NUCLEAR OFFENSIVE ARMS REDUCTIONS — PAST AND PRESENT

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The Moscow Treaty, under which the United States and Russia will reduce their strategic nuclear warheads by nearly two-thirds, "is not just a new treaty, but a new kind of treaty," says Richard H. Davis, Director of the Office of Strategic Negotiations and Implementation in the State Department's Bureau of Arms Control. It reflects the mutual trust and cooperation in the new U.S.-Russian strategic relationship by affording "a great deal of flexibility to each Party to meet unforeseen future contingencies."

EARLY EFFORTS

Since the beginning of the atomic age, experts have debated the question of whether and how nuclear arms would be subject to international controls. During the 1950s, these debates were largely theoretical, as the United States and Soviet Union sought to develop and deploy arsenals they thought necessary to satisfy their military and political requirements. In the 1960s, increasing public concern over both the nuclear arms race and the effects of nuclear testing led to major international agreements, including the Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty, the Threshold Test Ban Treaty, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, while these agreements had some effect on limiting the scope of both the arms race and nuclear testing, they did not preclude the two superpowers from continuing to build up their strategic nuclear arsenals.

Efforts to limit the superpower arms race through the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in the 1970s kept a dialogue going between the United States and the former Soviet Union, but did little to slow the development and production of more powerful and accurate nuclear weapons. Political controversy over the SALT II agreement in 1979, coupled with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan late that year, curtailed immediate prospects for halting the arms race.

REAL REDUCTIONS

In the period from 1985 to 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union took a series of dramatic initiatives to reduce the threat of nuclear war. A major foreign policy objective of the Reagan administration was to negotiate a new kind of treaty, one that would do more than merely limit the growth in the number of strategic weapons in the arsenals of the two superpowers, but rather would actually require a significant reduction. The 1986 Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Reykjavik marked the beginning of the process that stretched the envelope of what was achievable beyond anything negotiated before, and set the stage for the arms reduction treaties to follow. This process spanned the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, and the results — the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) and START (Strategic Arms Reduction) treaties — were groundbreaking in many ways. As a result of the 1987 INF Treaty, for the first time an entire class of nuclear weapons (all intermediate- and shorter-range missiles possessed by the United States and the Soviet Union) were eliminated. Under the 1991 START Treaty, each side's strategic offensive arms were reduced by over 40 percent. INF and START also broke new ground in providing for extensive and intrusive verification regimes — including a host of on-site inspections — to verify reductions and declarations under the treaties.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s made clear that the need to deter a general war between East and West in Europe was greatly diminished. However, despite the success of START and INF in dealing with strategic and theater-level nuclear weapons, thousands of so-called "tactical" nuclear weapons remained in the arsenals of NATO and the Russian Federation — from gravity bombs designed to be carried by small aircraft to nuclear landmines, torpedoes, and depth charges. As an important initial step to address this situation, President Bush and Soviet President Gorbachev took parallel actions in September 1991 to remove most non-strategic nuclear weapons from deployment. These actions, taken without benefit of formal negotiated agreement, resulted in all Soviet short-range nuclear weapons being relocated to sites within the Russian Federation itself by June 1992 and the removal to storage of all nuclear weapons from U.S. and Russian surface ships and attack submarines.

Additionally, to reduce tensions further and to encourage Russia — in the wake of the attempted coup in Moscow in 1991 — to lower its nuclear alert status, President Bush announced sweeping unilateral measures regarding strategic systems. These included removing strategic bombers from an alert posture, accelerating the deactivation of those missiles that were to be eliminated under START, and terminating the development of road- and rail-mobile ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) systems. Russia took similar steps. With these initiatives, the foundation was laid for prompt ratification of the START Treaty.

IMPLEMENTING TREATIES IN THE REAL WORLD

The process of implementing arms control agreements that reduce nuclear arms has been complicated, especially with the backdrop of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the new states that took its place. Future historians will debate whether the increased openness regarding the implementation of both START and INF contributed to a more general easing of relations between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The implementation commissions established under INF and START have played a continuing role in ensuring that the treaties are implemented effectively. The START Treaty, in particular, contains hundreds of pages of painstakingly detailed provisions for implementing everything from what kind of equipment inspectors can use during inspections, to how missile telemetry broadcast during flight tests must be formatted for exchange with the other side.

Treaty inspections — once virtually the only contact that the U.S. and Soviet/Russian military had with each other — are now part of a host of other activities, from reciprocal military exchange visits and joint training exercises to a joint U.S.-Russian center being established near Moscow to share early warning data on missile launches. Ironically, the millions of dollars in aid that the United States has provided to states of the former Soviet Union in order to help dismantle their aging strategic arsenals often means that at some Russian facilities, American contractors are busy disassembling the same items that U.S. inspectors are there to count.

