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TOWARDS NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract. The START Treaty-2010 expires in February 2026¹. This Treaty cannot be extended in its current form. In this regard, the question arises – how the situation will develop in the strategic area, in relations between Russia and the United States, when this Treaty expires? Additional efforts are needed to prevent the process of corrosion in the sphere of strategic stability. It is important to prevent further aggravation of relations not only between nuclear-armed countries, thereby preventing the growing threat of nuclear conflict, but also in the world as a whole. The development of the U.S. national missile defense system under the “Golden Dome” program, work under the “Prompt Global Strike” concept add difficulties to the potential action to bring the international security situation out of the current crisis. The vacuum threatening the world in matters of nuclear arms control can increase negative trends both around and within the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The upcoming NPT Review Conference (2026) will sharply raise the issue of countries’ fulfillment of obligations, primarily under Article VI of this Treaty. Security can be strengthened not only through building up defense capabilities, but also through arms control mechanisms. More international efforts needed to engage the Republic of China, France and Great Britain in multilateral negotiations on nuclear arms control with the participation of Russia and the United States. It is important that the role of Moscow and Washington in this process will be key. At the same time, attention is required to work out the option of Russian-American agreements to replace the START Treaty-2010. Success in the field of nuclear arms control will improve international security of each individual state.

Keywords: START Treaty-2010, nuclear arms control, nuclear-armed countries in accordance with the NPT, nuclear conflict, negotiations on nuclear arms, missile defense, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, nuclear test ban, strategic stability, national security.

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К ОЖИДАНИЯМ В ОБЛАСТИ КОНТРОЛЯ НАД ЯДЕРНЫМИ ВООРУЖЕНИЯМИ

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Аннотация. В феврале 2026 г. заканчивается срок действия ДСНВ-2010. Этот Договор в его нынешнем виде не может быть пролонгирован. Возникает вопрос: как будет развиваться ситуация в стратегической области, в отношениях между РФ и США, когда данное Соглашение прекратит свое действие? В условиях продолжающегося давления на Россию со стороны западных государств, преследующих цель нанести ей стратегическое поражение, необходимы дополнительные

¹ The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START-2010) was signed in Prague on April 8, 2010. It entered into force on February 5, 2011.

усилия для предотвращения процесса коррозии в сфере стратегической стабильности. Важно не допустить дальнейшего обострения отношений не только между ядерными странами, предотвратив тем самым нарастающую угрозу ядерного конфликта, но и в мире в целом. Как в годы холодной войны контроль над ядерными вооружениями может стать “золотым” звеном, потянув за которое можно оздоровить международную обстановку. Но формат потенциальных переговоров по ядерным вопросам необходимо расширить с двусторонней схемы на пятистороннюю основу с участием всех ядерных держав по смыслу ДНЯО. При этом не исключается вариант российско-американских договоренностей по замене ДСНВ-2010. Такие действия способны оздоровить международную безопасность и укрепить национальную безопасность России.

Ключевые слова: ДСНВ-2010, контроль над ядерными вооружениями, страны – члены ДНЯО, ядерный конфликт, переговоры по ядерным вооружениям, противоракетная оборона, стратегическая стабильность, национальная безопасность.

I

Very little time remains until February 5, 2026, the expiration date of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START-2010). The conclusion of this Treaty was one of the most significant international events of the early 21st century. Over the course of its implementation, it has proven its effectiveness. Developed on a strictly parity basis, the Treaty fully met the national security interests of both the Russian Federation and the United States, and not only theirs.

The experience of working with the American side on the implementation of this document has become an important part of the history of bilateral cooperation in maintaining strategic stability. The process of implementing START-2010 demonstrated that Russia and the United States are capable of resolving international security issues through diplomatic compromise.

START-2010 was concluded for a period of 10 years. It entered into force in February 2011, with the possibility of a single five-year extension, which was implemented in February 2021. This decision was a logical and justified step for two great nuclear powers bearing special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The extension of this Treaty made it possible to continue ensuring, while strictly observing the balance of interests, transparency, and predictability in the development of the strategic offensive arms situation between Russia and the United States.

