

# BULLETIN

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## Perspectives on Tactical Nuclear Weapons Negotiations Between the U.S. and Russia

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*The United States will seek to initiate negotiations with Russia on tactical nuclear weapons within one year after the entry into force of the new START Treaty. Because of conditions set by the Russian government, however, it is doubtful that such talks would take place. For Russia to change its position would require not only positive gestures by the U.S. and NATO, but also the persuading of Russia that a verifiable reduction of tactical nuclear arsenal is in its interest.*

The Treaty reducing the strategic offensive arms of Russia and the U.S. (the new START), which came into force on 5 February 2011, constitutes the next albeit not breakthrough step in reducing the nuclear arsenals of both countries.<sup>1</sup> It establishes verification and information exchange mechanisms, which were absent after the START I treaty expired in 2009. The new START will remain in force for 10 years and its implementation period will last seven years.

**U.S. Approach to Further Reductions.** According to President Barack Obama's message to the U.S. Senate on 2 February 2011, the U.S. will seek to initiate negotiations with Russia on tactical nuclear weapons within one year after the entry into force of the New START. This category comprises weapons with a range of up to 500 kilometres, smaller yields in comparison to strategic warheads or, under a broader definition, nuclear weapons that never have been the subject of a legally binding arms-control agreement. It includes artillery shells, mines, gravity bombs or short-range missiles. The negotiations would be aimed at verifiable reduction measures and a lowering of the disparity between U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear stockpiles. According to unofficial estimates, the U.S. possesses about 500 operational tactical nuclear warheads (including about 180 gravity bombs stored in five NATO countries), while Russia has between 2,000 and 4,000 such warheads. The U.S. President's statement is consistent with the Senate's conditions set in its resolution of advice and consent to ratification of the Treaty. It also meets the expectations of some NATO members that the treaty will open a door to reductions of tactical weapons in Europe. Poland has supported efforts toward increasing transparency regarding the number and storage locations of Russian weapons and their relocation away from areas adjacent to NATO members (storage facilities with tactical nuclear weapons might be located in the Kaliningrad region and the Kola Peninsula) as well as the inclusion of such weapons in further U.S.-Russia negotiations on the reduction of nuclear arsenals. This was reflected in a joint press article in February 2010 by Polish and Swedish ministers of foreign affairs, as well as in the Polish-Norwegian Initiative presented to NATO in April 2010.

**Russian Conditions.** Russia insists the beginning of negotiations be contingent upon several conditions that are unlikely to be met in the nearest future. First, Russia demands the complete withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe as a pre-condition to any talks on tactical nuclear inventories. Second, Russia stresses the necessity of the full implementation of the new START, which implies that in the most extreme case the talks could not begin until seven years from now assuming Russia will not withdraw from the Treaty before then. Russia may do so if it perceives the

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<sup>1</sup> Ł. Kulesa, *The Treaty on the Reduction of U.S. and Russian Strategic Nuclear Arsenals*, "Bulletin" PISM, no. 52 (128) of 8 April 2010.

U.S. missile defence system (MD) has reduced significantly the effectiveness of Russia's nuclear deterrent. According to suggestions by the Russian foreign ministry from 5 February 2011, that scenario might occur with the implementation of the third and fourth phases of the U.S. MD architecture in Europe – part of the NATO missile defence system. Therefore, to Russia the future of the treaty is dependent on agreement on MD and it is irrelevant whether the U.S. believes that the continued improvement and deployment of currently planned systems does not constitute an extraordinary event justifying a withdrawal from the Treaty. What's more, Russia wants further negotiations to include other nuclear weapons states. Last, they should include other armaments categories, such as weapons in space, long-range non-nuclear offensive systems developed by the U.S., as well as conventional forces (according to Russia, tactical nuclear weapons balance NATO's superiority in conventional weapons).

**Four ways to Entice Russia.** Russia's conditions for negotiations raise questions about whether U.S. efforts to initiate talks within a year have any chance for success. It seems that the U.S. has at its disposal several ways to encourage Russia to change its position.

First, the U.S. has consistently stressed its willingness to include in negotiations non-deployed strategic nuclear warheads, which are perceived as the most important U.S. bargaining chip with Russia. Their inclusion will alleviate the problem of numerical disparity between the U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear stockpiles. A verifiable reduction in non-deployed warheads would also decrease Russia's concerns that in the future the U.S. could load additional warheads on its strategic missiles. Nonetheless, it is questionable whether that reduction is as significant for Russia as the reduction of tactical weapons is for the U.S. and NATO.

Second, the U.S. and other NATO members could decide to reduce the number of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Such reductions could be accompanied with calls on Russia to take part in negotiations on tactical weapons, which could increase international pressure on Russian authorities. This would be consistent with NATO's Strategic Concept, which ties any further reductions to seeking a Russian agreement on transparency of its tactical weapons in Europe and their relocation away from territory of NATO members while taking into account the disparity between the two stockpiles. Nevertheless, it is probable that such actions and the accompanying international pressure would be ignored by Russia.

Third, the need to negotiate tactical weapons reductions could be articulated during U.S., NATO and Russia talks concerning the creation of a common MD system. Achieving agreement in this sphere is itself a challenge, though desirable for the Alliance. Nonetheless, some NATO members have had a sceptical attitude as to the level of cooperation proposed by Russia (which strives to obtain wide influence on the shape and functioning of the NATO system). During discussions dedicated to MD, the U.S. and other NATO members could use the argument that MD cooperation could be deepened along with an increase in mutual trust, the building of which would be contingent upon reaching agreement on tactical nuclear arsenals.

Fourth, the possibility to influence Russia may occur if negotiations on the modernization of the CFE regime begin.<sup>2</sup> In such a case, NATO members could express reservations that without parallel negotiations on tactical weapons, a conventional balance in Europe could not be established. Using such an argument depends, however, on escaping from an impasse related to the revival of the CFE regime, which was not accomplished in the past year despite efforts to do so. Furthermore, combining discussion about tactical weapons with talks about MD or CFE may only complicate resolution on the latter issues.

**Conclusions.** The United States possesses limited means of inducing Russia to take part in negotiations on tactical nuclear weapons. Available bargaining chips do not guarantee success and additionally could complicate negotiations on MD and CFE. Nevertheless, in order to encourage Russia to participate in negotiations, an advantage should be sought from all available means. On one hand, positive gestures vis-à-vis Russia should be used. Apart from inclusion in the negotiation process of non-deployed warheads, a decision could be taken within NATO to reduce U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. On the other hand, the co-responsibility of Russia in the process of building trust should be stressed. The U.S. and its NATO allies should indicate that Russian engagement in negotiations on tactical nuclear inventory could have a positive impact on cooperation related to MD as well as CFE. Russia should be persuaded that a verifiable reduction of tactical nuclear weapons is in its interest and, conversely, that a lack of cooperation in this area would be detrimental to its interests.

<sup>2</sup> J. Durkalec, *The Russian Approach towards Revival of Conventional Arms Control Regime in Europe*, "Bulletin" PISM, no. 134 (210) of 22 November 2010.