

Russia's Policy on Nonproliferation Under Putin

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On April 24, 2000, in New York, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will open to review continued implementation of the treaty. This is the first conference of the signatory states since the May 1995 decision on indefinite extension of the NPT.

The US, Russia, and the NPT

In the last five years, the cause of nuclear nonproliferation has not been marked by breakthroughs; on the contrary, many experts see regression taking place. Some decisions of the 1995 conference--above all on the principles and objectives of nuclear nonproliferation--have not been fulfilled. This is why many leading experts presume that the best outcome for the 2000 NPT Conference will be the absence of an outcome, i.e., getting through the heated debate and confrontational sentiments of many delegations during the meeting, the absence of any final decisions, preservation of the status quo, and the postponement of practical nonproliferation steps for the future. According to these specialists, the conference at best can manage to avoid substantive losses during the meeting, particularly the withdrawal of certain states from the NPT.

Russia and the United States (along with Great Britain) are the government depositaries of the NPT. They are the authors of the decisions taken at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. The major hopes and expectations concerning progress in the implementation of conference decisions rest upon them. The key decisions to be fulfilled relate to the universality of the treaty and to compliance with the provisions of Article VI concerning disarmament.

In the last five years, neither Russia nor the US has taken any substantive moves to promote nuclear nonproliferation and fulfillment of the 1995 decisions; for instance, there is still the problem of universality (universal adherence to the treaty). The NPT is the most representative of all effective international treaties, but four states (India, Pakistan, Israel, and Cuba) still remain beyond its scope. Three of them are unofficial nuclear weapons states. The 1995 decision calls universal adherence to the NPT "an urgent priority." The resolution on the Middle East, which was one part of a large set of decisions and ensured an agreement on indefinite extension of the NPT, states this even more firmly. It calls upon "all States of the Middle East that have not yet done so, without exception, to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to place their nuclear facilities under full scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards."

The nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in 1998 demonstrated the erosion of the nonproliferation process. One cannot expect a miracle to happen in the few days remaining before the conference: neither the South Asian nations nor Israel have made any step nor will they make even half a step towards the NPT. They are free from NPT commitments and they pursue their own national interests, sometimes very successfully.

In practical terms (leaving aside political declarations), the US tacitly supports Israel's policy in this area, while Russia tacitly supports India's policy. Obviously, the US has the foreign policy and military resources (carrot and stick) to pursue its interests in the area of nonproliferation, and these resources greatly exceed those of Russia. The use of these US resources is made extremely tempting by the opportunity to gain indisputable leadership on nonproliferation issues. Washington, however, exploits these resources irrationally and inconsistently.

After President Clinton visited New Delhi, the US de facto admitted the impossibility of making India join the NPT and decided (although not officially) to support New Delhi's nuclear status to balance China in the region. With this, the implicit attitudes of Russia and the US towards the region have come to coincide. Similarly, the US failure to press Israel to join the NPT makes some Arab states question the advisability of further compliance with the treaty.

At the same time, lack of coherence in US policy is demonstrated by the long diplomatic polemics with Russia on export controls, in particular concerning Iran, at times involving the imposition of sanctions against Russian enterprises. Partnership and dialogue with Russia on defining priorities and seeking common solutions to the key weapons of mass destruction (WMD) nonproliferation problems was rejected as unproductive. Instead, the US adhered to a policy of exerting pressure on Russia, while the negotiations were used to discuss only matters of secondary importance--to the detriment of significant and primary issues.

Throughout this process, Washington ignored the fact that the core national interests of Russia and the US in the area of WMD nonproliferation correspond, and became even closer in the 1990s than they had been in the 1970s and 80s, when the two states never stopped the fruitful dialogue on nonproliferation, despite Cold War tensions. From the Russian perspective, it appears that the temptation to become the only superpower has outweighed the logic of long-term national interests in US nonproliferation policy.