However, given the above, the Treaty in its current form, from a legal perspective, cannot be further extended. This raises the question: what

path will strategic offensive arms control take after the expiration of the 2010 START Treaty?

On the one hand, national security can, and should, be strengthened not only through defense capabilities, but also through legal mechanisms and instruments. The history of the creation and implementation of numerous documents related to international security and arms control, including, of course, the 2010 New START Treaty, confirms this approach. On the other hand, in the 15 years since the Treaty was signed, the global situation has fundamentally changed compared to the conditions under which it was originally developed. One cannot help but notice how radically the global system has transformed: the United States has pursued a course toward global dominance, and the world has shifted from a bipolar to a multipolar architecture. This means that maintaining strategic stability can no longer be the sole responsibility of Russian-American bilateral relations. A wide range of weapons, both nuclear and non-nuclear, has emerged, capable of solving certain strategic tasks. These include hypersonic weapons, long-range dual-use and high-precision weapons, cyber operations and cyberwarfare capabilities, and the integration of artificial intelligence into military affairs. Additionally, the United States is placing increasing emphasis on the capabilities of various space systems.

The United States has continued to build up its global missile defense system, which could potentially have a destabilizing effect on the international situation. The arms control treaty system, previously seen as a prerequisite and guarantor of strategic stability, is now in crisis. Washington has deliberately dismantled the arms control architecture: first by withdrawing from the open-ended ABM Treaty, then from the Intermediate-Range

Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty, and finally by refusing to implement a comprehensive agreement on the delineation of strategic and non-strategic missile defenses. It continues to leave the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in limbo, making the prospects for its entry into force increasingly uncertain.

The United States suspended Russian-American consultations on strategic stability, which could have laid the groundwork for future steps in the area of strategic offensive arms control. Instead, it unleashed an unprecedented sanctions war aimed at economically “strangling” Russia.

Yet, despite the extremely complex relations that have developed in recent years with the United States and other nuclear NATO countries, it would be wrong to dismiss the prospect, however distant, of strategic offensive arms control. At the same time, reaching new agreements seems to require, first and foremost, overcoming the main obstacle: The U.S. anti-Russian policy. This could be achieved through the concrete implementation of Donald Trump’s updated course. It is important to return to mutually beneficial international cooperation based on the principle of indivisible security, enshrined in the 2010 New START Treaty, and to build strategic relationships founded on equality and equal security, mutual trust, openness, and predictability.

Of course, this is an extremely difficult task; trust does not simply arise without cooperation, and vice versa. It is the same old dilemma: which came first, the chicken or the egg? However, someone must take the first step.

II

It is obvious that the resumption of negotiations on further strategic offensive arms reductions between the Russian Federation and the United States must take into account the nuclear arsenals of the UK and France, American NATO allies possessing over 500 nuclear warheads [1, 2], acting as a united anti-Russian front and participating in “joint nuclear missions.” Ignoring this European military potential, which is far from neutral toward Russia, in the overall security equation will prevent the development of an acceptable formula for strategic stability. Reducing Russian and American stra-

tegic offensive arms to lower levels would give an advantage to the United States and NATO as a whole, since it is no secret that the alliance operates its strategic offensive forces through joint nuclear planning, unified doctrines and methods of use, and an adapted nuclear weapons control system.

Regarding prospects for the next agreement, the format of possible negotiations, specifically on nuclear weapons, deserves special consideration. Summarizing the various opinions of the expert community, the following possibilities can be identified: multilateral negotiations (with the participation of all five official nuclear states, or, as Washington would prefer, three states, the United States, Russia, and China); bilateral negotiations (United States–Russia, United States–China); and unilateral but coordinated steps.

It appears that under current difficult conditions, priority should be given to a multilateral negotiating format. First, multilateralism is one of the key principles in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations and is recognized by all UN member states.

