

**EVEN FACED WITH CHALLENGES, ARMS CONTROL CAN ONCE AGAIN  
IMPROVE U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP**



To say “the future is not bright for arms control” is an understatement. New START may be the last formal nuclear arms agreement between the United States and Russia. It is possible that, by 2021, for the first time in five decades, there will be no negotiated agreements in place to regulate the U.S.-Russian nuclear arms relationship. And without any nuclear arms agreements in place, we could have what we never thought we would see again – a nuclear arms race in the absence of transparency measures that would provide a measure of predictability.

In the near term, given the sorry state of bilateral relations, our objectives should be modest. Essentially, we should aim to preserve existing agreements and other stabilizing arrangements. But in current circumstances, even this modest objective will be challenging.

***INF Treaty***

December 8, 2017 was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the INF Treaty. It may be the last one. Washington is convinced that Russia is violating the Treaty by testing and deploying an intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile, apparently an extended-range version of the *Iskander-K*, designated the *SSC-8*. Russia denies the charge and accuses the United States of violating the Treaty, especially by pursuing an *Aegis Ashore* missile defense system that it believes is capable of launching not just *SM-3* interceptor missiles but also intermediate-range cruise missiles.

We are now headed toward the demise of the INF Treaty. The U.S. Congress has authorized \$58 million for the Pentagon to establish a program to develop an intermediate-range ground-launched cruise missile prohibited by the INF Treaty. The Treaty may not be salvageable, but the two governments should try. Only currently unexpected acts of political will by both sides can save it.

U.S. experts should be invited to visit *SSC-8* deployment sites to inspect the missile and consider whether its fuel tank would permit a range exceeding 500 kilometers. The two sides could consider any modifications that would provide confidence that the range threshold could not be exceeded. Russian experts could be invited to visit the Romanian and eventually Polish *Aegis Ashore* sites to inspect the launcher and consider whether it is capable of launching intermediate-range cruise missiles. The two sides could consider any modifications that could provide confidence that the launcher could not house or launch an intermediate-range cruise missile.

***New START***

The prospects for New START are better. Both countries met the Treaty’s limits, which took full effect in February 2018. New START expires in 2021 but can be extended, by mutual agreement, for five years until 2026. Reportedly President Putin and President Trump addressed the extension issue at their Helsinki summit, with Putin suggesting that Russia had concerns about U.S. compliance with the Treaty. The matter will apparently be discussed in the context of a bilateral working group set up at the summit.

A potentially serious complication is that Congress intended to pass legislation that would deny funding for an extension of New START if Russia is not in compliance with the INF Treaty. In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, the funding for the extension of the

Treaty is conditioned on the U.S. government receiving a written consent of the Russian authorities to put the new Russian weapon systems under the New START limitations.

The two sides should agree to an early extension. Even if prospects currently look bad for further formal agreements, an extension would provide a measure of stability and predictability, at least in the near term, and give both sides an opportunity to consider next steps.

### ***Possible stabilization measures***

Although the likelihood of further nuclear reductions now looks remote, the two sides should consider how best to stabilize the current tense situation and reduce the risks of miscalculation and inadvertent conflict. They could review and update such measures as the 1972 Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents on and over the High Seas, the 1989 Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities, the 2011 Cooperative Airspace Initiative, and the Vienna Document.

In the context of resumed strategic stability talks, they could address such questions as:

- ***military doctrine***, including the uncertainties surrounding Russian doctrine and the doctrinal aspects of the Trump Administration's Nuclear Posture Review,
- ***the nuclear modernization plans*** of both sides,
- ***the strategic implications of regional and homeland missile defenses*** and the value of a missile defense transparency arrangement,
- ***the implications of possible future conventional prompt global strike systems***, including hypersonic glide vehicles,
- possible ***confidence-building measures in the cyber and space domains***, and
- prospects for ***involving third-party nuclear forces in arms control or stabilizing measures***.

Current conditions for further bilateral arms control are hardly advantageous. But conditions can change, sometimes abruptly. I was a member of the U.S. START delegation in 1983 when the United States started deploying *Pershing IIs* and *GLCMs* in Europe and the Soviet delegation walked out of the talks. At the time, we had little hope for a resumption of productive negotiations. But talks resumed in 1985, the INF Treaty was concluded in 1987, and START I came a few years later.

It will be difficult to overcome some of today's serious challenges to the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship, such as Ukraine, the resulting U.S. sanctions against Russia, and Russia's efforts to interfere with the U.S. election process. But arms control progress was made during similarly challenging conditions in the past, and arms control played a leading role in helping build a better overall bilateral relationship. Perhaps arms control can once again play such a role.

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This memo is prepared as part of the activities of the [Working Group](#) on Strategic Stability and De-escalation in U.S.-Russian Relations.