

Nuclear Arms Control and U.S.-Russia Relations

SARAH HUMMEL & ANDREY BAKLITSKIY

Working Group Paper 9

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Working Group on the Future of U.S.-Russia Relations

The Working Group on the Future of U.S.-Russia Relations convenes rising experts from leading American and Russian institutions to tackle the thorniest issues in the bilateral relationship. By engaging the latest generation of scholars in face-to-face discussion and debate, we aim to generate innovative analysis and policy recommendations that better reflect the common ground between the United States and Russia that is so often obscured by mistrust. We believe our unique, truly bilateral approach offers the best potential for breakthroughs in mutual understanding and reconciliation between our countries.

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Executive Summary

Recent developments in relations between the United States and Russia have made enhanced—or even continued—cooperation over nuclear arms control increasingly difficult. In this report, we identify five challenges to cooperation. These are:

- **Declining relations and negative public opinion:** The general relationship between Russia and the United States deteriorated over recent years. Public opinion polls and elite discourse in both countries reflect this decline. This raises the political costs associated with pursuing cooperation of any kind, including cooperation over arms control.
- **Allegations of noncompliance and mistrust:** Both the United States and Russia claim the other is in violation of existing agreements. The existence of these allegations—and the fact that they were not resolved quickly—significantly undermines trust between the two countries over the issue of nuclear arms control.
- **End of strategic insulation of arms control:** Public fears over the occurrence of nuclear conflict have declined since the Cold War. This, together with broader shifts in relative power, makes it more difficult for Russia and the United States to insulate the issue of nuclear arms control from both their domestic politics and the broader relationship between the two countries.
- **Effect of conventional technologies:** Recent technological developments have blurred the line between nuclear and non-nuclear military capabilities. Non-nuclear weapons now have indisputable implications for the strategic effectiveness of nuclear weapons. If the United States and Russia fail to address these issues in future treaties, we open the door to a new arms race in these nuclear-adjacent arenas.
- **Divergent threat perceptions:** The United States and Russia no longer understand each other's views of nuclear war-fighting. This generates misperceptions, as countries must base their assessment of nuclear threats purely on changes to technological capabilities without accounting for the intentions behind such changes. This leads countries to overestimate particular threats, which, in turn, affects how they develop their own nuclear policy.

Although the challenges to cooperation over nuclear arms control are significant, we offer five policy recommendations aimed at alleviating some of these concerns and improving the prospects for cooperation more generally:

- First, the leadership of Russia and the United States must reaffirm their commitment to maintaining strategic stability and preserving bilateral arms control. This should be done even if they cannot immediately agree on terms for a new treaty.
- Second, the United States and Russia should revive the INF's verification provisions to allow the investigation of alleged violations. Furthermore, all future treaties must include robust verification provisions.
- Third, Russia and the United States need to improve dialogue over nuclear arms control issues. As part of this, they must commit to taking each other's concerns more seriously. This includes concerns about particular perceived threats and compliance issues.
- Fourth, the arms control discussion must be broadened to include nonstrategic nuclear weapons and related conventional weapons and technologies. Although this may complicate negotiations, it is necessary for future treaties to be meaningful.
- Fifth, the United States and Russia should actively try to improve cooperation over the more noncontroversial issues on the nuclear agenda, such as strengthening global nuclear security and preventing nuclear terrorism. Doing so will open channels of communication that can later facilitate more difficult conversations about arms control.

Introduction

Cooperation between the United States and Russia over nuclear arms control remains necessary for global stability. Unfortunately, the two countries have been drifting apart with alarming speed over recent years. Mutual mistrust—both inside and outside of the nuclear sphere—is growing. Nuclear issues are becoming increasingly tangled in political maneuvering. A nascent arms race over technological innovation and nuclear-adjacent weaponry¹ threatens to overturn decades of relative stability. More practically, the continued existence of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (New START) is far from guaranteed. Should these treaties fail, the United States and Russia will be without a major bilateral arms control agreement for the first time in more than four decades.

How did we get here? Although many factors contributed to the current crisis, three developments stand out. First, as the likelihood of nuclear war between Russia and the United States declined, the “balance of terror,” which previously made both countries act cautiously and pushed them toward nuclear arms control, also weakened. Without this constraining force, the United States’ decision to pursue a more unilateral foreign policy in the late 1990s and early 2000s spilled over into the nuclear sphere, undermining preexisting norms of reciprocity and the joint commitment to bilateral arms control. Russia’s subsequent reassertion of power on the world stage included a significant investment in nuclear and nuclear-adjacent capabilities that, when combined with U.S. unilateralism, may be the harbinger of a new kind of arms race.

Second, the line between the nuclear and non-nuclear spheres is no longer clear. Non-nuclear technologies have advanced to the point that they can alter the *de facto* nuclear balance of power. Even if the United States and Russia find enough political will to pursue cooperation, the straightforward “cutting numbers” approach of preceding treaties will not be effective unless nuclear-adjacent weaponry, nonstrategic weapons, defense systems, and third parties are also included.

Finally, U.S.-Russia relations are at a record low for the post-Cold War period. Moscow and Washington question each other’s trustworthiness and make accusations about treaty violations. Between this and the geopolitical struggle that culminated in the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s alleged interference in U.S. presidential elections, there is only so much room for officials on both sides to pursue any cooperation. There are also influential forces in both countries that oppose the rapprochement.

A nascent arms race over technological innovation and nuclear-adjacent weaponry threatens to overturn decades of relative stability.

¹ Nuclear-adjacent weaponry is defined as conventional (non-nuclear) weaponry that has a clear impact on *de facto* nuclear capabilities.

In this paper, we analyze the U.S. and Russian perspectives on five key challenges that have arisen as a result of these developments. In doing so, we identify policy recommendations that, if implemented, could improve relations between the two countries. Although the prospect for cooperation between the United States and Russia over nuclear arms control appears bleak, we do not believe it is a lost cause. Our countries found common ground on nuclear issues during the Cold War. It is our hope that they can do so again.

Background

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, nuclear arms control between the Soviet Union and the United States made significant progress based on the understanding that (1) strategic stability could be maintained with much lower numbers of nuclear warheads than had been built, (2) mutual nuclear cuts (both treaty-based and unilateral) could serve as powerful confidence-building measures, and (3) reducing costly nuclear arsenals was to the financial advantage of both countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent end of the Cold War pushed the dynamics of arms control further in the “cutting numbers” direction, emphasizing both the confidence-building and financial aspects of this policy. Because Russia and the United States were no longer adversaries, the strategic stability component of Cold War–era arms control (removing incentives for a nuclear first strike) seemed less relevant and even outdated. Russia sought partnership with the United States on the global arena and was embracing the U.S.-led world order.

In the 1990s, generally positive relations between Russia and the United States facilitated reductions in the number of nuclear weapons globally. The Soviet successor states of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan agreed to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks Treaty (START1) in 1992. Two years later, the four countries affirmed their commitment to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and formally ratified START1. In addition, the United States became directly involved in the process of securing and dismantling the Soviet nuclear arsenal outside of Russia.

However, as it adjusted to the absence of its Cold War adversary, Washington shifted toward a more unilateral approach to nuclear issues. The United States’ policies showed less regard for the preferences of Russia, or of other countries in the world. For instance, President George W. Bush announced early in his administration that his vision for American security included the development of missile defense.² Faced with Russian and UN objections to this plan, the United States simply withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) in 2002.³ Bush subsequently announced a plan to construct an anti-ballistic missile defense installation in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic.

