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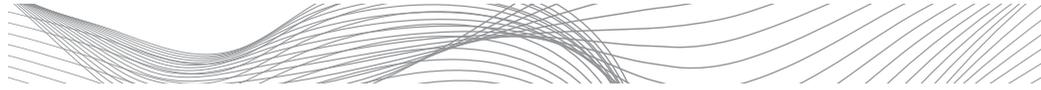
# SECURITY INDEX

PIR PRESS

## The Future of U.S.- Russian Arms Control:

Principles of Engagement and

New Approaches



Editor-in-Chief: Vladimir A. Orlov

Editors: Nikita Degtyarev, Semenov Sergey

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This report was published following a series of joint seminars between PIR Center and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, USA) under the general title “Reducing Nuclear Risks in the Era of Great Power Rivalry” (November 12 - December 9, 2020). The report presents a squeeze of the views of Russian and American experts on strategic stability issues and outlines the basic principles of building a prospective arms control architecture. In particular, they touched upon the issues of structuring the negotiation process, as well as the prospects for achieving both legally and politically binding agreements in this area.

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## AUTHORS

### **CONLEY, Heather**

Senior vice president for Europe, Eurasia, and the Arctic and director of the Europe Program at CSIS

### **ORLOV, Vladimir**

Founder and Director of the PIR Center, President of the Trialogue Club International, MGIMO University Professor

### **BUZHINSKIY, Evgeny**

Chairman of the PIR Center Executive Board; Vice President of the Russian Council for International Affairs; Head of the Center for Political and Military Studies at the International Politics Department of the Moscow Lomonosov State University

### **NEWLIN, Cyrus**

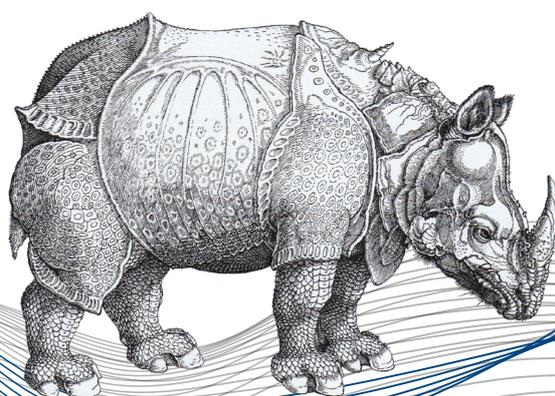
Associate Fellow, Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program

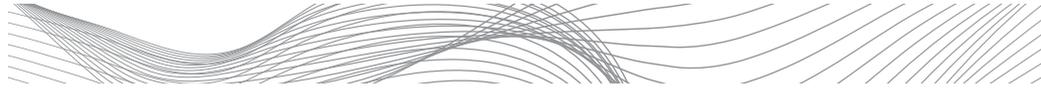
### **SEMENOV, Sergey**

Coordinator, Nonproliferation & Russia Program – Junior Research Fellow, Yaderny Kontrol editor

### **GABIDULLINA, Roksana**

Program Manager, Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program





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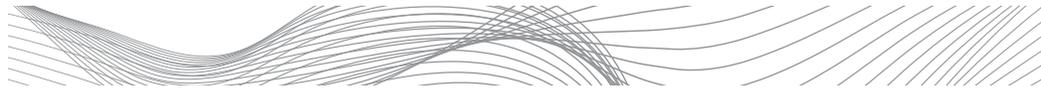
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# Highlights

- Arms control is equally needed by both Russia and the United States. The creation of a next-generation security architecture must be supported by the belief on both sides in the importance of arms control.
- It is necessary to resume informal consultations on strategic stability as soon as possible. A preliminary discussion will not remove all questions and does not mean that all problems can be solved simultaneously. However, in the course of an informal discussion, participants could sort all the issues into “baskets” and determine a new priority agenda to be discussed during formal negotiations.
- It is unlikely that Russia and the United States will be ready or, in the case of the United States, able to sign and ratify a legally binding treaty covering all these types of weapons. Nevertheless, despite the development of new technologies, Russia and the United States should strive for legally binding agreements in areas closely related to verification - especially regarding the total number of nuclear warheads and their delivery vehicles, even as the development of technologies (cyber weapons, space assets, nuclear modernization, AI) depends more on modern ethics, dictating to keep up with the times, than on formal agreements.
- Cyber threats to command, control, communications and intelligence systems, and critical infrastructure (C3I) are a hot topic for bilateral discussion. Russia and the United States must agree to abandon cyber operations against nuclear command infrastructure and missile warning systems.



