

CHALLENGES TO BROADENING THE SCOPE OF U.S.-RUSSIAN ARMS CONTROL

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Since 2014, the U.S. government has expressed increasing concerns about Russia's emerging military capabilities as well as Moscow's intentions, particularly toward U.S. allies and partners in Europe. The incoming U.S. administration is likely to take steps to engage with Russia in a strategic stability dialogue and even potentially seek to conclude numerical and/or operational arms control agreements. The last several years have seen no shortage of proposals from civil society experts, some of which are likely to become policies of the incoming administration.

While there is a possibility that the incoming administration may use a New START extension to signal a break with the nuclear policies of the outgoing administration, it's also likely that U.S. positions on arms control with Russia will take some time to emerge. The incoming administration will have to outline its defense and procurement priorities, including the future of the nuclear triad and the nuclear enterprise, as well as a missile defense strategy.[i] These will have to contend with an environment of economic constraints and political divisions. The incoming administration will also need to reinvigorate relationships with U.S. allies and partners and re-engage in international cooperation on immediate threats, like global health security. And, it will need to nest U.S.-Russian risk reduction efforts within a broader strategy for the bilateral relationship that is likely to remain fraught with hostility and mutual recrimination. With these points in mind, here are my answers to the questions posed.

How would you prioritize the incorporation of new elements into a future arms control negotiating framework?

There is a veritable cornucopia of arms control proposals that have been developed by U.S., Western, and Russian experts over the last several years. Some issues, like Russia's stated concerns about the evolution of the U.S. missile defense architecture and conventional prompt global strike have been on the table for some time. So has the U.S. concern about Russia's nonstrategic nuclear weapons. But new issues have also been added to the table, to include hypersonic, cyber, space, and autonomous weapons systems. President Putin's 2018 speech to the Federal Assembly made public Russia's so-called "exotic capabilities." [ii] The collapse of the INF and Open Skies treaties amid allegations of noncompliance, as well as close encounters between Russian and U.S./allied forces, have highlighted the need to invest time and attention into security architectures in key regions. There is general consensus on all sides that many of these issues require focused dialogues before negotiations allow actionable solutions, if available, to emerge. These focused dialogues could take place not only in a bilateral format, but also within the P5, and even potentially within a NATO-Russia format.

Russia's nonstrategic nuclear weapons and novel capabilities are issues important to the U.S. government, legislature, and allies. But, it's not entirely clear that Russia wants to negotiate on this issue due to its perceived need for regional deterrence capabilities. This raises some questions: Is there a minimum level of nonstrategic or novel nuclear capabilities that Russia would need or be comfortable with? Are there links with some very specific U.S. capabilities that could be considered for tradeoffs? Is this something that could be easier to engage on at the regional level (with links to conventional capabilities) or should all nuclear weapons be handled together and separately from conventional? There may be venue and format tradeoffs here. Further, according to President Putin's January 2018 speech, Russia procured some of its novel nuclear systems to counter U.S. missile defense. But does that also mean that Russia no longer perceives U.S. missile defense as a threat because it has factored it into modernization since the early 2000s? Or could some of these capabilities be viewed separately as bargaining chips in future arms control? At least at present, this is not clear.

Washington may remain interested in constraining all nuclear warheads, potentially to a single nuclear warhead limit that includes nondeployed and nonstrategic warheads.[iii] Some have argued for a solution involving adaptive warhead limits that would "tie one side's allowed strategic nuclear deployment to the other side's chosen level of ballistic missile defense deployment." [iv] There are also creative ideas related to delivery vehicles, including intercontinental ground-launched boost-glide missiles and nuclear-powered torpedoes.[v] All proposals will require creative approaches to verification.

What is the most highly destabilizing weapon system that requires immediate attention?

My personal opinion is that there isn't one "most highly destabilizing weapon system" because risks have more to do with how sides plan to use certain capabilities.

For example, there is some concern that, in a crisis or early in a conflict (or in the initial period of war), Russia may want to use offensive cyber, counterspace, and precision capabilities to deny its opponent(s) information superiority or achieve coercive effects. The effects of such Russian actions on the other side's NC3, C4ISR, or civilian infrastructure may be unpredictable and also potentially highly escalatory. The first step to trying to mitigate risks involves agreeing that this is an area of mutual concern and then exploring practical risk reduction steps. But, right now, points of convergence with opportunities to mutually improve security are unclear.

What would a negotiating framework look like to address these new elements bilaterally and multilaterally?

After a New START extension, the United States may be able to work bilaterally (with Russia and China, and maybe others) on key strategic stability issues while also engaging in various multilateral and international venues. But, a neat negotiating framework for all these new elements is unlikely because, as noted, many of them still need to "ripen" through dialogue. Moreover, space, cyber, and issues related to autonomous systems span across domains, institutions, and stakeholders. They will prove complex for any domestic interagency process, and an even greater challenge of comprehension and coordination when scaled up to the bilateral or multilateral level. While some issue linkage at a political level is possible, working out the technological and military-strategic details will take time—and all the while the capabilities in question and employment concepts will continue to evolve.

