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Arms Control: The End of an Era

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Arms Control: The End of an Era

By Jay P. Kosminsky

I am grateful to the members of this committee for the opportunity to discuss the START Treaty and America's strategic nuclear priorities in the years ahead.

Due to the near-miraculous events of past months, I find myself in the position of discussing a treaty that history rapidly is passing by. Even as the Senate begins the formal process of ratification, we can look forward to a new era in which the incrementalism of adversarial arms control is left behind, and in which America safely will be able to steeply reduce its level of nuclear armaments while maintaining its security.

East-West arms control as it has been practiced until now borders on irrelevancy. The problems it set out to solve have been subject to a meta-solution that had little if anything to do with the arms control process: the collapse of the Soviet regime that for forty years propelled the arms race and kept the world on the edge of oblivion.

Still, if recent events are reversed, the START Treaty could again become a document with important implications for national security. Before it is ratified, therefore, the Senate should ensure that some potentially serious issues are resolved. These include the question of who precisely are America's partners in this treaty now that the Soviet Union no longer exists, and whether all verification provisions — particularly the ban on missile test data encryption — are understood in the same way by all sides. Before taking a closer look at these issues, however, I would like to reflect on the assumptions of the Cold War era just past — the "arms control" era — and to see what lessons can be drawn for the new age before us.

Arms Control Past

The end of the Cold War has proved false many of the assumptions underlying arms control theory, as set out by its pioneers in the 1960s. The first misconception of course was the "arms race" itself. Looking back, it becomes clear that there never was an "arms race," at least not as it was understood by arms control's most ardent advocates. There never were two blind goliaths stumbling forward in mindless competition. The arms race was not a misunderstanding, not driven by mistrust and suspicion. The real arms race was propelled by Moscow's conscious and unabashed drive for military superiority in pursuit of its imperial ambitions. The final evidence, if ever we really needed it, is that the demise of the Soviet regime, not arms control, has brought the arms race virtually to a dead halt. To be sure, ending the arms race was only one of the goals of arms control. There were others: increasing strategic stability, decreasing the risks of war, and lessening the damage should war occur. It achieved none of these. During the 1970s and 1980s, arms control rechanneled the arms competition, often away from programs in which America might have had an advantage like space-based defenses, and into other weapons like tanks, artillery, and aircraft, all of which Moscow built in prodigious numbers during the 1980s in pursuit of a military edge over NATO allies.

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Strategic stability also proved an elusive quest. Efforts through SALT I to control the size and hence throw-weight of new Soviet missiles failed when Moscow deliberately misled American negotiators about the dimensions of its new generation of ICBMs and deployed them in circumvention of what it knew to be America's understanding of the treaty. Even under START, U.S. land-based forces will be marginally more vulnerable — despite cuts in Moscow's heavy missile force — as a result of deadly enhancements of the SS-18's silo-busting capabilities, taken in combination with cuts in America's ICBM force.

Fatal Flaw. The fatal flaw of arms control theory was its implicit hope that it ultimately could have a political effect, easing the climate of misunderstanding and suspicion that was judged to be the real culprit behind the superpower rivalry, and aiming to improve security on both sides. But as it turned out, the real culprit was the Soviet regime itself, which only became more hostile and expansionist with each measure of security it gained. It is important to understand this because for years the arms race was presented as the problem, and arms control — often in the form of unilateral arms restraint — as the solution. Thus arms control advocates often went astray. They opposed weapon programs, from SDI to the B-1 bomber, that in fact did more to bring the arms race to an end — by frustrating Moscow's drive for superiority — than all the arms control of the post-World War II era.

Before the arms race could end, the Cold War had to be won. And it was. The result is that all the objectives of arms control now are within reach. The arms race has ended, arms expenditures are down, the risk of war is reduced, and there is every reason to believe that Moscow soon will give up its most "destabilizing" weapons.

Arms control had little to do with this outcome. To continue to talk the language of arms control today is to talk in terms of Newtonian physics after Einstein. The language still all makes sense within its own narrow framework of logic, but in the grand scheme of things it has been shown to have little to do with the powerful forces that shape the universe of war and peace.