Second, it is crucial to address the fact that nuclear powers such as China, the UK, and France remain effectively excluded from the nuclear arms limitation and reduction process, despite the significant role their nuclear arsenals play. The current position of these countries essentially boils down to the following: Russia and the United States, possessing the largest nuclear arsenals, bear a special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament. Therefore, they must “decisively” and “substantially” reduce their nuclear weapons to a level comparable to that of other nuclear states. Only then, they say, will the latter be ready to join the nuclear arms limitation and reduction process. This position is not without a certain logic.

However, the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), signed by all nuclear powers, makes no such reservations or exceptions. Article VI clearly states: “*Each* (italics supplied. – A.A.) of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and

complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" [source 1].

Is there currently a need and opportunity to conduct negotiations in a multilateral format, given the provisions of the NPT and the fact that the USSR/Russia and the United States, having begun negotiations in the 1960s and 1970s and, by the end of the 1980s, each possessing approximately 10,000-11,000 nuclear warheads [3, pp. 120-122], reduced their strategic nuclear arsenals to a level not exceeding 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads? In our view, the conditions and opportunities for such negotiations do exist; of course, without political will, it is unlikely that the current situation will be overcome.

Under the current circumstances, it would be naive to expect the conclusion of a multilateral (with the participation of all five nuclear-weapon states) and comprehensive agreement similar in scope to the 2010 START Treaty. It seems more realistic to begin with more "modest," but no less important, steps. Such a multilateral agreement could initially agree on and formalize at least the following provisions, including the policy goals of the nuclear powers:

- eliminating incentives for nuclear war and preventing the use of nuclear weapons (in the spirit of the established principles of the nuclear five). The parties to the agreement could commit to avoiding the creation of situations that could lead to dangerous escalation or military confrontation resulting in the outbreak of nuclear war;

- sharing data on nuclear weapons to an agreed extent (this would be an equitable measure, demonstrating trust between the parties and addressing the issue of transparency);

- renouncing the buildup of nuclear arsenals. What is fundamentally important here is that there is no need to impose a uniform "ceiling" on nuclear weapons for all parties. Instead, the status of each party's arsenal at the time of the agreement would be fixed. At the same time, parties possessing more nuclear weapons than others (namely, Russia and the United States) could express a willingness to gradually reduce their arsenals in accordance with the evolving international situation, without fear that other parties will increase their stockpiles in the meantime;

- agreeing to exercise "restraint" in the qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, which could undermine strategic stability. The concept of "restraint" would need to be clearly defined and agreed upon during multilateral negotiations;

- developing unburdensome, cost-effective, and, most importantly, equitable control and trust-building measures, as well as mechanisms for ensuring predictability in military activities. These measures would reduce the likelihood of nuclear war resulting from accident, miscalculation, terrorism, or an unexpected technological breakthrough, and help prevent incidents between nuclear powers;

- cooperating with other countries to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, including efforts to eliminate the risk of nuclear war;

- establishing a joint commission to monitor compliance with the agreement.

Importantly, such an agreement could elevate the bilateral nuclear arms control process to a multilateral level, one that is supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. It would not infringe on the security interests of participating countries, while ensuring transparency in the nuclear weapons sphere and strengthening mutual trust.

III

It should be noted that the transition to multilateral negotiations is necessary for another reason. Despite the military-technical changes that have occurred in recent years, strategic stability continues to rest on the balance of power in the nuclear sphere. Under these conditions, the task of determining nuclear parity, taking into account both the diversity of new capabilities and the interests of all parties, must be addressed jointly. An agreement reached bilaterally may not subsequently align with the positions of other nuclear states. However, when they become involved in arms control efforts, they may be expected to adopt decisions developed without their participation.

It is also worth noting that Russia's position on multilateralizing nuclear arms control negotiations, with the participation of the five nuclear powers that are parties to the NPT, no longer

meets the same level of opposition it did several years ago. Even in the United States, this idea is now viewed more favorably, albeit primarily within political science circles [4].

President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed support for multilateral negotiations, though in a trilateral format involving the United States, Russia, and China [5]. Washington has made no secret of its concerns regarding China's nuclear buildup, Beijing's lack of transparency, and, most importantly, the use of its space-based capabilities² [4].