It would have been unthinkable for the Soviet Union or the United States to leave an existing arms control agreement during the Cold War, for fear of an unpredictable escalation of force. Fortunately, such an escalation did not occur after the United States withdrew from the ABM. The United States reassured Russia that its only goal was the defense of Europe from potential nuclear attacks by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. For its part, Russia expressed disappointment about this move and raised concerns over

As it adjusted to the absence of its Cold War adversary, Washington shifted toward a more unilateral approach to nuclear issues.

² George Bush, “Speech at the National Defense University,” May 1, 2001.

³ Terence Neilan, “Bush Pulls Out of ABM Treaty; Putin Calls Move a Mistake,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2001.

whether the United States could use the interceptor missiles offensively.⁴ However, the United States and Russia remained partners and the U.S. withdrawal did not preclude their negotiating the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT) later in 2002.

Soon after their respective elections, Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev promised a “fresh start” in relations between their two countries.⁵ One element of this fresh start was a new nuclear arms deal. Accordingly, in 2010 they agreed to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). Although both sides agreed to the treaty, political maneuvering over ratification hinted at brewing tensions. The Russian parliament attached a provision for withdrawal if Moscow believed that European missile defense threatened Russian national security. In turn, Washington attached a massive spending provision for modernizing American nuclear forces.⁶ More broadly, Russian concerns over missile defense, strategic conventional weapons, and space were largely dismissed, as were the United States’ concerns over Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

Russian concerns over missile defense, strategic conventional weapons, and space were largely dismissed, as were the United States’ concerns over Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

Relations worsened in President Obama’s second term, which coincided with Vladimir Putin’s return to the Russian presidency.⁷ Russia, which was already concerned by NATO’s eastward expansion and the failure of the Adaptation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), faced changes of governments after mass protests in its neighborhood and in the Middle East (the so called “color revolutions”). Relations were further strained by the passing of the Magnitsky Act, which imposed travel and banking restrictions on specific Russian officials. American grievances included the ban on adoption of Russian children, Edward Snowden’s political asylum, disagreements over Syria, and the crisis in Ukraine. In 2015, one journalist noted that “there can rarely have been two world leaders so obviously physically uncomfortable in one another’s presence” as Obama and Putin.⁸ The countries and their leaders saw each other increasingly as adversaries and not as partners.

These strained relations affected the countries’ engagement over nuclear issues. In 2013, Russia broke off talks with NATO about missile defense after Washington refused to limit the scope of its interceptors in Europe.⁹ In 2014, the United States accused Russia of violating the INF Treaty by testing a medium-range ground-launched cruise missile, which was banned under the treaty.¹⁰ In 2016, despite the temporary reversal of Bush’s ground-based missile defense plans under Obama, the United States completed construction of a missile defense site in Romania and began construction on a second one in Poland. In addition, the United States unilaterally changed the way weapons-grade plutonium was supposed to be disposed under the Plutonium Disposition agreement, prompting Russia to withdraw.¹¹

⁴ “Bush: Missile Shield No Threat to Russia.” *CNN Politics*, April 1, 2008.

⁵ Helene Cooper, “Promises of ‘Fresh Start’ for U.S.-Russia Relations,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2009.

⁶ “Ready, Set, START!” *Russia Today*, January 26, 2011.

⁷ Mikhail Zygar, “The Russian Reset That Never Was,” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2016.

⁸ Roland Oliphant, “The Awkward Moment When Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin Met at the UN General Assembly,” *The Telegraph*, September 29, 2015.

⁹ Robin Emmott, “After Long Wait, U.S. to Unveil European Missile Shield” *Reuters*, May, 11, 2016.

¹⁰ Michael Gordon, “U.S. Says Russia Tested Cruise Missile, Violating Treaty,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 2014.

¹¹ “Russia Suspends Weapons-Grade Plutonium Deal with US,” *BBC News*, October 3, 2016.

President Donald Trump's election in 2016 had the potential to become a turning point in U.S.-Russia relations. Trump spoke positively of Russia throughout his presidential campaign and talked with President Putin only a week after assuming office. However, the opportunity for cooperation has not been realized.¹² Trump's general repudiation of treaties negotiated under Obama and other Democratic presidents may incline him against extending New START. Any new treaty would face the difficult task of ratification by the U.S. Senate. Furthermore, the ongoing investigation into Russia's alleged interference in the 2016 presidential election has heightened domestic scrutiny of Trump's behavior toward Russia and constrained the ability of the Trump White House to seek diplomatic accommodation with Moscow.

As of 2018, the United States and Russia have two bilateral arms control agreements in place. The first is the INF Treaty, which was signed in 1987 by the United States and the Soviet Union. Under this treaty, both countries agreed to eliminate all nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5,500 kilometers.¹³ The second is the New START treaty, which entered into force in 2011. On February 5, 2018, both the United States and Russia announced that they had successfully met the treaty's limits on strategic arms. The countries also shared information according to the treaty and allowed inspections of sites with both deployed and nondeployed strategic systems.¹⁴

Unfortunately, both the INF and New START are threatened. The INF is under fire because of allegations that Russia tested and deployed a medium-range cruise missile in violation of its terms. Moscow flatly denies any violation and accuses, in turn, the United States of violating the treaty. These competing narratives must be resolved before it is possible to even begin discussing the solutions.

The New START treaty is set to expire on February 5, 2021. It could be extended for a further five years if both countries agree. Given the current tensions between the two countries, such an extension would be a practical—if incomplete—way forward. However, even this relatively straightforward step is in doubt. President Trump reportedly condemned New START to President Putin as one of the “bad deals” negotiated under his (Trump's) predecessor.¹⁵ There are also forces in the United States that believe (for different reasons) it is not in the U.S. interest to participate in the INF and the New START. If this opposition continues, forces in Russia that believe arms control is tying Russian hands might gain greater prominence. In the following section, we discuss some of the most important challenges the United States and Russia must overcome on the path to nuclear cooperation.

¹² Jenna McLaughlin and Emily Tamkin, “Under Trump, U.S.-Russia Relations Hit New Low,” *Foreign Policy*, July 6, 2017.

¹³ “Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty).” U.S. Department of State, available at <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm> (last accessed January 27, 2018).

¹⁴ “New START,” U.S. Department of State, available at <https://www.state.gov/t/avc/newstart/> (last accessed January 27, 2018).

¹⁵ Jonathan Landay and David Rohde, “In call with Putin, Trump denounced Obama-era nuclear arms treaty,” *Reuters*, February 9, 2017.