Any arms control framework will need to be resilient to political fluctuation in the bilateral relationship.

Given the current volatility of the relationship, envisioning a resilient bilateral channel is very difficult. One way could be to have strictly technical engagement away from public eyes and twitter. Another way could be to expand the engagement away from the bilateral toward the regional, P5, or multilateral so that there is staying power and pressures from others to keep at it. There is potential for multiple approaches at once.

Are there other instruments or mechanisms – short of a legally binding treaty – that could improve bilateral transparency and confidence?

Many experts have proposed shifts in declaratory policy, moratoriums, and various transparency and confidence-building measures.^[vi] Some have put forward risk reduction measures that would include noninterference with nuclear C3I.^[vii] Others have stressed norms. For example, when it comes to space, there are proposals of preserving the norm of noninterference with national technical means,^[viii] developing norms of behavior and rules of the road in outer space,^[ix] or creating rules of the road for space and cyber space in peacetime, crisis, and conflict.^[x] Some of these could be explored bilaterally and in various multilateral fora.

Some propose non-treaty approaches to arms control. However, at times, it's not always clear if these are proposed as a response to needs for flexibility due to perceived changes in the world order or because some think it may be more practical because of challenges in seeking U.S. Senate ratification?

Future arms control will need to be durable enough to pass the bipartisan smell test in the United States Senate because otherwise all policy advances will be fragile.

I think it's important to appreciate the limitations of this particular moment because deliberating, let alone agreeing on, limits on military technologies may prove challenging when numerous states are engaged in the pursuit of military innovation. But it doesn't mean the United States and Russia shouldn't try to engage in arms control or strategic stability discussions. For example, President Putin has said that future deterrence approaches may not necessarily rely on nuclear weapons.^[xi] So, could both sides work toward nuclear arms control while engaging in military innovation on conventional capabilities? That may be the most likely outcome, but only time will tell.

This discussion paper, which was prepared in response to questions at a Track II workshop on strategic stability organized by CSIS and the PIR Center in November 2020, represents the personal views of the author.

[i] For a discussion of fundamental questions on missile defense, see Brad Roberts, "Missile Defense: Fit for What Purpose in 2030," in Brad Roberts, editor, *Fit for Purpose? The U.S. Strategic Posture in 2030 and Beyond* (CGSR LLNL, October 2020), <https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/The-US-Strategic-Posture-in-2030-and-Beyond.pdf>

[ii] And, if that speech was intended as an invitation to arms control, it's not entirely clear that the message worked as intended on a U.S. audience.

[iii] In addition to proposals of the Trump administration, see, among others, Rose Gottemoeller, "Rethinking Nuclear Arms Control," *The Washington Quarterly*, September 2020, https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/1/2181/files/2020/09/Gottemoeller_TWQ_43-3.pdf or Steven Pifer, "The Next Round: The United States and Nuclear Arms Reductions After New Start," Brookings, November 29, 2010, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-next-round-the-united-states-and-nuclear-arms-reductions-after-new-start/>.

[iv] Aaron Miles, "Adaptive Warhead Limits for Further Progress on Strategic Arms Control," RealClear Defense, February 6, 2017, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/02/07/progress_on_strategic_arms_control_110760.html

[v] Pranay Vaddi and James M. Acton, "A ReSTART for U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control: Enhancing Security Through Cooperation," CEIP, October 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/02/restart-for-u.s.-russian-nuclear-arms-control-enhancing-security-through-cooperation-pub-82705>

[vi] See, for example, James Timbie, "A Way Forward," *Daedalus*, Spring 2020, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/way-forward>; Linton F. Brooks, "The End of Arms Control?" *Daedalus*, Spring 2020, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/daed_a_01791?mobileUi=0; Vince Manzo, "Nuclear Arms Control Without a Treaty: Risks and Options After New START," March 2019, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IRM-2019-U-019494.pdf and see Linton Brooks, op. cit.

[vii] James M. Acton, "Escalation through Entanglement: How the Vulnerability of Command-and-Control Systems Raises the Risks of an Inadvertent Nuclear War," *International Security*, Summer 2018, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/full/10.1162/isec_a_00320

[viii] Michael Markey, Jonathan Pearl, and Benjamin Bahney, "How Satellites Can Save Arms Control," *Foreign Affairs*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2020-08-05/how-satellites-can-save-arms-control>

[ix] Frank A. Rose, "Safeguarding the Heavens: The United States and the Future of Norms of Behavior in Outer Space," Brookings, June 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FP_20180614_safeguarding_the_heavens.pdf

[x] James N. Miller and Richard Fontaine, "Navigating Dangerous Pathways," CNAS, January 30, 2018, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/navigating-dangerous-pathways>

[xi] "Встреча с рабочей группой по подготовке предложений о внесении поправок в Конституцию" [Meeting with a working group to prepare constitutional amendment proposals], President of Russia, February 13, 2020, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62776>.

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