Russia and Nonproliferation

In 1993-1998, Russia also had such temptations, but they were weak and related to the loss of its great power status. The Russian decision-making community--both military and political--was involved in informal but heated debate on this issue. So far, Russia has managed to resist the temptation to pursue unilateral gain through proliferation. If one forgets about deplorable export control violations (which reflected economic chaos and

not deliberate Russian policy) concerning supplies to Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and notwithstanding US criticism (and to a small extent thanks to this criticism, if it played a preventive role), Russia has continued to observe NPT provisions and to share WMD nonproliferation values.

According to the National Security Concept approved in January 2000, strengthening the nonproliferation of WMD and their delivery systems is "the primary task in the area of maintaining national security," while WMD proliferation is considered to be one of Russia's major threats to national security and interests. This provision was incorporated in the Concept not to please the US, but to sum up the results of debate within the Russian decision-making community. The importance of nonproliferation is a view held both at elite and societal levels: according to the results of a public opinion poll conducted at the request of the PIR Center, 78% of Russians support continued nuclear nonproliferation endeavors.

Even throughout the terrible economic difficulties of the 1990s, Russia has never directly or indirectly violated Article I of the NPT, and has not transferred nuclear weapons or their components to other states. Russia complied with Article IV concerning assistance to non-nuclear weapon states in providing peaceful technologies (e.g., the construction of a nuclear power plant in Bushehr, Iran).

Monologue or Dialogue?

However, as far as Article VI (disarmament) is concerned, Russia, like other nuclear weapon states, has not met NPT goals. Indeed, Russia and the US have similar problems in the area of arms control.

START II, though finally ratified by the State Duma in April, has not yet entered into force, and the US Senate refuses to approve the protocols to the treaty. START III talks are yet to commence officially (although "consultations" have begun); the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was signed but has not entered into force; the negotiations on the Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) have been blocked; and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty may be lost, since the US intends to deploy a national missile defense system.

At this point, Russia is in a better situation than the US. It has ratified START II in full (while the chances for the ratification of protocols by the US are slim), and it is ready to sign a START III that provides for substantial nuclear arms reduction as soon as possible (while it is not yet clear whether Washington is willing to accept this radical approach). While the US Senate derailed the CTBT ratification, the hearings on the CTBT in the Russian Duma in March 2000 passed without any serious problems and with the intention to ratify the treaty "sooner rather than later."

Differences on the ABM/National Missile Defense (NMD) problem are the crucial condition, making Russian government experts on the eve of the NPT Conference

question the need for cooperation with the US and backing a single stand on such significant issues as universality and disarmament.

China's special position on a number of issues, including missile defense and the Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), calls into question the sustainability of a provisional tactical alliance like the P-5 (or "the nuclear five") during the conference, and transforms "the nuclear five" into "the nuclear four." Under these circumstances, it would be reasonable to ask whether Russia should join, or take its own position, following China's example. Besides, many parties to the NPT find this position beneficial. It is evident that not only China but even a number of NATO states share the Russian policy on missile defense matters. The temptation to attend the NPT Review Conference in a self-righteous manner is nearly irresistible, but Russian diplomats should demonstrate self-control and defy this temptation. Refusal to participate in concerted P-5 efforts would make a tactical gain into a strategic loss, since the essence of the NPT will be undermined, which runs counter to Russian interests in the long term.

Vladimir Putin and Nonproliferation

To keep his authority in the eyes of the electorate, Vladimir Putin has had to demonstrate a tough attitude in relations with the West. This mostly concerns Russia's territorial integrity and the struggle against terrorism, concerns which have arisen during the war in Chechnya. However, Russia's economic situation and the threat of international isolation lead Russia to seek common ground and possible areas of cooperation. This cooperation can be based on nuclear security, nonproliferation and export controls--areas where Vladimir Putin can demonstrate even more flexibility than the West might expect. In December 1999 - March 2000, the government headed by Vladimir Putin took steps to facilitate START II ratification by the State Duma and has supported the prompt ratification of the CTBT.