# The Future of U.S.- Russian Arms Control: Principles of Engagement and New Approaches

**AS ONE OF ITS FIRST SECURITY POLICY DECISIONS**, the Biden administration agreed to extend the New START Treaty for five years with no conditions. The New START Treaty represents one of the last remaining vestiges of international arms control architecture and one of the few areas of potentially productive U.S.-Russian dialogue in an otherwise toxic bilateral relationship where trust does not exist. Yet the security environment has drastically changed since 2010, when New START was negotiated. The Treaty covers only a part of the “security equation”, whereas missile defense, new weapon systems, space-based assets and advanced technologies are not subject to formal arms control agreement. Both Moscow and Washington – though to different extents – have grounds to be concerned about the nuclear capabilities of 3rd countries that are not parties to existing arms control arrangements.

Against this backdrop, how does one begin to reframe the U.S.-Russian arms control dialogue for the future? Where does one start the negotiation or discussion? New capabilities? Rebuilding some semblance of trust reinforced by greater transparency measures? Reaffirming and developing principles in multilateral fora rather than seeking formal treaties? What can be realistically accomplished during the five-year extension period? These questions provided the backdrop to a U.S.-Russian Track II Strategic Stability Dialogue held over four, in-depth conversations in November and December of 2020 hosted by Center for the Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Moscow-based PIR Center. This bilateral and bipartisan dialogue was unique in that it featured a wide range of views on arms control on both the American and Russian side. In doing so, the organizers sought to build the groundwork for an approach arms control talks that would withstand political fluctuations in both countries.

U.S. and Russian dialogue participants disagreed between and amongst themselves on how best to reframe arms control in the twenty first century, but all agreed on the benefits of cooperative efforts to manage nuclear risks. Although successful arms control negotiations have occurred between Washington and Moscow during equally tense bilateral moments, this moment feels significantly fraught. The Track 2 Dialogue centered on developing a roadmap for arms control talks that simultaneously addresses both parties’ deep-seated concerns and an evolving strategic environment. Elements of this roadmap have been well-surveyed and significant roadblocks well-known; other elements require expeditions and new mapping of principles, new agreements or a web of interlinking agreements. But before this process can begin, it requires both Russia and the United States to reaffirm the necessity of arms control as doctrinal thresholds and discourses have been significantly lowered to the point of casual conversation. It is with this renewed urgency and opportunity in mind that participants outlined several principles of productive engagement:

**Heather A. Conley, Vladimir Orlov, Evgeny Buzhinsky, Cyrus Newlin, Sergey Semenov and Roksana Gabidullina**

## THE ROAD THAT MUST BE TRAVELED

*Begin talks early.* Both Russian and American participants were critical of the Trump administration's delay in initiating a conversation with Russia on arms control, and the extension discussion of New START only began in earnest in the spring of 2019. The delayed talks were further bogged down by other United States' extraneous requests, such as engaging with China on a trilateral basis and seeking a temporary freeze on all nuclear weapons. These delays inevitably ran into the U.S. presidential election calendar and, although it appeared that the Russian government was prepared to agree to a limited extension accompanied by a temporary nuclear freeze. However, the talks stalled over a U.S. demand that the extension be accompanied by more intrusive verification measures, which Russia was not ready to accept. In the end the decision regarding extension was left for the last two weeks before the treaty expired. Participants pointed to the need to begin new arms control talks immediately following the extension of New START as the negotiating calendar will again be subject to the political calendar.

*Equal buy-in to the negotiating process.* Some participants believed that the assumption underlying the Trump administration's approach to negotiations was that Russia needed arms control more than the United States, and that Moscow would therefore be ready to make concessions in order to achieve an extension. Valid or not, building the next-generation of arms control architecture will require a shared belief in the value of arms control. This means equal-buy in to the negotiating process, and policy creativity, including a willingness to entertain greater flexibility around long-standing negotiating postures, and recognition that the other side has legitimate concerns.