Arms Control Present

The collapse of the Soviet regime for the time being has rendered START obsolete, and if all goes well in Moscow, it will remain so. If, however, Russia's democracy fails, START again could become central to America's national security equation. In this context, I have several serious reservations about the treaty that I believe should be resolved fully before it is ratified.

The first is the question of with whom the United States is entering into START. The State Department's current plan, as I understand it, is for Russia to sign the START Treaty and for the three other CIS strategic nuclear powers — Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine — to sign legally binding side agreements assuring access for inspections and other verification provisions on their territory. Under this formula, Russian ownership of START-limited weapons would be established and Russia ultimately would be responsible for bringing the total number of weapons down to START limits.

The problem is that the CIS states themselves cannot agree on a formula, and I was told just last week by a member of the Defense Committee of the Russian Supreme Soviet that the issue has become rather heated, despite assurances to the contrary from the State Department. Russia apparently wants all START business conducted through Moscow. Hence if the U.S. were to demand an inspection on Ukrainian soil, it would make the request through Moscow and bypass Kiev. This is unacceptable thus far to Ukraine, and should be unacceptable to the United States, since it does not respect the sovereignty of each CIS state.

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The [redacted] therefore should delay ratification until all outstanding issues have been resolved regarding the discrete obligations and responsibilities of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine regarding the Treaty. Before ratification, all necessary implementing agreements should be drawn up and signed by these states. These agreements should fully respect the sovereignty of each state while establishing clear lines of responsibility for verification and monitoring provisions, and central control and authority over the weapons themselves.

Also at issue of course is the as yet unresolved question of whether and when the non-Russian strategic nuclear powers of the CIS, particularly troublesome Kazakhstan, will rid themselves of their strategic nuclear weapons. The assumption on the U.S. side is that these weapons will be dismantled as part of Russia's START reductions. I suggest to the Senate that a unilateral U.S. statement be attached to the treaty that makes explicit this understanding.

A related issue is whether the Russian government in fact has full authority over the former Soviet military forces that have operational control over START-controlled weapons.

Technically, the military is under the control of the CIS, an entity (or non-entity) with which the U.S. will not be signing any agreements, and which is apt to have a limited lifespan. The presumption is that strategic nuclear forces in practice will be under Russian control, but increasingly the military leadership is divided over the question of to whom it owes its allegiance, and elements of the officer corps are taking on an independent political role. The situation warrants close watching and, I suggest, some further investigation by this Committee before the treaty is ratified.

Further Reservations. My second set of reservations concern the more technical issues of "encryption" of data from ballistic missile test launches, and secondly the production of mobile ballistic missile components. As you know, Washington and Moscow upon signing START declared their intention to cease encryption of missile test data beginning on November 28, 1991. But in December, an ICBM was launched from Kazakhstan with test data encrypted. Moscow claimed the ICBM launch was a civilian "space launch" not covered by the treaty, and that its declaration of intent therefore did not apply. Last year, Moscow also conducted a series of SS-24 ballistic missile launches without first giving prior notice as required by the 1988 Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement — again on grounds that the tests were of "space launch" vehicles. Hence even as it was negotiating START, Moscow was trying to establish a precedent — as yet not vigorously contested by the U.S. — for circumventing a key verification provision of the treaty.

Before ratification the Senate should seek a formal statement by the Russian government that henceforth no similar attempts to circumvent the treaty's "no encryption" provisions will occur.

The second technical issue is mobile missile component production. While this issue is highly sensitive, and I have no access to the classified information needed to address it in depth, it is clear from the public record that a problem exists. While the production of mobile missiles is subject to verification procedures in the START Treaty, production of components is not. Moscow apparently is producing solid rocket motors and other components for mobile ICBMs in numbers far higher than needed for planned deployments. As I understand it, the Defense Intelligence Agency, as well as the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have expressed serious concern over this issue. I hope that this committee will resolve this issue to its satisfaction before it recommends ratification of the START Treaty; in addition, a unilateral U.S. statement should accompany the treaty to the effect that a continued production of excess mobile missile components could be considered an "extraordinary event" that would jeopardize the treaty.