Major Challenges to Cooperation

Challenge 1

Declining relations and negative public opinion

As the preceding section outlined, the relationship between Russia and the United States deteriorated significantly after 2010. Popular and elite discourse in both countries reflects this decline. Figure 1 (see below) illustrates how U.S. citizens view Russia, and Figure 2 (next page) shows Russian opinions of the United States since the early 1990s. Both U.S. favorability in Russia and Russian favorability in the United States declined sharply in the 2010s. Although the public opinion data suggest a slight rebuilding of mutual regard, favorability percentages remain well below their peaks. A Pew Research survey conducted in spring 2017 suggests that 47 percent of Americans view Russia’s power and influence as a “major threat,” and only 23 percent express confidence that Putin will do the right thing regarding world affairs.¹⁶ A Levada Center survey from January 2018 found that 52 percent of Russians had a mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable view of the United States, 44 percent of those saying that “Washington was trying to subdue the whole world” and 35 percent accusing the United States of aggressive policy toward Russia.¹⁷

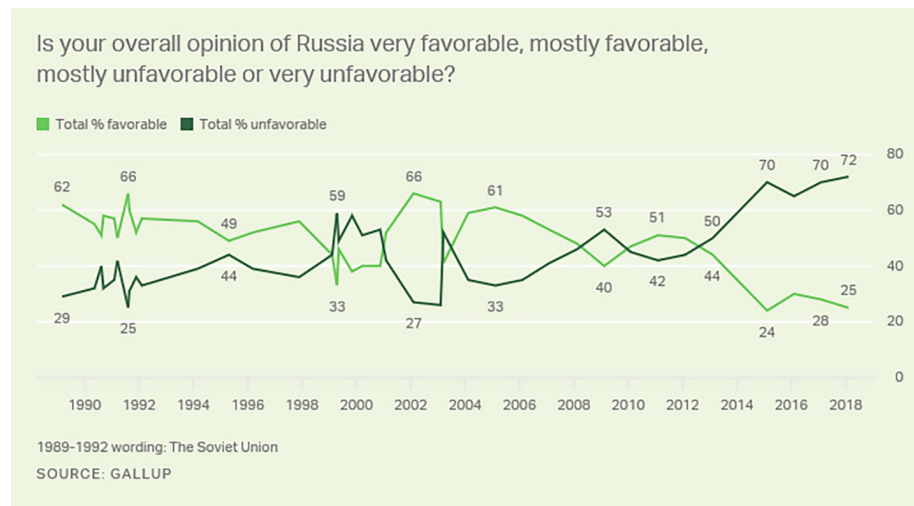


Figure 1.
Source: Gallup. Used by permission.

¹⁶ Margaret Vice, “Publics Worldwide Unfavorable Toward Putin, Russia,” *Pew Research Center Publications*, August 16, 2017.

¹⁷ *Otmoshenie k stranam* (Feelings toward certain countries). *Levada Center*, February 12, 2018.

How do you generally perceive the US?

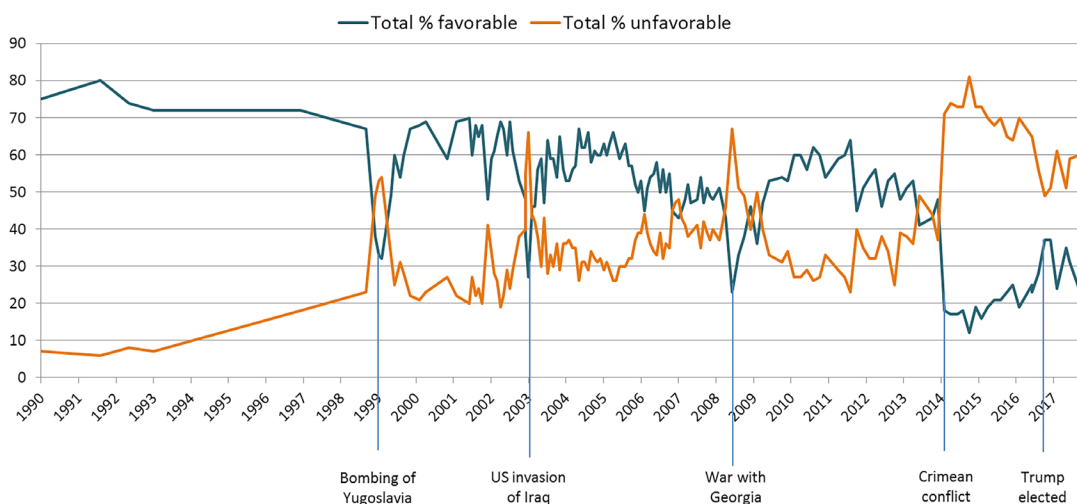


Figure 2.
Source: Data from Levada Center. April 1990 to January 2018.

Statements by political elites in both countries reflect this negativity. Coinciding with then-U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s visit to Moscow in April 2017, President Putin commented on Russian television that “the level of trust on a working level, especially on the military level, has not improved but has rather deteriorated.”¹⁸ Although President Trump’s statements about Russia are mixed in tone, U.S. elites have been more consistently unfavorable. For instance, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, said in March 2017 that “We cannot trust Russia. We should never trust Russia.”¹⁹ Further, in a rare instance of bipartisan cooperation, both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly voted in July 2017 to impose new sanctions on Russia.²⁰

Negative public opinion makes cooperation significantly more challenging. There is a political cost to signing agreements—and a political benefit to breaking existing ones²¹—if the signatory and/or the details of the agreement are unpopular. It is more difficult for Washington and Moscow to credibly signal their commitment to continued or enhanced nuclear cooperation when their domestic constituents oppose such cooperation. Given political incentives for defection, a high level of trust is necessary for each side to believe the other will (1) sign such an agreement in the first place and/or (2) not break it as soon as doing so is politically expedient. In this way, negative public opinion increases the amount of trust necessary to sustain cooperation.

¹⁸ Yeganeh Torbati and Vladimir Soldatkin, “Putin: Russia-US trust is eroding because of President Trump,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 12, 2017.

¹⁹ Philip Rucker, “U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley: ‘We should never trust Russia,’” *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2017.

²⁰ Alex Johnson, “Senate Joins House in Overwhelmingly Passing New Russian Sanctions,” *NBC News*, July 27, 2017.

²¹ Stephen Chaudoin, “Promises or Policies? An Experimental Analysis of International Agreements and Audience Reactions,” *International Organization*, 68(1): 235–256.

Negative public opinion makes cooperation significantly more challenging.

Adequate communication and dialogue between the two countries could help make this possible. Given Russia's general optimism over Trump's election, beginning a dialogue early in his administration might have gone a long way toward rebuilding relations. Unfortunately, improving arms control dialogue with Russia was not a priority for President Trump after his election. This made real negotiations impossible early in his administration. In July 2017, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov expressed frustration over the fact that the United States had been "too slow" in hiring senior personnel who could discuss the future of New START.²² The U.S. arms control team had not even been assembled as of March 2018. Furthermore, although the countries are currently sharing the information required under New START and held one round of strategic stability talks, there is a notable lack of communication through informal or unofficial channels. Exchanges of military and nonmilitary personnel can foster personal relationships that help build long-term trust and understanding between the two countries.²³ The absence of these relationships facilitates the growth of mistrust, misperceptions, and miscommunications between countries.

Challenge 2

Allegations of noncompliance and mistrust

Relations between the United States and Russia over nuclear issues, in particular, suffer from a severe lack of trust. Although international agreements can be designed to promote compliance even in the absence of preexisting trust,²⁴ the task is significantly easier if countries have confidence in one another's motivations and actions.²⁵ Without trust, all but the most well-designed agreements run the risk of being dismissed as "cheap talk" and not actually changing behavior in meaningful ways. The major source of mistrust between the United States and Russia over nuclear issues is the recent history of noncompliance allegations. Both the United States and Russia claim the other is in violation of existing agreements.

Although U.S. allegations that Russia violated the 1987 INF Treaty became more visible over the past year and half, these concerns are not new. The U.S. State Department's report *Adherence and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments* noted that the United States had determined that "the Russian Federation is in violation of its obligations under the INF Treaty" as early as July 2014. The 2015 edition of the report more clearly identified that "the cruise missile developed by Russia meets the

²² "Disputes Cloud U.S.-Russian Arms Talks," *Arms Control Today*, September 1, 2017.

²³ Heather Williams, "From Reykjavik to Twitter: A Toolkit for Avoiding Instability in U.S.-Russia Relations," *Presentation at U.S.-Russia Track 1.5 Dialogues*, October 19, 2017.