To regard ongoing treaty inspections and other monitoring activities as a relic of the past would be a mistake, however. Every aspect of the new openness between our countries makes its own unique contribution, and inspectors are allowed to go places and verify data that would still otherwise be closed to our eyes. They are only part of the new relationship, but still an important part.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The verification mechanisms of the START Treaty are still a useful and productive tool for both sides. However, the nuclear weapons inventory left over from the Cold War remains large — larger than needed to ensure for U.S. national security today. START has reduced strategic nuclear weapons by approximately 40 percent from the highest levels achieved during the Cold War, but the remaining forces are just under 6,000 warheads deployed on each side. Neither the United States nor Russia requires such a large inventory of weapons. However, a combination of congressional restrictions,

the need to secure predictability in an uncertain future, and the difficulty in keeping up with the dynamic political world, left each side with larger inventories of nuclear weapons than they needed or desired.

As President George W. Bush assumed office, his administration faced a paradox on the strategic weapons front. Although the numbers of nuclear weapons were clearly higher than the United States and Russia needed for their legitimate security concerns, during the 1990s neither side had felt it could reduce unneeded weapons in the absence of a formal agreement. START inspections were working relatively smoothly, providing valuable insight into each other's forces, but carried with them a small mountain of rules resulting from detailed procedures written for the Cold War relationship.

Clearly something needed to be done. Negotiating a whole new treaty equal in scope and detail to START was not the answer. Not only had the antagonism and mutual suspicion of the Cold War receded, but also the START regime itself was still in place, and did not need to be duplicated. Moreover, any addition or expansion to that regime would have been lengthy and complicated to negotiate. Cold War fears may have vanished, but writing the rules for inspecting the facilities where each side manufactured, stored, or disassembled nuclear weapons would have required additional painstaking negotiations and ever more formal and complex rules. Visiting an airfield to count bombers is one thing; getting inside a nuclear weapon factory is another.

In a major foreign policy address at the National Defense University on May 1, 2001, President Bush said the United States "must move beyond the constraints of the 30-year-old Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty" and replace it with a "new framework." Although the president did not elaborate what the new strategic framework would look like, he reaffirmed his intention to deploy ballistic missile defenses as well as to cut further the U.S. nuclear arsenal. "My goal is to move quickly to reduce nuclear forces," Bush declared.

In keeping with his pledge to reduce the overall level of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to one consistent with the U.S. need to safeguard its interests, President Bush decided to seek a new solution. He announced at a summit meeting with President Putin in Crawford, Texas, in November 2001, that the United States intended to reduce its operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to a level of 1,700- to 2,200- over the next decade. Shortly thereafter, President Putin announced a similar goal for Russia, and the two presidents later agreed to work on recording their plans in a legally binding document.

Less than six months later, Presidents Bush and Putin signed the Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions. Under this treaty, the United States and Russia will reduce their strategic nuclear warheads to a level of 1,700-2,200 by December 31, 2012, a reduction of nearly two-thirds below current levels. This new, legally binding treaty codifies the deep reductions announced by Presidents Bush and Putin.

THE NEW WAY

The Moscow Treaty is not just a new treaty, but a new kind of treaty. Reflecting the mutual trust and cooperation in the new U.S.-Russian strategic relationship, the Moscow Treaty affords a great deal of flexibility to each Party to meet unforeseen future contingencies.

It is simple — just five articles and 485 words, barely two pages long, with no annexes or protocols, as opposed to the 47 pages and 19 articles of START, with its hundreds of pages of annexes and protocols. It gives each side the flexibility to carry out reductions, for example, by removing warheads from bomber bases and missiles, or by removing missiles, launchers, and bombers from operational service. In contrast, START mandated precise "counting rules" that force — sometimes unrealistically — over- and under-counting of actual weapons in the name of strict parity and unambiguous accounting.

The flexibility provided by the new treaty allows each side to determine how to make its own reductions.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that the United States plans to deactivate all 50 of its 10-warhead Peacekeeper ICBMs and convert four Trident submarines from strategic to conventional service. Additional steps to reduce the number of U.S. operationally deployed strategic nuclear warheads to the 1,700-2,200 level will be decided subsequently. Some of the warheads that are removed from deployment will be used as spares, some will be stored, and some will be destroyed. Russia, too, may choose its own means of reducing its warheads.

This new treaty is only one part of a new strategic framework that will redefine U.S.-Russian relations in the years to come. Like its predecessors, it both defines and benefits from the prevailing attitude of its time. Like its predecessors, it will enhance stability and reduce the threat of nuclear war, and is responsive to the Parties' obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ultimately to agree on nuclear disarmament. Unlike its predecessors, it is an arrangement between friends to foster predictability and openness at the beginning of a new era of warmer relations.