*Table, sort, prioritize.* Following the extension of New START, participants agreed that the United States and Russia should immediately begin informal, mid-level diplomatic discussions while a new U.S. administration is organizing itself. After United States' consultation with its allies, these informal discussions could place all issues on the table with each side having an opportunity to hear areas of priority and air grievances with the goal of aligning understandings of the problems with current arms control regimes and the risks posed by certain technologies. This initial discussion does not mean that all issues will be addressed nor does it mean that all issues can be addressed simultaneously; this would result "in the [negotiating] table collapsing," as one participant put it. But the informal nature of the discussion puts forward all the issues from which negotiators could sort issues into "baskets" and identify emerging, prioritized agenda items to be pursued in formal negotiations. This would help ensure greater buy-in from both sides.

Correctly sorting, organizing, prioritizing and sequencing these issues will likely determine the success of the negotiations. Should negotiators tackle issues that present the greatest risk? Build confidence by sequencing issues that may be able to be successfully addressed initially? One participant proposed a simultaneous three-track negotiation structure which would better elucidate the interaction between capabilities. Described as a "strategic equation," one track would focus on offensive capabilities, a second on defensive capabilities, and a third, on conventional capabilities. Others have proposed addressing strategic weapons and delivery systems, a second basket for non-strategic systems, and a third basket related to cyber, new technologies, and space. Another proposal would create a separate track for each technology/platform: command control risks and cyber, hypersonic, space, and so



forth. Yet another approach would have a track on weapons and delivery systems, including nuclear and long-range precision strikes, a separate track on securing targets, including critical infrastructure, Command, Control, Communications and intelligence (C3I), and space-based assets, and a third track on new domains (cyber, automation, etc.).

Once organized, the United States and Russia must prioritize issue areas. Two straight-forward questions might guide this process: Which capabilities or technologies pose the greatest threat to predictability and transparency? And, where can both sides mitigate risk? Participants wondered if another Cuban Missile Crisis was needed in order to create greater political buy-in to the process and initiate serious discussions. Could scenarios be war-gamed at the Track 2 or Track 1.5 levels to help align understandings about which capabilities cause the greatest distress and misinterpretation therefore must be immediately prioritized? Some participants believed that reaching agreement that neither side would deploy a cyberattack against the other's nuclear weapon command and control systems could be such a priority focus.

*Ready for agreement, aim for treaties, shoot for arms control processes.* Are treaties or voluntary norms and principles the best pathway to re-establish a productive arms control process? To reach a new agreement, the United States and Russia will need to address a broad range of concerns spanning space-based systems, underwater drones, nuclear cruise missiles, cyber, and other capabilities (see below). But participants were doubtful that the United States and Russia would be willing or, in the United States' case be able to ratify a legally binding treaty covering all these classes of weapons, in part because of lack of trust as well as the two sides' disagreement over which of these technologies are destabilizing. Nevertheless, the United States and Russia should pursue legally binding agreements where verification is deeply embedded particularly in relation to the total number of nuclear warheads and their means of delivery even with the evolution of technological development. New bilateral treaties would set a positive precedent and create foundational building blocks for more complicated multilateral arms control discussions.

*Be mindful of political realities. U.S.-Russia arms control must be anchored in domestic political realities and resilient to political fluctuations.* In the United States, this means that any future agreement – legally binding or otherwise – must have sufficient Congressional support and some bipartisan agreement. Political polarization in Washington, the narrow margin of Democratic control in a split Senate, and the U.S. electoral calendar mean that in the short-term a new, ratified treaty may be challenging to achieve. In this context, U.S. arms control negotiators should engage members of Congress early and throughout the negotiating process to expand informed stakeholders. Indeed, the next four years will be politically challenging for both Moscow and Washington in the lead-up to 2024 for different reasons. U.S.-China relations also will increasingly weigh on U.S.-Russia relations. Understanding how arms control negotiations will impact the strategic balance in specific regions, such as the Indo-Pacific region, could be helpful. Understanding what is feasible within each other's domestic political contexts is essential.