²⁴ Kenneth Abbott, "Trust But Verify: The Production of Arms Control Treaties and Other International Agreements," *Cornell International Law Journal* (1993), 26: 1–58.

²⁵ Scholarship on international business alliances suggests that trust is a key component to success. For example: Arvind Parkhe, "Understanding Trust in International Alliances," *Journal of World Business* (1998), 33(3): 219–240.

INF Treaty definition of a ground-launched cruise missile with a range capability of 500 km to 5,500 km, and as such, all missiles of that type, and all launchers of the type used or tested to launch such a missile, are prohibited under the provisions of the INF Treaty.”²⁶

Russia’s response to these accusations was emphatic denial. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov clearly stated, “There have been no violations on our part.” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has made similar statements.²⁷ The Russian side argued that the United States did not provide adequate proof of a violation or any specific information that could be verified in order to clarify the situation.²⁸ The U.S. State Department’s 2017 report contradicted this claim, stating that the United States provided “more than enough information for the Russian side to identify the missile in question . . . including Russia’s internal designator for the mobile launcher chassis and the names of the companies involved in developing and producing the missile and launcher and information on the violating GLCM’s [ground-launched cruise missile] test history, including the tests’ coordinates and Russia’s attempts to obfuscate the nature of the program.”²⁹ In November 2017, the United States announced that the missile under dispute was the Russian Novator 9M729.

In turn, Russia claims that three U.S. military programs violate—or will violate—the INF Treaty. The first alleged violation is the United States’ use of intermediate-range missiles as targets during tests of the U.S. missile defense. The United States does not dispute the use of repurposed ballistic missile engines but argues that they were used solely for research and never equipped with warheads. As such, the United States claims they do not fall under the scope of the INF, which is limited to missiles that have been “flight-tested or deployed for weapons delivery.” Second, Russia argues that the use of drones as weapons-delivery vehicles violates the INF. Here again, the dispute is over the terms of the treaty rather than the occurrence of the action. The INF defines cruise missiles as “an unmanned, self-propelled vehicle that sustains flight through the use of aerodynamic lift over most of its flight path.” While Russia alleges that drones meet this definition, the United States claims that drones are piloted remotely, rather than being “unmanned,” and that they are analogous to aircraft rather than to missiles because they are “two-way, reusable” systems.³⁰ Finally, Russia argues that U.S. plans to use the MK-41 missile launchers to deploy missile defense interceptors on land in Romania and Poland as part of the Aegis Ashore system would also constitute a violation, since those are also capable of launching intermediate-range missiles. The United States claims that the missile defense system “lacks the software, fire control hardware, support equipment and other infrastructure needed to launch offensive ballistic or cruise missiles,” and that the land-based vertical launch system that will be used is not the same launcher as the sea-based MK-41 vertical launch system.³¹

²⁶ Amy Woolf, “Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty: Background and Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service* 7-5700, December 6, 2017.

²⁷ “Information war: Kremlin dismisses accusations of missile treaty violations,” *Russia Today*, February 15, 2017.

²⁸ “В МИД прокомментировали ситуацию с договором по РСМД,” *РИА Новостям (RIA Novosti)*, 28 июня, 2017.

²⁹ Woolf, “Russian Compliance with the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.”

³⁰ Brian P. McKeon, “Statement prepared for the Joint Hearing on Russian Arms Control Cheating and the Administration’s Response,” *House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and House Subcommittee on Strategic Force*, December 10, 2014.

³¹ “Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance Factsheet—Refuting Russian Allegations of U.S. Noncompliance with the INF Treaty,” *Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance*, December 8, 2017.

The goal of this working paper is not to adjudicate these various disputes. However, we will make two observations about how these events affect trust between the countries. First, both sides make reasonable claims about potential violations that need to be taken seriously. Neither the act of accusing, nor the act of denying an accusation, is productive in the absence of serious dialogue. The Russian request for proof is a valid one, as long as the Russians will engage in talks about returning to compliance should such proof be provided. Likewise, the United States and Russia need to discuss how to interpret the existing INF Treaty’s applicability to new technologies; without such discussion, the treaty will become nothing more than a forum for pointing fingers. For the United States and Russia to move forward with cooperation, they each must trust that future allegations over violations will be taken seriously and solved through productive dialogue. Resolving the existing disputes is a necessary first step toward this goal.

Second, these allegations are not new. While they have been publicized recently in both American and Russian media, the governments of both countries were aware of them much earlier. Over time, these unresolved conflicts contributed to increasing mistrust between the two countries. It is impossible to trust a counterpart that has—at least according to the narrative of one’s own nation—continued to abuse this trust by violating an agreement without showing any inclination to return to compliance.

Challenge 3

End of strategic insulation of arms control

As both recent and more distant history suggests, disagreement between Russia and the United States is not new. However, the United States and Russia managed to find a common interest in arms control during the Cold War. They cooperated over this issue even while remaining in conflict in other spheres. Today, however, arms control is less isolated from politics, making it more difficult to separate nuclear cooperation from both the countries’ broader relationship and their respective domestic political considerations.

The first major arms control successes between the United States and Russia occurred in the 1960s with the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the Treaty on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and preliminary Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). These accomplishments are all the more impressive when we consider the state of more general relations at the time: the Cuban missile crisis, the start of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia all occurred during this decade. To be sure, these early arms control negotiations were not entirely isolated from politics. However, their mere existence demonstrated that cooperation over vital nuclear issues could occur even when the broader relationship remained turbulent. In addition, the common cause of nuclear nonproliferation arguably helped pave the way for better relations more generally.³² Joint concern over the fate of Soviet nuclear weapons in the new post-Soviet countries likewise facilitated positive relations between the United States and Russia during the 1990s.

For the United States and Russia to move forward with cooperation, they each must trust that future allegations over violations will be taken seriously and solved through productive dialogue.

³² Avis Bohlen, “Arms Control in the Cold War,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 15, 2009.

The end of the bipolar world system allows disagreements over relative strength to complicate negotiations.

Unfortunately, these two positive lessons from the Cold War—that cooperation can occur even in the context of adversarial relations, and that the common cause of nonproliferation may help improve relations over time—do not seem to apply today. Negotiations over nuclear issues are less insulated from outside pressures and political whims than in the past. Why might this be the case?

First, the current political will to solve nuclear issues is insufficient. During the Cold War, both the U.S. and Soviet leadership demonstrated their willingness to bear at least some political cost for engaging in cooperation. This is no longer the case. A major reason is the fact that such costs are significantly higher now than they were in the past. During the Cold War, the public's fear of a nuclear attack was pervasive. Even accounting for increased concern related to the United States' recent standoff with North Korea, this is not the case today. A 2017 national survey of Americans found that, while 39 percent of respondents said they feared nuclear war, twenty other common fears ranked more highly.³³ In a 2015 poll of Russian citizens, a quarter responded that President Putin's statement about his readiness to use nuclear weapons did not cause them any concern at all.³⁴ As former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry commented, "Our children don't know what the threat of nuclear war really feels like."³⁵

During the Cold War, citizens of both countries agreed that avoiding nuclear war was a top—if not *the* top—priority. Over time, the perceived likelihood of nuclear war declined simply because the United States and Russia always found non-nuclear resolutions to the various crises and conflicts they faced. This created the expectation that there would be non-nuclear solutions to future crises and decreased the perception that nuclear war is likely. Consequently, citizens are less willing to give politicians the kind of leeway necessary to insulate nuclear issues than they did before. In the modern era, negotiating over nuclear issues involves similar political costs to negotiating over any other issue.

