commitments not to be the first to place weapons in space. These proposals are intended to prevent outer space becoming a new field of the arms race and to avoid it being “dominated” by anybody. Especially when we see the raise of issue of military domination.

Russia is strongly opposed to diverting international arms control and non-proliferation regimes from their initial legitimate purpose and turning them into political tools serving the interests of individual States or groups of States. Sad results of such an abuse may be seen at the OPCW that some member-states wanted to integrate into their campaign against Syrian President Assad and his government. Another goal was to blackmail Russia and to undermine our efforts aimed at political settlement of the conflict. To do it, the OPCW technical secretariat – administrative body by definition – was invested with “attribution” functions empowering it to designate perpetrators of eventual chemical attacks. This was done in a very irregular way circumventing the rules set by the CWC. There is no doubt this mechanism will work “as instructed” by its major stakeholders and produce conclusions that they expect.

Russia will continue to oppose this plot. We call on all the OPCW member-states not to undermine this Organization that until recently was one of the most successful and efficient mechanisms in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation.

For Russia, the central role in strengthening the global architecture of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation should belong to the UN and its multilateral disarmament machinery. Unfortunately, here we also witness disturbing trends that risk reducing to zero the efficiency of what is called “the UN disarmament triad”. The UNGA voting results for relevant resolutions show that consensual decisions are getting more and more difficult to achieve and that there is no common program of action in this area. Even issues that formerly seemed to be undoubtedly unifying may suddenly become objects of bitter controversy. Attempts to sideline substantive dialogue, to politicize debates and to turn the UN into a tool for building pressure on opponents became especially manifest starting with 2018 session of the UNGA First Committee.

Speaking of the UN I can not avoid mentioning scandalizing and totally illegitimate US refusals to issue visas to members of Russian delegations and Russian experts coming to the UN events being held in NY. Such US policy is an open incompliance with its commitments under the 1947 Agreement on the UN headquarters. This year it has resulted in disrupting the regular session of the UN Disarmament Commission by preventing the head of the Russian delegation from attending it. Thus American authorities have shown their real priorities as they have collapsed discussions on the issue of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities that were originally initiated by the US side.

Current situation in the UN disarmament machinery reflects general deterioration of international situation that is aggravated by lack of dialogue on strengthening the existing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regimes and on developing mutually acceptable new mechanisms in this area. In this context, the issue of a legally-binding Protocol to the BTWC is a tattle-tailing example of how things may get blocked by those who want to avoid restrictions and constraints – or, maybe, have something to hide.

Speaking of BTWC, Russia will continue to support initiatives aimed at strengthening its regime and making the Convention more efficient. We have made a number of proposals in this sense and call on all other members to support them. But the issue of the Protocol is still pending.

Under current circumstances it is very important to keep the remaining communication channels open. We are glad that after a long – maybe, too long – break strategic dialogue has resumed with the US. It is a venue that allows us to speak openly on our respective security concerns and on eventual ways to fix them. We are looking forward for the next meeting that we hope will take place before the end of this year. Bilateral high-level discussions with some other countries also take place.

For Euro-Atlantic region an important role in this area belongs to the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation, “structured dialogue” on European security challenges and threats and the Open Skies Consultative Commission. The NATO-Russia Council that was supposed to be “weather-proof” has failed a real-life test. Its NATO members did not realize that dialogue is only possible on the basis

of equality and mutual respect. So, now NRC is practically out of business, and there are strong doubts about its future.

Within the OSCE framework Russia's priorities are reducing military confrontation, including mutual restraint in military activities along our borders with NATO countries, resumption of military-to-military contacts, risk reduction, strengthening stability and de-escalation. As for "structured dialogue", it first of all provides us an opportunity to address issues related to "deconflicting".

Surely, international security and arms control agenda in Europe may be much more ambitious. I am not speaking about the "European missile crisis Rev 2.0" that may be coming our way. There are lots of things here that can be done on a cooperative basis. We have already kissed some of these "sleeping beauties", but they either did not wake up, or went to sleep again. Maybe, second chance will be worth trying, but for this it will be necessary to return to the basics and assume that all countries here are equal. They all have their security concerns and legitimate security rights. Russia is not an exception.

One should also remember that arms control is always a deal, so it would be totally unrealistic to expect us to give away our national security interests for nothing. And, most of all, it is important to realize that nothing positive will ever be achieved through policies of "detering Russia", that nowadays look more and more like "containment" that was the central element of the Cold war, and that, I hope, we have definitively left behind.

December 10, 2019