## EXTENDING NEW START

At the time of the dialogue in the fall of 2020, President-elect Biden had indicated his intention to extend New START before February 5 without

## THE FUTURE OF U.S.-RUSSIAN ARMS CONTROL

pre-conditions, which ultimately occurred. However, a reported internal debate within the Biden transition team over how long to extend New START mirrored the discussion that took place within our Track 2 discussions and remains illustrative of larger debates within the U.S. national security community. Some American participants favored multiple rolling extensions within a five-year period. Proponents of this view believed an unconditional, five-year extension would potentially “reward” Moscow, would potentially reduce urgency in the negotiating process and place the expiration date beyond Biden’s four-year term, potentially reducing U.S. leverage in follow-on discussions with Russia and placing greater uncertainty of the U.S. ratifying a new treaty. Conversely, Americans who urged an unconditional extension of five years believed that the United States would benefit from legally binding verification of Russian strategic nuclear forces, and that a full extension would create “breathing room” and a stable foundation for follow-on discussions covering a wider range of systems. On the whole, American participants were more divided on the issue, while Russian participants were unanimously in favor of a five-year extension. Yet nearly all participants agreed that extending New START in some form would sustain transparency and predictability into the only remaining U.S.-Russia strategic treaty which could be built upon, such as introducing unilateral and verifiable commitments to reduce deployed warheads to a number below the New START ceiling of 1,550. This would signal mutual restraint and provide a positive tone ahead of the August 2021 NPT Review Conference.

### NEXT-GENERATION ARMS CONTROL

For over a decade, U.S.-Russia arms control negotiations have been paralyzed by the question of what is and is not on the negotiating table. Russia seeks to establish the parameters for future negotiations that address a broader array of issues affecting strategic stability, such as missile defense, before consenting to negotiating any one element piecemeal. The United States is not going to negotiate with Moscow on missile defense, cyber, and conventional precision strike systems before Moscow demonstrates willingness to engage on non-strategic nuclear weapons. Both perceive their own unrestricted capabilities as hedges against the other’s. Withdrawals from and violations of previous arm control treaties combined with the overall toxic state of bilateral relations has diminished the political space for arms control talks.

Both Washington and Moscow have an interest in breaking this stasis over the next five years to achieve a new arms control agreement or agreements that succeed New START. A future agreement will need to address both a broad range of old and new capabilities that affect the strategic calculus, including missile defense, non-strategic nuclear weapons, conventional strike systems, hypersonic missiles, cyber nuclear threats, space-based assets, and novel strategic systems. Such an overarching agreement or narrowly defined agreements could exist in a legally binding form on their own or alongside separate codes of conduct, principles, norms of behavior, and other non-binding arrangements addressing issue areas (cyber, space, AI) for which there are greater challenges to verification.



### *Missile defense and non-strategic nuclear weapons*

Russian officials have long expressed concerns about U.S. missile defense against ICBMs, which are intended to counter threats from North Korea and Iran but which Russia (and China) believe counter their deterrent capabilities, thereby upsetting the strategic balance. Remarks by former U.S. President Donald Trump have underscored these concerns (“Our goal is simple: to ensure that we can detect and destroy any missile launched against the United States – anywhere, anytime, anyplace.”) as have long standing Russian views about the intent of U.S. missile defenses vis-à-vis Russia. To further illustrate this point, during the course of the Track 2 dialogue, the United States successfully intercepted a test ICBM using the Aegis SM-3 Block 2A ship-to-missile technology which, Russian participants noted, again underscored and reinforced their concerns.

Russian participants noted that their recent advances in hypersonic guided cruise missiles – which U.S. participants noted with great concern – were a result of the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty as Moscow attempts to counter these systems and remain at strategic parity with the U.S. Because of this technological development, U.S. participants wondered whether missile defense remained a concern for Moscow.

In response, Russian participants maintained that the U.S. missile defense systems remain destabilizing due to uncertainty around its efficacy against Russian strategic systems. In its current form, U.S. missile defense may not be able to upset the strategic balance, but its potential for improvement is a major concern for the Russia arms control community. Progress in bilateral arms control will likely require addressing the growing technological capabilities of both the U.S. and Russia in order to avoid a destabilizing cycle in which Russia develops new offensive systems designed to defeat U.S. missile defenses, compelling the United States to develop greater global missile defense capabilities.