Second, shifting power dynamics may tempt political leaders to implicitly or explicitly link nuclear cooperation to other issues. The global power system during the Cold War was bipolar, with Russia and the United States viewing each other as roughly equal. Bipolarity has the advantage of being a relatively stable power structure.³⁶ In addition, this acknowledged equality meant that neither could reasonably try to extract overwhelming concessions from the other and set a clear precedent of reciprocity. Because both sides gained from arms control, there was no need to include other issues or concessions in these negotiations.³⁷

The end of the bipolar world system allows disagreements over relative strength to complicate negotiations. Russia's power on the global stage declined rapidly after the end of the Soviet Union, then began to rebound as its economic and political situation stabilized. For its part, the United States is still coming to terms with its own relative decline in

³³ "America's Top Fears 2017," *Chapman University Survey of American Fears*, October 11, 2017.

³⁴ "Угроза для России со стороны США," *Levada Center (Левада-Центр)*, December 5, 2015.

³⁵ John Kerry, "Remarks at the Ploughshares Fund Gala," *U.S. Institute of Peace*, October 28, 2013.

³⁶ Kenneth Waltz, "Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* (1964), 93(3): 881–909.

³⁷ Linking concessions across issues is less likely when negotiations have this kind of symmetry. See Ronald Mitchell and Patricia Keilbach, "Situation Structure and Institutional Design: Reciprocity, Coercion, and Exchange," *International Organization* (2001), 55(4): 891–917.

influence over global affairs. These broad shifts create disagreement and uncertainty about the relative bargaining power of the countries, which can contribute to the failure of negotiations.³⁸ When countries are not certain about the size of concessions they can plausibly demand from their partners, they may inadvertently make demands that are too unpalatable domestically to meet. Asymmetric and shifting power relations also make it more likely that one side will try to extract formal or informal concessions outside of the nuclear issue area. This, in turn, further diminishes the insulation of nuclear issues from other areas of foreign policy.

Cooperation over arms control will be more challenging for the United States and Russia if the issue remains enmeshed in the politics of their broader relationship, at least for as long as that relationship remains adversarial. The more this relationship declines, the harder it will be for political leaders to cooperate over arms control. Given the recent negative developments in U.S.-Russia relations, this is cause for serious concern.

Challenge 4

Effect of conventional technologies

Although there are advantages to insulating nuclear issues from the politics of the broader U.S.-Russia relationship, recent technological developments blur the line between nuclear and non-nuclear military capabilities. Future agreements need to account for both conventional and nuclear technological innovation. This requires countries to take the broader strategic context into account when negotiating nuclear agreements. Although necessary, increasing the complexity of the problem in this way may make agreement harder to reach.

Military technology has changed greatly since the Cold War-era arms control treaties. First, conventional weapons have become increasingly sophisticated, making the distinction between nuclear and non-nuclear weaponry less clear-cut. In particular, long-range weapons with high-precision targeting can now be used to destroy high-value targets—including some types of nuclear weapons as well as the command and control facilities—in the event of a crisis. These kinds of weapons complicate nuclear balance-of-power calculations and, as some analysts have noted, may make a preemptive nuclear strike more likely.³⁹ Despite these implications, the United States has invested heavily in advanced conventional weaponry in recent years. Under the Obama administration, it redoubled efforts on the Conventional Prompt Global Strike system, which would allow the United States to deploy high-precision conventional weapons anywhere in the world within one hour.⁴⁰ In response, Russia began to develop its own advanced conventional arsenal, while

³⁸ James Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations of War,” *International Organization* (1994), 49(3): 379–414.

³⁹ Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala, “Advanced US Conventional Weapons and Nuclear Disarmament: Why the Obama Plan Won’t Work,” *The Nonproliferation Review* (2013), 20(1): 107–122; Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, “The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* (2006), 30(4): 7–44.

⁴⁰ Amy Woolf, “Conventional Prompt Global Strike and Long-Range Ballistic Missiles: Background and Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, February 3, 2017.

simultaneously arguing for the inclusion of all strategic offensive arms—both nuclear and non-nuclear—in future arms control treaties.⁴¹ Russia demonstrated its enhanced conventional capacity by using some of these new long-range precision-guided missiles during the Syria conflict.⁴²

Second, the ongoing militarization of space compounds the challenges associated with conventional weapons. The 1967 Treaty on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space explicitly bans weapons of mass destruction from being placed in orbit, but it does not include similar provisions for conventional weapons.⁴³ After the United States withdrew from the ABM treaty in 2002, the several-decades-long “unofficial moratorium” on militarizing space ended, leading to a proliferation of military-purpose satellites.⁴⁴ Some of these are offensive, while others have the capacity to destroy or sabotage enemy satellites.⁴⁵ On March 13, 2018, President Trump even suggested creating a new military branch—Space Force.⁴⁶ As with advanced conventional technologies, the militarization of space may directly alter nuclear capabilities.

Third, the same precision-targeting technology that makes conventional weapons increasingly dangerous can be integrated into nuclear weapons themselves. In 2015, the United States flight-tested an updated B61 bomb, which has steerable fins and other advanced technology designed to improve its accuracy and allow the destructive power to be adjusted depending on the target.⁴⁷ Russia’s Deputy Defense Minister, Anatoly Antonov, called the test “irresponsible” and “openly provocative.”⁴⁸ In addition, a new fuzing mechanism incorporated into the Navy’s W76-1/Mk4A warheads improves detonation and consequently makes them even more deadly.⁴⁹ For its part, Russia also began an ambitious modernization of its nuclear forces⁵⁰ and demonstrated its precision-targeting capacity through its deployment of dual-capable⁵¹ “Kalibr” sea-launched cruise missiles in Syria. These advancements allow countries to increase their nuclear capabilities without violating existing caps on nuclear weapons.

⁴¹ Anatoly Antonov, “Russia Forced to Develop Global Prompt Strike Weapons,” *Security Index: A Russian Journal on International Security*, 19(3): 3–8.

⁴² Sergey Minasyan, “Russia’s Conventional Deterrence: An Enhanced Tool for Both Warfighting and Political Strategy,” *PONARS Policy Memo 466*, March 2017.

⁴³ Michel Bourbonniere and Ricky Lee, “Legality of the Deployment of Conventional Weapons in Earth Orbit: Balancing Space Law and the Law of Armed Conflict,” *European Journal of International Law* (2007), 18(5): 873–901.

⁴⁴ David Axe, “When it comes to war in space, U.S. has the edge,” *Reuters*, August 10, 2015.

⁴⁵ Lee Billings, “War in Space May Be Closer than Ever,” *Scientific American*, August 10, 2015.

⁴⁶ Brooke Singman, “Trump Praises Military, Calls for ‘Space Force’ as New Branch of Armed Forces,” *Fox News*, March 13, 2018.

⁴⁷ William Broad and David Sanger, “As U.S. Modernizes Nuclear Weapons, ‘Smaller’ Leaves Some Uneasy,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2016.

⁴⁸ “Russia slams US test of B61-12 atomic bomb as “provocative,” *Press TV*, July 13, 2015.

⁴⁹ Hans Kristensen, Matthew McKinzie, and Theodore Postol, “How US nuclear force modernization is undermining strategic stability: The burst-height compensating super-fuze,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 2017.

⁵⁰ Hans Kristensen, “Russian Nuclear Forces: Buildup or Modernization?” *Russia Matters*, September 14, 2017.

⁵¹ *Vstrecha s glavoy Minoborini Sergeem Shoigu* (Meeting with Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu). Kremlin.ru, December 8, 2015.