Arms Control Future

The most important steps America can take today to ensure its security and move the world toward a more peaceful future have little to do with arms control, or for that matter with arms building. Russia today stands midway between its expansionist Soviet past and what we all hope will be its peaceful democratic future. Helping the CIS states, particularly powerful Russia, toward this future should be America's highest national security priority.

A democratic Russia can be a partner in trade, science, and security, including anti-proliferation and strategic defense. Helping Russia's democrats today can help prevent the Soviet Union or anything like it from arising again in our lifetimes. This means humanitarian aid, financial advice, expertise and membership in international economic organizations, large-scale joint scientific projects, and most of all, private investment. Russia's democrats are engaged in a life-or-death struggle to demilitarize their society, gain control over ex-Soviet armed forces and institutionalize civilian oversight and control of the military. We cannot ensure the success of their endeavor; too much depends on forces out of our control. But we owe it our best effort.

The most important type of "arms control" America will engage in during this era will not involve sitting around a table with potential adversaries, but cooperating with allies — hopefully including Russia — to use all means to stop the proliferation of mass destruction weapons and technology to such outlaw regimes as those in Iran, Iraq, Libya, and North Korea.

In coming years America will have an opportunity to completely restructure its offensive and defensive nuclear forces. This should not be a numbers game. The question is not how low can we go, but what threats will America face and what forces will be needed to ensure security. Barring the rise of a neo-Soviet regime in Moscow, the good news is that there is no nuclear threat comparable to the Soviet threat on the horizon. Security therefore likely can be achieved at far lower cost and with far fewer nuclear weapons than has been the case in years past. In the near term, I suggest the following steps:

- 1) **Resolve outstanding START issues before ratifying the treaty.** I hope the Senate will address the outstanding issues I have just discussed before ratifying the START Treaty. If these can be resolved to the Senate's satisfaction, START then should be ratified, mainly because its extensive verification and monitoring provisions will be useful during this period of transition in the former Soviet Union. These provisions are unprecedented for a treaty of this type, and on this account the treaty is an advance over its predecessors.

- 2) **Once START is ratified and forces reduced to START levels, proceed via informal arms control to President Bush's proposed level of 4,500 strategic warheads, and de-MIRVing of ICBMs.** As long as a friendly regime remains in place in Moscow, deeper mutual cuts than those envisioned under START are desirable as long as Moscow reciprocates. Bush should announce unilaterally the U.S. intention, once START limits have been reached, to further cut U.S. forces to 4,500 warheads and to de-MIRV ICBMs and part of the SLBM force, as he already has proposed. He should outline reciprocal steps he expects of Moscow, particularly concerning the fate of its heavy missiles. Formal Russian agreement on all details, including ultimate force levels, is not necessary. Prolonged negotiations of the type that led to START are likely to create an adversarial atmosphere and delay progress. America simply should proceed toward its own force goals as long as Russian reciprocity makes it safe to do so.

This informal arms control approach is preferable to negotiating new, lower numbers for the START accord. First, trying to change START numbers now could entail a lengthy renegotiation, open new questions about relevant negotiating partners, and delay putting in place the useful verification and inspection procedures of the START Treaty. Further, dangers could arise if the U.S. were to negotiate far lower numbers with the current Russian government, only later to have that government overthrown by a militarist regime that would seek to exploit every potential advantage. Then, suddenly, issues like cheating, undeployed missiles, *Backfire* bombers, and breakout potential again would surface — only this time far more dangerously since America would be without the margin of safety provided by START's relatively high numbers. If, however, America proceeds toward lower numbers via informal agreements, it will have the freedom to continue working cooperatively with Russia's democratic leaders, or if need be to reverse course and fall back on a robust, START-compliant force in the face of a newly-hostile Kremlin regime.

- 3) **Declare an informal moratorium on new strategic weapon development; request Russian reciprocity.** America rightly has shelved for the time being any plans to deploy new types of strategic weapons. Russia, however, still has at least one new ICBM and cruise missile in development. The U.S. should declare a freeze on the deployment of any strategic offensive systems not currently in production, and request Russian reciprocity.