The United States continues to express great concern over Russia’s development of non-strategic nuclear warheads and its implications for transatlantic security--a subject that is not within the purview of New START restraints. U.S. and Russian participants engaged in a productive discussion which attempted to better understand Russia’s military purpose and intent for possessing such a high number of non-strategic weapons. Russian participants maintained that non-strategic nuclear weapons are a means of regional deterrence. In Europe, NATO conventional superiority over Russia is of concern to Moscow. Moreover, Russia is within range of NATO non-strategic nuclear weapons, while Russia’s own non-strategic nuclear weapons are kept in centralized depots and would take time to make operational. U.S. participants argued that Russia has announced the movement of non-strategic weapons to Kaliningrad and Crimea and that the number of warheads far exceeds the need to deter NATO forces and weapon systems. A future agreement could seek to ground this debate in the logic of sufficiency. If Russia desires a higher number of non-strategic nuclear weapons for regional deterrence and to offset NATO missile defense systems in Europe, how many warheads is enough? Joint declarations on numerical or locational limits could be a first, politically binding step to arms control in the absence of treaties closely followed by the development of verification mechanisms. Other potential ways forward could include Russia moving more non-strategic weapons further from the European theater through verification, and to renew lab-to-lab scientific cooperation on methods of counting.

### *Cyber and space*

Cyber threats to C3I and critical infrastructure are ripe material for bilateral discussions and potentially a code of conduct or joint statement of principle prohibiting the use of cyber against nuclear command-and-control infrastructure and early warning systems. Participants on both sides emphasized that cyber activities cannot be disassociated from nuclear arms control discussions: to ensure strategic stability, nuclear communications structures must be immune to cyber penetration. Among U.S. participants, there was some concern that Russia would use cyber capabilities to deny its opponent's advantage during the initial period of war. However, both the United States and Russia have a mutual interest in secure command and control systems that are not vulnerable to cyberattacks. Although difficult to achieve, this could create room for some discussion of cybersecurity standards for protecting strategic systems.

Unfortunately, discussions related to the nexus of cyber, space-based assets and arms control are nascent, unlikely to produce quick results, and will occur in an environment of regular offensive and defensive cyber breaches by the United States and Russia into each other's systems. Nevertheless, the United States and Russia should make attempts to delink cyber threats to strategic infrastructure from other forms of cyberattacks and cyber espionage, and to initiate preliminary talks on the former. One participant noted that the entire field of arms control was at one point nascent and the path forward unclear, but engagement, though messy at first, helped align understandings of the threat and paved the way for more formal agreements. Participants agreed that because of challenges around verification, legally binding agreements on uses of cyber may be difficult, but cyber rules of the road and norms could help clarify intentions and reduce risks.

As with cyber, the increased use of space assets, particularly anti-satellite weapons designed to inhibit missile warning or reconnaissance and surveillance systems, must be sacrosanct within any weapons treaty. The New START Treaty provides for non-interference in national technical means. In the C4ISR domain, however, that is not enough. Outer space bears great potential for disrupting the strategic balance. To prevent such a scenario, Moscow and Washington could explore a formal agreement to ban anti-satellite tests and space-based conventional weapons and develop some form of transparency and verification mechanisms. Signaling mutual restraint may prompt other parties to make their own unilateral commitments not to target space-based infrastructure.

### *Hypersonic and high-precision weapons*

The proliferation of high-speed and high-precision weapons - nuclear or conventional and regardless of delivery system - is a threat to strategic stability and presents a target of opportunity for negotiators. Some form of agreement on these systems - whether formal or informal - is needed. The United States and Russia could begin a discussion on limitations of these weapons. The United States has expressed concern over Russia's underwater, unmanned vehicle, Poseidon, as well as Russia's Avangard hypersonic missile systems. Russian participants in turn noted that the United States has its own systems unparalleled by the Russian military, including the Boeing X-37, which Russian participants posited may be closer to actual deployment than the Russian systems. This opened a conversation on the role of information where it was noted that Russia will



at times overstate its capabilities in order to project strength, which can obfuscate actual capabilities, create uncertainty around Russia's intent, and intensify U.S. weapon development, which heightening strategic instability.

### DOCTRINES

Information and signaling were discussed as part of deepening Russian and U.S. participants' understanding of shifts in the other's nuclear doctrine. Strategic ambiguity is an inherent feature in both U.S. and Russian nuclear doctrines. Both are also based on nuclear deterrence and ensuring second-strike capability. However, in recent years there have been growing questions around the circumstances upon which the United States and Russia would contemplate employing nuclear weapons. On the U.S. side, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review uses strategic ambiguity in relation to what type of attack would require a nuclear versus a conventional response. Its inclusion of "significant non-nuclear strategic attacks" as an instance in which the United States would consider a nuclear response prompted Russian participants to wonder whether the United States had lowered its threshold for nuclear use. Concerns that the U.S. nuclear threshold is lower than it used to be also stem from the deployment of low-yield warheads on Tridents D5LE SLBMs. On the other side, ambiguity remains about whether "escalate-to-deescalate" is a part of Russia's nuclear doctrine. While ambiguity serves an important purpose, excessive ambiguity can be destabilizing and could produce dangerous mis-signaling, particularly when U.S.-Russia bilateral relations are in a state of crisis.