Finally, the United States forged ahead with its plan to develop a missile defense system. In 1999 the UN General Assembly approved a resolution aimed at pressuring the United States to abandon these plans.⁵² Rather than comply with this, the United States withdrew from the ABM treaty. Although Russia did not respond immediately in kind, it has since begun improving its own missile defense system and developing missiles that can overcome the American system.⁵³ On March 1, 2018, President Vladimir Putin during his annual address to the Federation Council presented five new strategic nuclear systems capable of penetrating U.S. missile defenses (an ICBM, a nuclear-powered cruise missile, an unmanned underwater vehicle, hypersonic aircraft missile system, and a hypersonic boost glide vehicle).⁵⁴

At least some of these issues need to be addressed in future agreements because they directly affect the broader strategic calculation faced by both Russia and the United States. Certain non-nuclear technologies have indisputable implications for the strategic effectiveness of nuclear weapons. High-precision conventional weapons, hypersonic boost glide weapons, the military use of space, and missile defense all alter *de facto* nuclear capabilities. If the United States and Russia fail to address these issues, we open the door to a new arms race in these nuclear-adjacent arenas.⁵⁵ Furthermore, new cooperative agreements should not only account for recent changes in nuclear technologies but should also provide a framework for dealing with future advances. As countries improve targeting and detonating capabilities, they increase the effectiveness of each warhead. In practice, this increases their relative nuclear power in a way that existing “counting numbers” treaties would not account for.

Challenge 5

Divergent understandings of threat perceptions

The United States and Russia lack a common approach to nuclear weapons’ use, resulting in misconceptions about each other’s capabilities and intentions. This is nothing new in U.S.-Russia relations. During the Cold War, Moscow and Washington routinely acted based on different strategies of nuclear use (while the United States was ready to use limited nuclear strikes in Europe under the “flexible response” strategy,⁵⁶ the Soviet Union prepared for all-out war⁵⁷) and misinterpreted each other’s strength (the United States mistakenly

⁵² “General Assembly Calls for Strict Compliance with 1972 ABM Treaty, as It Adopts 51 Disarmament, International Security Texts,” *Press Release of the General Assembly 9675*, December 1, 1999.

⁵³ “Воздушно-космические силы выполнили пуск противоракеты системы ПРО,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, November 24, 2017; Jon Sharman, “Russia to test new generation of intercontinental missile that can ‘beat US defence systems,’” *Independent*, October 24, 2017.

⁵⁴ Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, *Official Website of the President of Russia*, March 1, 2018.

⁵⁵ Mike Eckel, “New Weaponry, More Spending, Tough Rhetoric Stoke Fears of New U.S.-Russia Arms Race,” *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, May 18, 2016.

⁵⁶ J. Michael Legge, “Theater Nuclear Weapons and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response,” Rand Corporation, April 1983.

⁵⁷ Alexey Arbatov, “The Hidden Side of the U.S.-Russian Strategic Confrontation,” *Arms Control Today*, September 2016.

believed that the U.S.S.R. had a big advantage in ICBMs, the so-called missile gap⁵⁸) and/or intentions (the Soviet Union saw the “Able Archer” command post exercises in Europe, which simulated conflict escalation, as possible preparation for nuclear war by the USA⁵⁹). However, most significant arms control agreements occurred at times when both countries held—and were able to clearly communicate—non-adversarial intentions.

The situation drastically improved with the Soviet-U.S. *détente* at the end of the 1980s and the formulation of the Soviet–United States Joint Statement on Future Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Arms and Further Enhancing Strategic Stability in 1990 as a part of negotiations of the START treaty.⁶⁰ In this document, the United States and the Soviet Union explicitly agreed on joint principles governing strategic offensive and defensive arms.

However, with the urgency and interest in each other’s approaches to nuclear war–fighting low in the 1990s and 2000s, the countries’ concerns and threat perceptions began to diverge once more. As they became increasingly uncertain about each other’s intentions and strategies, Moscow and Washington began to base their assessments primarily on technological capabilities. Moscow focused preparations on the possibility of an “air-space war” in which the United States leads a high-precision weapons attack against Russia. In contrast, Washington became fixated on the threat of a Russian “escalate to de-escalate” strategy, which supposedly implies using a limited first nuclear strike early on to win a conventional conflict. These worst-case scenarios are based on assessments of current capabilities and do not reflect actual intentions or nuclear doctrines. Focusing on such worst-case scenarios may be enough to spark a new arms race.

The idea that Russia may “escalate to de-escalate” rests on the assumption that Russia has significantly lowered the bar for using nuclear weapons since the Cold War.⁶¹ However, the term—which was coined in the academic community—is rather loosely defined.⁶² The general notion that Russia might use nuclear weapons on the battlefield originated in the arguments of a 1999 article published in the Russian military journal *Voennaia Mysl*. The authors posited that the use of nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict could demonstrate credibility and convince the adversary to stand down for fear of further escalation.⁶³ In 2000, following the NATO air campaign in Yugoslavia, Russia’s new military

The idea that Russia may “escalate to de-escalate” rests on the assumption that Russia has significantly lowered the bar for using nuclear weapons since the Cold War.

⁵⁸ Greg Thielmann, “The Missile Gap Myth and Its Progeny,” *Arms Control Today*, May 2011.

⁵⁹ “The Soviet ‘War Scare,’” President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, February 15, 1990.

⁶⁰ “Soviet–United States Joint Statement on Future Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Arms and Further Enhancing Strategic Stability,” June 1, 1990.

⁶¹ Matthew Kroenig, “The Case for Tactical U.S. Nukes,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2018.

⁶² See, for example, Jüri Luik and Tomas Jermalavičius, “A plausible scenario of nuclear war in Europe, and how to deter it: A perspective from Estonia.” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Volume 73, 2017; Evelyn Farkas, “Trump Needs a Russia Policy, or Putin Will Force One on Him,” *Foreign Policy*, February 15, 2017.

⁶³ V. I. Levshin, A. V. Nedelin, and M. E. Sosnovskiy, *O primenenií Yadernogo Oruzhíia dlíia Deesklatsii Voennih Deistvii* (On Use of Nuclear Weapons to De-escalate the Military Actions). *Voennaia Mysl*. 1999.

doctrine did allow for first use in case of large-scale conventional aggression against Russia or its allies.⁶⁴ A senior official also expressed Russia's readiness to use nuclear weapons in regional wars.⁶⁵

However, some steps taken by Russia should alleviate Washington's concern about this scenario. Neither the 2010 military doctrine, nor the one that followed it in 2014 (the most recent), mentions anything of this sort. Current military doctrine clearly states that nuclear weapons will be used only in response to nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction and/or "when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy." The scenarios in which Western analysts envision Russian nuclear escalation—most of which involve ending a conventional conflict—seem to fall far short of this threshold. Russia is also increasingly confident in its conventional capabilities, which are strong enough to play at least some of the strategic deterrence roles historically played by nuclear weapons.⁶⁶ This raises the nuclear threshold rather than lower it. Despite this, the United States remains concerned about the "escalate to de-escalate" concept. Indeed, the 2018 US Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) argued that the United States must develop new low-yield nuclear weapons to deter Russia at lower levels of conflict.⁶⁷

At the same time, Moscow is deeply concerned about the prospect of "air-space war" against Russia along the lines of NATO campaigns in Yugoslavia in 1999 or the Iraq wars of 1990 and 2003.⁶⁸ There also seems to be a genuine fear that a U.S. conventional counterforce strike against Russian nuclear forces would leave Russia's second strike small enough to be absorbed by eventual U.S. missile defense capabilities.⁶⁹ The development of new, "more usable" nuclear weapons by Washington would increase those worries. It is also easy to see how even a conventional U.S. air campaign against Russia, targeting command and control systems, many of which are dual-use, could be seen in Moscow as putting "the existence of the state in jeopardy" and thus allow a nuclear response under current Russian military doctrine.⁷⁰ While there is not much evidence in the published U.S. literature or official statement that Washington contemplates such a scenario, the United States could do more to reassure Moscow, and it remains a serious concern for Russia.