"Russia demonstrates its firm commitment to strengthen export controls and the WMD nonproliferation regime. Our country takes into full account US concerns about export controls," said Putin. In late April 2000, the US and Russian presidents should receive a joint document prepared by Russian-US joint working groups on export controls where the "successes" of recent years would be summarized and proposals for further improvements and progress in strengthening of export controls would be suggested as part of the US-Russian security agenda. Russia will be interested in maintaining productive and continuous dialogue with the US on key nonproliferation issues, especially if it replaces petty quarrels.

For that purpose, the following concerted (and sometimes unilateral) efforts might be taken in the next 2-3 years:

- Immediately after START II ratification by the Duma, the parties, without waiting for the treaty to enter into force, will commence official START III talks, which can be concluded with a treaty signed by Vladimir Putin and Bill Clinton this year (building upon the existing progress and agreements reached within the

- framework of bilateral consultations). START III may include the reduction of strategic offensive arms to 1,500 warheads for each state with the subsequent elimination of nuclear warheads under conditions of mutually acceptable transparency to prevent their redeployment. START III should provide for the possibility of mounting MIRVs on existing (those that remain under START II) stationary or mobile missiles (but no more than three reentry vehicles on each missile);
- The ABM Treaty remains effective and preserves the current ban on deploying ABM systems for the defense of territory and providing a base for such a defense. At the same time, the parties may agree to designate two areas of limited missile defense deployment with the same number of interceptor missiles as provided in the original text of the treaty. Hence, the amendments would deal with the ABM deployment sites, which may be chosen by the parties but not necessarily in or near the capitals or in the silo ICBM launchers deployment sites as provided for by the treaty. This could be achieved by making amendments to the Protocol related to the ABM Treaty of 1974 reducing the number of sites from two to one;
 - Russia and the US publicly review the provisional results of the 1991-1992 unilateral initiatives on tactical nuclear weapons and make further unilateral statements confirming the prior intentions and, probably, forming some implementation schedule, which can be not legally binding for the parties;
 - All nuclear weapons states make unilateral declarations on non-deployment of nuclear weapons outside the national territory in accordance with the NPT's spirit. US tactical nukes are withdrawn from Europe and Turkey;
 - Intensified efforts to implement the 1996 Trilateral Initiative--involving the US, Russia, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)--to verify weapons-usable fissile material in Russia and US;
 - The obstacles to FMCT negotiations in Geneva must be removed. Nuclear weapon states should take a flexible position on setting up the corresponding committee at the conference if non-nuclear weapon states insist on the parallel establishment of other subsidiary bodies, e.g., on nuclear disarmament issues. It would be reasonable to take into account the position of China and some other states on creating a subsidiary body on preventing arms race in outer space (PAROS);
 - Russia ratifies the CTBT, regardless of the US Senate's actions;
 - The US abandons the policy of imposing sanctions against Russian enterprises and companies accused of breaching export controls, and the existing sanctions are lifted;
 - Russia and the US sign the protocols to the treaty establishing the nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia (after the conclusion of such a treaty);

- Russia demonstrates more transparency in biological weapons elimination and the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention;
- The US significantly increases the amount of assistance to Russia within the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) framework (Department of Defense) and the Materials, Protection, Control and Accounting Program (MPC&A) program (Department of Energy). The US appropriates substantial funding for chemical weapons dismantlement in Russia; and
- Russia formulates a coherent national policy on WMD nonproliferation, which will put an end to the attempts of certain ministries to pursue their own interests. The appropriate inter-agency body or presidential authority should be established (the Russian Arms Control and Nonproliferation Agency).

A realistic assessment of the chances of realizing these proposals does not preclude that nonproliferation matters will inevitably be included in the general context of US-Russian bilateral relations, and to a large extent will continue to be a bargaining chip.

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