

The Imperative of U.S.-Russian Disarmament Collaboration

By Alexey Gromyko

International nuclear arms races are in the making, although there is still a chance to reign them in. Unfortunately, it seems that it will get worse before it may get better. The 2022 Joseph Biden defense budget of the U.S. is a mammoth one even surpassing the last defense budget of Donald Trump. It is inevitable that the U.S. will press forward to modernize its nuclear triad. Russia to a large extent has already done so. It is a reverse situation in comparison to the Cold War era. This time NATO has an overwhelming superiority in conventional weapons, and Russia with its nuclear doctrine has to rely heavily on nuclear deterrence. Recently the UK has sharply raised the ceiling of its nuclear warheads. A new fundamental shift is occurring—a potentially radical increase in a number of Chinese ICBMs, which may put in question the Russia-U.S. dialogue on the future of strategic stability. Moreover, within this dialogue there are competing aims—the U.S. wants to embrace all strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons. For its part, Russia wants the dialogue to cover all offensive and defensive, nuclear and non-nuclear strategic weapons.

The disruptive technologies are another complicating factor. Hypersonics are a real concern should such systems be deployed in the proximity of Russia. The same relates to the new INF systems, which are being quickly developed by the U.S. In Germany there is already a revived NATO military infrastructure, closed in the aftermath of the 1987 INF treaty, and designed for operating INF systems. In the eyes of Moscow there is a high probability of a new Euromissile crisis exploding in two to three years if Russia's proposals for a moratorium are not responded to in a rational way. Nuclear posturing on all sides, including NATO nuclear sharing, may change for worse more quickly than that if recent Russia's proposals on security guarantees, handed over to the U.S. and NATO, are not taken seriously. If the NATO—Russia Final Act, or what is left of it, is jettisoned, the U.S. will have the right to move its tactical nuclear weapons, for example, to Poland, and Russia—to Kaliningrad or/and Belarus. What Moscow considers to be a non-negotiable red line is a non-deployment of strike systems in Ukraine and on the territory of other Russian neighbors. If these developments occur, they can lead to the worst scenario, a change of the deterrence doctrines of

both Russia and the U.S. from a counter- or a second-strike capability to a pre-emptive one.

The corrosion of the non-proliferation regime also occurs due to the further spread (or the potential growth) of nuclear technologies, which is an obvious risk inherent in the AUK–U.S. adventurism. The U.S. strategy of a new cold war with China envisages the creeping involvement of India in the anti-Beijing military alliance, which will inevitably spur a nuclear arms race between Delhi and Beijing. Pakistan would be inevitably involved in it. The more the official nuclear powers brace for more competition with each other, the less they coordinate their efforts in stemming proliferation in the Korean peninsula, and the less they work on the return of the U.S. to the JCPOA. Meanwhile Iran is raising the enrichment of uranium to 60 percent.

Is there a chance that in present circumstances the RevCon can achieve progress? There are certain elements that could help to bring it about. In the core of this lie the responsibilities of the P5 states, which at last should convene a P5 conference as was agreed in 2020 before the pandemic struck. In Vienna the talks on the JCPOA should move forward with an active support of the U.S., which is responsible for the current crisis. The return of the U.S. and Iran to the deal would defuse a looming nuclear arms race in the Middle East among Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel. The U.S. and NATO should strive to work with Russia on achieving mutual guarantees of security ruling out deployment of nuclear or/and conventional strike systems in the proximity to each other. Only the U.S. and Russia working together in goodwill can persuade China to refrain from destabilizing steps with respect to its nuclear arsenal. On its part, China should clarify if there are changes in its nuclear doctrine, which can breach its nonproliferation obligations. As to the nuclear doctrines of the U.S. and Russia, it should be a logical step on the basis of the Putin-Biden Geneva statement that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought to proceed to embrace sole purpose as being understood to be a deterrence-only and no first use posture.

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