Both worst-case scenarios are unlikely. However, they have been influential in creating new nuclear and non-nuclear military capabilities in both countries. The divergence of threat perceptions is thus already affecting nuclear policy. Unless the United States and Russia try to understand the other's concerns and act to alleviate them by providing reassurance about their non-adversarial intentions, this problem will only get worse.

⁶⁴ Russia's Military Doctrine, *Arms Control Today*, May 1, 2000.

⁶⁵ *RF Gotova Primenyat Yadernoe Oruzhie v Localnih Conflictah* (Russian Federation Is Ready to Use Nuclear Weapons in the Local Conflicts), *RBC*, October 14, 2009.

⁶⁶ "Precision Weapons Could Replace Nuclear as Deterrent Factor: Defense Minister," *Sputnik*, December 1, 2017.

⁶⁷ "US Nuclear Posture Review," Office of the Secretary of Defense, February 2018.

⁶⁸ Alexey Arbatov, Vladimir Dvorkin, and Petr Topychkanov. "Entanglement as a New Security Threat: A Russian Perspective," Carnegie Moscow Center, November 8, 2017.

⁶⁹ *D. Rogozyn: SSHA za Pervie Chasi Voyny Mogut Unechtozhit 90% Raket RF* (D. Rogozyn, "The US Will Be Able to Destroy 90% of Russian Missiles in the First Hours of War"), *RBC*, June 28, 2013.

⁷⁰ Sergei Sukhanov, "VKO eto zadacha, a ne sistema" (Air-space defense is a task, not a system), *Vozdushno-Kosmicheskaya Oborona*, March 29, 2010.

Recommendations

Based on our understanding of the challenges the United States and Russia face with respect to arms control, we offer the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

State that arms control is unquestionably important

U.S. and Russian civilian and military leaders generally agree on the importance of strategic stability and arms control. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in 2016 that “brandishing nuclear weapons is the last thing to do. But we must proceed from reality and from the fact that nuclear weapons are a deterrent and a factor of ensuring peace and security worldwide. They should not be considered as a factor in any potential aggression, because it is impossible, and it would probably mean the end of our civilization.”⁷¹ President Donald Trump’s first impulse on dealing with Russia was to cut some kind of arms control deal.⁷² Both the foreign and defense ministries in Russia and the United States see merit in arms control agreements and would like to implement and preserve the bilateral treaties. A nuclear arms control regime is supported in the Russian military doctrine and (albeit lukewarmly) in the new US Nuclear Posture Review. Despite mutual accusations of noncompliance, both countries stated they will implement the INF treaty and will try to bring the other side into compliance.

However, this is not nearly enough. President Trump’s negative reaction to extending the New START treaty⁷³ and his administration’s generally unenthusiastic approach to foreign policy limitations will embolden arms control skeptics in both countries and decrease the incentives for the bureaucracy to work on these issues. To counter these trends, the presidents of Russia and the United States should come up with a joint statement or separate unilateral statements lending support to maintaining the strategic stability and preserving bilateral arms control.

⁷¹ “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” President of Russia website, October 27, 2016.

⁷² Guy Faulconbridge and William James, “Trump’s offer to Russia: an end to sanctions for nuclear arms cut,” *London Times/Reuters*, January 16, 2017.

⁷³ Jonathan Landay and David Rohde, “Exclusive: In call with Putin, Trump denounced Obama-era nuclear arms treaty: sources,” *Reuters*, February 9, 2017.

Any future arms control agreement between the countries should include strict verification measures.

Even if the presidents disagree about what an ideal arms control agreement would look like, they should be able to agree that a verifiable treaty designed to prevent an arms race, increase transparency, and contribute to national security is in the interest of both countries. Pending the negotiations of such a treaty, existing arms control agreements, though imperfect, should be preserved and, if needed, extended.

Such a move could form the basis for successful security relations between the countries. It would also demonstrate that both Washington and Moscow have the political will to at least try to reach an arms control agreement and provide some reassurance about their intentions regarding the use of nuclear weapons. This, in turn, would help alleviate the fears of many non-nuclear weapons states that the United States and Russia have abandoned their commitments to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to . . . nuclear disarmament” under Article VI of the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Recommendation 2 Improve verification procedures

The United States and Russia overcame mutual mistrust during the Cold War to cooperate over nuclear issues. A major reason was the purposeful use of verification procedures. Even today, despite some concerns from both sides, the robust verification procedures in the New START treaty facilitate its implementation. That said, one of the main problems with the INF today—the very treaty that prompted President Ronald Reagan’s phrase “trust but verify”—is that it does not currently have any onsite verification provisions. These provisions ended on May 31, 2001. Currently, the United States and Russia are using only national technical means of verification (mainly surveillance satellites) for data collection.

A potential solution could be the one-off reviving of the INF verification provisions for both Russia and the United States. This could be negotiated through the INF Special Verification Commission, which can be convened at any time by the request of a state-member.⁷⁴ In this case, Moscow could inspect MK-41 launchers in Poland and Romania to ensure that they cannot launch cruise missiles, and, in return, Washington could verify that there are no deployed INF range missiles in Russia. Parties could then build on this success to come up with mechanisms to ensure the verifiable implementation of the treaty.

This approach would emphasize reciprocity between the two countries. In the absence of such actions, the mutual lack of trust makes the negotiation of a new strategic arms control to succeed the New START almost impossible. Likewise, any future arms control agreement between the countries should include strict verification measures.

⁷⁴ “The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance,” *Arms Control Association*, December 2017.

Recommendation 3

Seriously discuss each other's concerns

The allegations over noncompliance of the INF are a good example of the United States and Russia talking past each other. In an interview on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the INF treaty, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said, “we have explained to the US flaws in their INF accusations, and would like to discuss our concerns.”⁷⁵ In a parallel interview, U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas Shannon stated, “We want Russia to stop denying its violations and producing baseless counter-accusations.”⁷⁶ Neither Moscow nor Washington is currently willing to even accept that the other side might have legitimate concerns.

There are clear political reasons for both the United States and Russia to claim (1) that they are fully complying with existing treaty obligations⁷⁷ and (2) that they are operating only in a benign way that should be of no concern to others. However, the truth is that a number of activities, both covered by existing treaties and out of them, raise concerns for the United States and Russia. Ignoring such complaints and dismissing them as baseless will only increase those concerns. It will also intensify the focus on capabilities when evaluating potential threats, rather than encourage Moscow and Washington to take each other's intents and strategies into account. As noted earlier, countering perceived imbalances could start the vicious circle of an arms race.

The United States and Russia have taken several steps to improve dialogue. In September 2017, they held strategic stability talks overseen by Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and U.S. Undersecretary of State Thomas Shannon in Helsinki.⁷⁸ According to individuals involved in the discussion, the first round of talks mainly took stock of each side's grievances. The Russian side canceled the next meeting, which was scheduled for early March 2018, after the United States pulled back from the information security talks in Geneva at the last minute. No new meetings were scheduled as of March 2018.⁷⁹ With Undersecretary Shannon announcing his retirement,⁸⁰ and no confirmed Undersecretary for Arms Control at the State Department, the future of talks remains uncertain.