The United States is closely monitoring the construction of three missile bases and 350 ICBM silo launchers in the central regions of the PRC³ [6]. According to numerous reports, China's strategic offensive arsenal could grow from the current 400 warheads (600, according to other estimates [7]) to 1,500 warheads by 2035, approaching or even exceeding the levels of Russia and the United States under the 2010 START Treaty⁴ [8].

The main task in initiating the proposed multilateral process is to bring the nuclear five to the negotiating table (this would not duplicate the format or content of the consultations held within the NPT framework) in order to define the subject and parameters of future negotiations.

Within the nuclear five itself, it is possible to create "truncated" formats, for example: the U.S. and Russia; the U.S. and China; France, the UK, and China. Other configurations are also possible. In this context, the prospect of asymmetrical agreements between various participants as part of broader package solutions cannot be ruled out. However, it is premature to discuss the possible results of future efforts.

Recall that until recently, China categorically rejected the possibility of multilateral negotiations. Meanwhile, the intensification of the U.S.-China dialogue in early 2025 through Track II diplomacy gives grounds for cautious optimism that Beijing

² Gottemoeller R. *Owen Harries Lecture: US–Russia–China: The Nuclear Triumvirate of the 21st Century*. Lowy Institute, 25.03.2025. Apple Podcasts. Available at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/event-owen-harries-lecture-usrussia-china-the/id191062366?i=1000700707985&l=pt-BR> (accessed 14.05.2025).

³ Intercontinental ballistic missiles.

⁴ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

may ultimately join joint efforts. However, it will likely attempt to slow the process using the most plausible pretexts. Notably, this assessment is also echoed in the statements of American experts⁵.

The French and British (the latter, incidentally, holds the presidency of the five-party format this year), who have shown limited enthusiasm for multilateral negotiations, are unlikely to have the resolve to resist potential pressure from Washington, assuming, of course, that the U.S. agrees to the proposed format. The U.S. administration is well aware (and there is little doubt about this) that a restrictive U.S.-China-Russia format does not align with Moscow's interests. Paris and London, which consistently seek to appeal to the Non-Aligned Movement, would find it uncomfortable, especially on the eve of the 2026 NPT Review Conference, to be seen as obstructing progress on nuclear issues in the context of Article VI of the NPT.

It can be stated with a high degree of certainty that in any multilateral format, the Moscow-Washington relationship will be pivotal. Both powers are capable of significantly influencing the course and outcome of future negotiations. Clearly, the accumulated Soviet/Russian-American experience in nuclear arms control negotiations over many decades will be of considerable relevance in future discussions. This point, in the author's view, extends well beyond the narrow interpretation of nuclear arms parity, encompassing confidence-building measures, the development of agreed definitions, the establishment of information exchange processes, and more.

IV

Some experts view the approval of parallel, politically binding statements on continued compliance with the main limitations of the 2010 START Treaty for an agreed period as a precursor to launching a negotiation process, as one (and the simplest) option for further steps in a bilateral format [9]. Essentially, this approach echoes the example of the SALT II Treaty, which served as a prelude to the START I Treaty concluded in 1991 [4].

However, it should be kept in mind that Donald Trump stated as early as 2017 that the 2010 New START Treaty was more beneficial to Rus-

⁵ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

sia and did not serve U.S. national interests. The U.S. President's Special Representative for Arms Control, M. Billingslea, was also very active on this issue [10]. It is important to emphasize that many legislators and influential politicians in Washington support Trump's negative assessment of the Treaty and advocate for a rapid U.S. withdrawal from it. They also claim that Russia is violating the provisions of the 2010 New START Treaty, and that the United States is not taking adequate steps to deter Russia and China, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, from further nuclear development [4].