The Biden administration's renewed emphasis on arms control and on reestablishing policy that is consistent and credible provides a signaling opportunity. The Biden administration could decide to reaffirm the 1986 Reagan-Gorbachev statement that, "A nuclear war cannot be won therefore it must not be fought", as Russia has proposed. The United States could reaffirm a no-first use policy (although this would not address the use of new conventional platforms and technologies). The United States could issue clarifying language relating to the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review by reaffirming that the primary role of nuclear weapons for the United States is deterrence. A United States sole purpose declaration would also be helpful, although it may be politically challenging to initiate any of these statements. Should the United States take any of these steps, Russia should respond, ideally jointly, but in kind. At a minimum, several participants present in the Track 2 posited that Russia could do more to clarify its policy from the highest levels of government in relation to "escalate to de-escalate."

But affirmative and clarity related to doctrinal language only gets you so far. It is the perception of intent and the ability to verify statements and treaties that ultimately matter for arms control and this perception is conditioned by the domestic, bilateral and geopolitical environment. Russia's threat perception is shaped by United States' conventional capabilities, NATO's frontiers, and Washington's perceived Russophobia. Washington's threat perception of Russia is shaped by Russia's military modernization and its political willingness to deploy military capabilities in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and elsewhere alongside cyberattacks and domestic influence operations of foreign origin.

## MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT

The United States and Russia no longer view arms control exclusively through the lens of U.S.-Russian strategic stability. Washington increasingly acknowledges that China is now a larger threat and military competitor as it seeks to limit Beijing's quickly growing nuclear and conventional forces. From Washington's perspective, arms control agreements that do not include China are incomplete, even if they provide for a measure of security and predictability in U.S.-Russia strategic relations. Participants widely felt that the Trump administration's efforts to coerce Russia into pressuring China to join trilateral negotiations were clumsy at best and damaging to these arms control efforts at worst. Some participants observed that the United States and Russia have deep expertise in and a strategic culture related to arms control and non-proliferation issues – despite a significant slow-down over the past decade. But this is not the case with China where there is no bilateral arms control culture. It must be created through nascent bilateral and multilateral arms control steps involving China, but with the realization that an arms control culture may not develop at all if Beijing remains unwilling to engage.

As Russia and the United States embark on their bilateral arms control negotiations, the United States, after extensive consultation with its allies and partners, should seek to establish confidence building measures in order to reduce mis-signaling and miscalculation regionally. These smaller steps could open the way for a bilateral and/or trilateral dialogue with Moscow that could explore wider discussions on verifying and limiting intermediate-range nuclear missiles in the Indo-Pacific.

Russian participants noted that it is unlikely that Beijing would engage in arms control negotiations unless it could negotiate from a position of strength. Because the United States and Russia account for 92 percent of the world's nuclear stockpile, it will be difficult to convince China, or other states, to reduce or limit their arsenals unless the United States and Russia both agree to asymmetric reductions (which they are unlikely to do). There was discussion about the number of missiles China possesses, with some estimates ranging from 200-300 strategic and intermediate-range nuclear weapons, others suggested these figures were much higher, which raises important questions about a viable verification regime. The United States, having only recently withdrawn from the INF Treaty, has no mid-range missiles deployed in Asia but has considered deploying them. Discussing limits on intermediate-range missiles could be a starting point or one of the elements of initial trilateral discussions.

Multilateral arms control could also occur in the P5 format, though participants were generally quite skeptical about the productiveness of the format and whether a binding agreement could be met. For one, multilateral deterrence is by nature impossible, as each state has different threat perceptions and different countries to deter; one cannot involve China without India, and India without Pakistan, although Indian and Pakistani nuclear stockpiles are not officially declared. Nevertheless, participants believed that a P5 statement reaffirming the Reagan-Gorbachev principle as well as the formation of nuclear risk reduction centers in Asia would be an important signal of a multilateral commitment to reducing nuclear risk.