Neither Moscow nor Washington is currently willing to even accept that the other side might have legitimate concerns.

⁷⁵ Sergey Ryabkov, “*Dlia Sohranenia Dogovora Trebuetsia Bolee Otvetstvennyy Podhod so Storoni SSHA*” (US Must Demonstrate More Responsible Approach to Save the Treaty), *Kommersant*, December 8, 2017.

⁷⁶ Thomas Shannon, “*Dlia Nas Nepriemlema Situatsia v kotoroi SSHA Sobliudayut Dogovor, a Rossiya Narushaet Ego*” (For Us the Situation When the US Complies with the Treaty and Russia Violates It Is Unacceptable), *Kommersant*, December 8, 2017.

⁷⁷ 2017 Report on Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments, US Department of State, April 14, 2017.

⁷⁸ Nick Wadhams and Ilya Arkhipov, “U.S., Russia Make Little Headway After Latest Talks,” *Bloomberg*, September 13, 2017.

⁷⁹ “Moscow cancels new round of strategic consultations with US,” *TASS News Agency*, March 2, 2018.

⁸⁰ Matthew Lee, “Longtime U.S. Diplomat Stepping Down in Blow to the Trump Administration,” *Time*, February 1, 2018.

Both the United States and Russia should prioritize the continuation of talks. The format could be strengthened by broader participation of other agencies, especially the militaries and security councils, and increasing the level of delegations.

Recommendation 4

Broaden the arms control discussion to include nonstrategic nuclear weapons and related conventional weapons and technologies

The development of conventional military systems with strategic impact, such as conventional high-precision weaponry, space technologies, hypersonic weapons, and missile defense, is accelerating. Furthermore, the United States and Russia are becoming increasingly interested in each other's nonstrategic nuclear forces (Russian tactical weapons, U.S. gravity bombs in Europe). Both of these issues should be considered during the next round of arms control negotiations.

Including them will almost certainly make negotiations more challenging. However, it is necessary for two reasons. First, the number of warheads does not adequately reflect the relative nuclear capabilities of the two countries anymore because nuclear-adjacent technologies alter the *de facto* nuclear balance of power. This means an agreement that sets a reciprocal limit on the number of warheads may actually favor one side when viewed in the broader strategic context. This will make even superficially equal agreements more difficult to reach. Second, the United States and Russia have publicly argued for the inclusion of different items in future arms control agreements. The United States wants to include tactical weapons in future agreements—which Russia has in far greater quantities than the United States and claims are necessary for its security—and Russia would like to include missile defense, space technology, hypersonic weapons, and U.S. tactical nuclear weapons located outside of its national territory. Consequently, it will be politically difficult for both sides to sign and ratify future agreements that do not include at least some of these items.

To deal with this situation, future arms control agreements must (1) expand the scope of what is relevant in a “nuclear” agreement, and (2) set up a framework for dealing with any future technological innovations that significantly affect the strategic use of nuclear weapons. This will not be easy. However, the first step would be to recognize that it is reasonable for one side to request any nuclear or nuclear-adjacent technology, as well as technologies that will affect these areas in the future, to be discussed during the negotiations.

There is some reason to think that this will be easier now than it was during past rounds of negotiation. With Russia closing the gaps it previously had with the United States in precision-guided conventional weapons, hypersonic technology, and missile defense, the conversation could become more productive than it might have been when capabilities were

less balanced. Instead of Moscow demanding that Washington abandon promising military technologies, the parties can now discuss how they can manage their respective capabilities and limit them in a way that would not threaten the strategic stability.

Recommendation 5

Increase cooperation on the noncontroversial issues on nuclear agenda

While our report specifically focuses on U.S.-Russia arms control, it is important to remember that this subject does not exhaust the bilateral nuclear agenda. Russia and the United States have a wide spectrum of other issues of mutual concern, from nuclear nonproliferation to nuclear security and safety. They also have a proven track record of successful cooperation on those issues, even during the most difficult periods of their relationship. Russian participation in negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program was often cited by the Obama administration as an example of successful cooperation and the model for future interactions between countries.⁸¹

Increased cooperation on nuclear issues that are noncontroversial can increase trust, strengthen people-to-people ties, and increase support for nuclear cooperation and cooperation in general in the public and in elites. All of this can significantly support bilateral arms control.

A promising field for such cooperation would be strengthening global nuclear security and preventing nuclear terrorism, given the mutual interest of both countries and their respective presidents in the issue. The United States and Russia serve as co-chairs of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT), sit on the Board of Governors of the IAEA, and used to cooperate effectively within the framework of Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction under the G8 international political forum. Launching a joint initiative within any of those formats (Russian return to the Global Partnership, in one way or another, is long overdue) would prove beneficial for both countries. Possible issues to address could include loose radiological materials, supporting the conversion of reactors from highly enriched uranium to low enriched uranium, and capacity building in emerging nuclear energy countries.

Another issue on the bilateral agenda is nuclear nonproliferation. Both Russia and the United States are interested in denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, keeping Iran a non-nuclear state, and preventing other countries from acquiring military nuclear programs. While Washington and Moscow have different approaches to Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, there could be room for coordination of actions and facilitation of the dialogue between the United States and Iran or the DPRK.

Increased cooperation on nuclear issues that are noncontroversial can increase trust, strengthen people-to-people ties, and increase support for nuclear cooperation and cooperation in general in the public and in elites.

⁸¹ Roland Oliphant, "Barack Obama praises Putin for help clinching Iran deal," *The Telegraph*, July 15, 2015.

Conclusion

Recent developments in U.S.-Russia relations do not provide much hope for the future. Reacting in part to the power vacuum left by Russia's decline during the 1990s, the United States pursued an increasingly unilateral approach to foreign policy that undermined previous norms of reciprocity. This generated tensions and fueled mutual mistrust once Russia began to reassert itself on the global stage. In addition, as the threat of nuclear war receded from the public consciousness, policymakers in both countries lost the political will to insulate nuclear cooperation from other political issues. Given the current state of relations between the two countries, this shift will make negotiating a meaningful new agreement difficult. Furthermore, previous and existing arms control treaties focused almost exclusively on placing limits on different types of weaponry. This relatively simple approach did a great deal for advancing the cause of arms control. However, conventional weapons with precision targeting, military-purpose satellites, and missile defense are intricately related to nuclear capabilities. Developments in these fields alter the strategic calculations associated with using nuclear weapons and may prove to be strong destabilizing forces. Finally, the countries' understandings of strategic stability and threat perception are diverging, making a jointly cooperative approach toward arms control more challenging.

We offer several recommendations that would help overcome these challenges. First, the United States and Russia should reaffirm their mutual commitment to arms control. This can occur even if the details of a new agreement remain in dispute. Second, we need to recognize that trust between the United States and Russia has declined. To facilitate cooperation in the absence of trust, we need to improve verification procedures for existing and future treaties. Third, the countries need to take each other's concerns seriously. This includes concerns over noncompliance and fears about each other's nuclear-use doctrines. Fourth, policymakers in both countries need to recognize that the scope of "nuclear" cooperation must be expanded if it is going to be both meaningful and politically palatable. Only after they have accepted this fact will they be able to begin discussing exactly which items should be included in future agreements. Finally, the United States and Russia need to rebuild channels for dialogue and communication over nuclear issues. Beginning by focusing on areas of mutual interest, such as dealing with terrorism and nuclear-capable rogue states like North Korea, would facilitate this process.

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