Were this the 1980s, I certainly would have been before you arguing that START provisions require modernization of America's strategic force. I would have argued that rail-MX and the Midgetman mobile ICBM were needed to counter improvements in the yield and accuracy of the SS-18. I would have argued for a full complement of B-2s to take advantage of START counting rules that discount non-ALCM bombers. If America faced a hostile regime in Moscow today, or if it faces one again, these systems would be needed. But with a democratically elected government in Moscow committed to 50 percent cuts this year in military procurement, they are not needed today.

- 4) **Allow the 1972 ABM Treaty to lapse and negotiate a new treaty with Russia allowing for deployment of effective limited missile defenses.** With the Soviet Union now gone, the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty no longer is valid. It should not be revived. In a televised speech on January 29, Russia's President Boris Yeltsin called for the United States and Russia to "create and jointly operate" a global defense system. The first step in this direction was taken during Secretary of State James Baker's trip to Moscow this month when the two governments agreed to a joint monitoring center to track the launch of ballistic missiles anywhere in the world. As the landmark bipartisan agreement forged by the Senate last year indicates, there now exists a consensus among liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, that at least some defenses are prudent as a hedge against an accidental, unauthorized, or light missile attack from any of an expanding number of ballistic missile states.

President Bush is right in asserting that in order for this defense to be effective, the U.S. will have to deploy a system that goes beyond the limits of the ABM Treaty. Preferably, this can be done through cooperative discussions with the Russian government at the Defense and Space Talks. With Washington and Moscow moving away from their former adversarial relationship and toward cooperation, no one need fear that defenses will spark an "arms race." With patience and openness, there is no reason that American defenses — particularly limited defenses — should be viewed as threatening by Moscow, any more than they are viewed that way by London or Tokyo. On the contrary, as suggested just this month by former Soviet Defense and Space Talks delegate Alexander Savelyev, strategic defense cooperation with America offers Russia an opportunity to protect itself against expanding threats at a time when it cannot bear the costs of such a defense itself.

Still Deeper Cuts?

Where these steps ultimately will lead depends mainly on developments within the former Soviet Union. If Russia in particular moves in the direction of neo-Sovietism, these initial steps may be as far as we can hope to go. If such a regime were to revert to the militarism, secrecy, and cheating of the ex-Soviet Union, nuclear modernization programs would have to be restored, including the mobile Midgetman missile and B-2 bomber.

On the other hand, if Russia over the next five or ten years successfully transcends its militarist past and effectively joins the West, even steeper reductions in America's nuclear arsenal then will be possible. Criteria by which to judge Russia's transformation from adversary to ally include: continued adherence to democratic principles; firm civilian control over a drastically reduced military force; demilitarization of the Russian economy; and compliance with START and informal agreements.

If Russia successfully makes this transition, issues like stability and even deterrence — at least in relation to Russia — would be almost wholly irrelevant. The U.S. then would be able to structure its strategic nuclear offenses mainly to deter a hostile upstart nuclear power. Contingent upon the success of anti-proliferation efforts, this could be a small force of perhaps 2,000 total weapons or less. Defenses would guard against a light, accidental, or unauthorized nuclear launch from anywhere in the world, and hedge against an unexpected turn of events in Russia or elsewhere in the CIS. With defenses in place and Russia firmly in the Western camp, the U.S. could consider the elimination from its arsenal of all ICBMs.

Near-Term Scenario. In discussing this scenario, I am not talking about a distant future, but what could well be possible by the turn of the century, only eight years away. This future would never have been conceivable had the Soviet Union survived. It will not be possible if a militarist regime replaces the courageous, struggling democrats now ascendent in the Kremlin. To the extent that it is in our power, America cannot allow Russian democracy to fail. This objective is more important than any arms control or strategic modernization programs now underway.

As we prepare to meet the inevitable threats of the future, let us avoid the intellectual mistakes of the past. Let us never again put ourselves on par with the tyrants of the world, accepting equal responsibility for a blind "arms race" for which we were not to blame. Let us never again think that we can further our own security by making dictators feel more secure. Let us abandon, that is, the logic of arms control, and address the new world through the logic of America's values, interests, and security requirements.