In sum, there is some room for optimism that Russian and American negotiators can constructively use the five-year extension to the New START Treaty to begin building a new arms control “scaffolding” that will be able to address new technologies and prioritize those issues



which present the most immediate challenge to second-strike capabilities. With a sturdier U.S.-Russian strategic stability negotiation framework constructed, greater trilateral negotiating opportunities with China can be pursued. Progress in these areas will pave the way for greater success in other important multilateral non-proliferation fora, such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. ■

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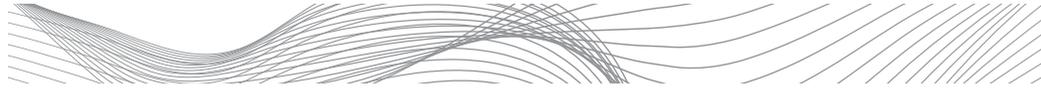
PIR Center wishes to express its great thanks to its partner, the Washington-based CSIS, for the constructive role it played in developing and implementing this dialogue. Dialogues however are only as good as the participants who generously give their time and insights and this dialogue received an abundance of both.

## SECURITY INDEX

Security Index Occasional Paper Series - reports, analytical articles, comments and interviews that reflect the positions of Russian and foreign experts on the current challenges to global security and Russia's policy in this area. The aim of the series is to provide a clear analysis of international security problems and to offer specific and realistic solutions for them. The series replaced the Security Index magazine published by PIR Center in 1994-2016. The authors and editors of the series welcome comments, questions and suggestions, which readers can email [inform@pircenter.org](mailto:inform@pircenter.org)

## PIR CENTER

Founded in 1994, PIR Center is Russia's leading nongovernmental organization specializing in global security research. Ever since its foundation, PIR Center has focused on such areas as nuclear weapons nonproliferation, international nuclear energy cooperation, and nuclear security cooperation. The organization has been involved in the NPR Review Process since 1995. As part of the preparations for the 2021 NPT Review Conference, PIR Center is working to achieve three main objectives: to support constructive Russian-US dialogue on strategic stability; to develop recommendations on Russian-US cooperation in the NPT Review Process framework; and to increase the number of Russian specialists and NGOs participating in the NPT Review Process



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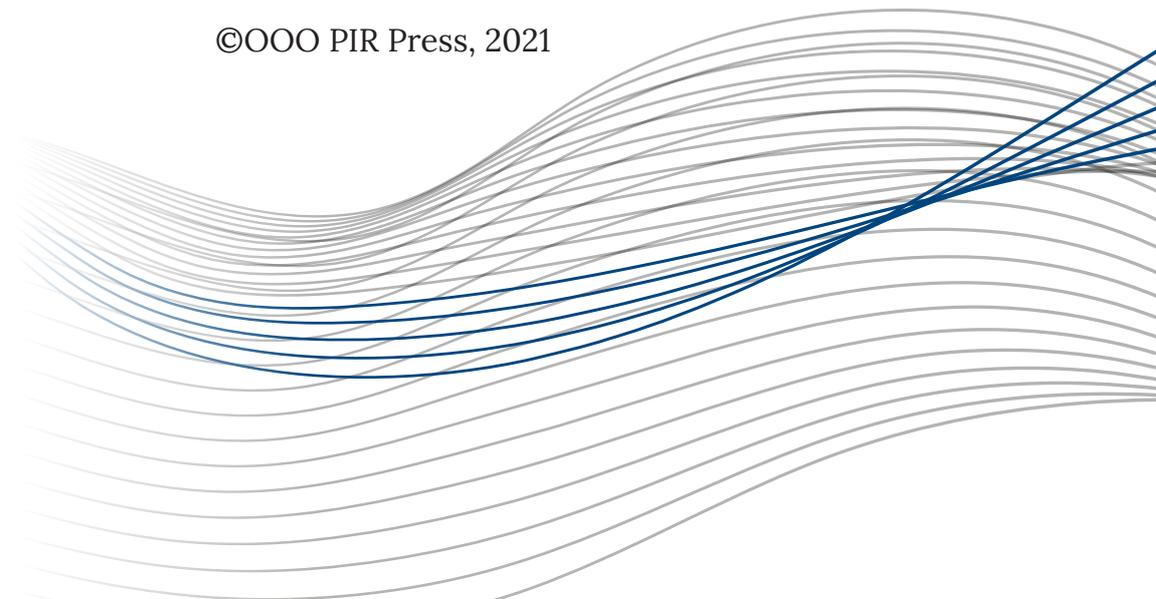
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