However, other politicians argue that, with the 2010 New START Treaty nearing its end, withdrawing from it does not offer any strategic advantages for the United States [4]. The fact remains that the U.S. will not be able to rapidly increase its nuclear potential, even if it decides to exceed the Treaty's restrictive "ceilings." The administration currently lacks both the funding and technological capacity to do so. Furthermore, formalizing any further extension of the Treaty in a legally binding manner would require amending Article 14, paragraph 2 of the 2010 New START Treaty, which defines its duration, thus necessitating an official amendment to the Treaty. Clearly, such a step would require ratification by the parliaments of both countries. In the author's view, under the current circumstances, this option appears unlikely to be feasible.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that a number of American political scientists hold a more optimistic view⁶. They believe that Donald Trump's considerable political influence and his sway over members of Congress provide grounds for hope regarding the successful approval of potential Russian-American agreements on Capitol Hill.

Some analysts also see the potential for developing an "updated" version of the bilateral START-2010 Treaty, which would include lower weapon ceilings and place all new Russian strategic systems under its restrictions⁷ [4, 10]. However, the experience of preparing and implementing the 2010 START Treaty suggests that, despite the apparent simplicity of this option, it is fraught

with numerous complex and potentially intractable challenges.

The first of these challenges is determining the composition of the weapons that should fall under a future treaty, referring both to new Russian systems and to the 100 U.S. strategic offensive arms (56 Trident II SLBM⁸ launchers and 41 B-52H heavy bombers), which were unilaterally declared "converted" [source 2]. One must also not forget about weapons previously exempt from restrictions, such as long-range sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs).

Next. When signing the 2010 START Treaty, the Russian side issued a unilateral statement on missile defense, stating that the Treaty could only function and remain viable under conditions in which there was no qualitative or quantitative buildup of U.S. missile defense systems. Despite this, the United States has continued to expand its strategic missile defense capabilities. In March of this year, construction was completed on 20 additional silos for the missile defense system at Fort Greely, Alaska. As a result, the number of interceptor missiles that can be deployed there increased from 40 to 60 units [11].

It appears that any potential agreement, whether bilateral or multilateral, will be impossible without resolving the issue of U.S. plans for national missile defense. It should be emphasized that what is at stake here is not merely the missile defense system itself, but the interdependence between its expansion and the reduction of strategic offensive arms. If this issue is not addressed, further reductions in strategic weapons become meaningless, as such reductions indirectly enhance the effectiveness of the national missile defense system. Most importantly, the unrestrained development of a strategic missile defense undermines stability by creating the illusion of the possibility of an unpunished first strike.

V

On January 27, 2025, during the second week of the new U.S. administration, Donald Trump signed an executive order launching a next-generation missile defense initiative. This project envisions protection against ballistic missiles, hy-

⁶ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

⁷ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

⁸ Submarine-launched ballistic missile.

personic weapons, advanced cruise missiles, and other sophisticated airborne threats from “peer, near-peer, and hostile states.” It also includes the deployment of space-based sensors for tracking hypersonic and ballistic missiles, as well as the development of space-based interceptors [source 3]. The initiative, initially dubbed “Iron Dome for America,” was later renamed “Gold Dome” by the Missile Defense Agency (MDA).

In parallel, a draft act has already been prepared in the U.S. Congress that proposes allocating \$19.5 billion in fiscal year 2026 for a broad range of missile defense initiatives extending beyond the scope of the executive order. The majority of this funding (\$12 billion) is earmarked for further expanding the number of silo launchers for midcourse missile interceptors at the aforementioned Fort Greely airbase [12].

The executive order of January 27, 2025, sets out a new policy for deterring and defending against any foreign air attack on U.S. territory. An initial analysis of this document suggests a departure from the previous policy, under which missile defense development was primarily aimed at countering threats from “rogue” states such as North Korea and Iran. Trump’s directive adopts a broader approach, one that affects, to some extent, Russia’s deterrent potential.

At the same time, the administration’s future actions appear to be more focused on China’s strategic offensive capabilities. American analysts have suggested that Beijing might be unable to retaliate effectively in the event of a nuclear conflict, and that a robust and effective U.S. strategic defense system could neutralize any residual Chinese nuclear potential following a first strike [13]. In this regard, the Trump administration is effectively attempting to revive President Reagan’s long-abandoned vision of a national missile defense shield.

Naturally, a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. plans to create a global missile defense system will require time. One might pose the question in an unconventional way: rather than asking how many interceptors the U.S. needs, we must ask whether sufficient financial resources and technological capabilities exist to achieve these goals. It will be essential to monitor and understand the substance of the administration’s forthcoming strategic defense and nuclear policy reviews.

Clearly, in the context of the “Gold Dome” strategy, merely acknowledging the relationship between offensive and defensive weapons, and referencing it in the preamble of any new agreement, as was done in the 2010 New START, is no longer sufficient. Stronger, more concrete guarantees will be required to ensure that strategic parity is not undermined.

It should be added that proposals for “mitigating” Russia’s concerns about American missile defense plans have previously been presented to Washington for discussion. However, in past years, there was insufficient time, and, more importantly, insufficient political will and trust to reach compromise solutions. At the same time, should the United States abandon its confrontational anti-Russian policy, these ideas could be revisited, naturally adapted to present-day realities and considered in conjunction with other issues of strategic stability.

The issue of strategic weapons, particularly ICBMs and SLBMs equipped with non-nuclear warheads, must also be resolved, as the positions of the Russian Federation and the United States clearly diverge. The author emphasizes that leaving this issue unresolved increases the risk of a potential conflict involving conventional weapons escalating into nuclear war. This concern is especially relevant given that the United States has conducted command post exercises simulating military conflict between Russia and NATO using conventional weapons, the purpose of which was to test the Prompt Global Strike concept employing non-nuclear ICBMs [source 4].

The concept of “operationally deployed weapons” will likely need to be revised or even eliminated. Its application, for example, means that the legal limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads under the 2010 START Treaty may not reflect the actual number of warheads in deployment, thereby undermining the effectiveness of these quantitative restrictions. The current warhead-counting rule, particularly as it pertains to heavy bombers, also requires further analysis. Under the 2010 START Treaty, each bomber is counted as carrying one warhead, even though, depending on the type, a bomber may carry between 12 and 24 nuclear missiles or bombs.

Another highly important, and extremely complex, issue remains unresolved: the limitation of

long-range sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs). It is appropriate to revisit the outcomes of the 1989 Soviet-American meeting in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where the SLCM issue was one of the central topics in bilateral negotiations on nuclear and space weapons. At that meeting, both sides agreed to continue their joint search for control measures over SLCMs [source 5].

Of course, the list of issues arising in the context of developing an updated version of the 2010 START Treaty is not limited to those outlined above. All of this only reinforces the conclusion that such negotiations will be highly complex and that a considerable amount of time will be required to reach mutually acceptable compromises.

In April 2025, former NATO Deputy Secretary-General and U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Rose Gottemoeller, proposed the following option: parallel negotiations between the United States and Russia, and between the United States and China⁹. The essence of her proposal is as follows: Moscow should be asked to agree to maintain the restrictions of the 2010 New START Treaty until new limitations are developed, and then to insist on additional restrictions on all nuclear warheads, deployed and non-deployed, strategic and non-strategic, including imposing restrictions on the latest Russian delivery systems, such as the Poseidon nuclear-powered unmanned underwater vehicle equipped with a nuclear charge.

According to Gottemoeller, nuclear arms control negotiations with Beijing should begin with China's commitment not to develop or deploy warheads in quantities sufficient to undermine the New START Treaty, that is, not to exceed 1,550 warheads. Simultaneously, the United States should persuade both China and Russia to agree to a ban on fractional orbital bombardment systems.

Gottemoeller justified her proposal by noting that China's nuclear modernization efforts are already producing tangible results. Therefore, in the near future, the United States may face two nuclear powers – Russia and China – that have deployed an equal number of nuclear warheads. Together, they could threaten a first strike, which the United States lacks the weapons to carry out.

The combined superiority of these partners will undermine the American ability to deter them, which could have catastrophic consequences for regional and global stability¹⁰.

With all due respect to Gottemoeller, a seasoned and highly capable negotiator who led the American delegation during the 2010 START negotiations in Geneva, it must be noted that her proposal leaves the nuclear capabilities of America's allies, the UK and France, unrestricted, allowing them to expand without limitation. Such initiatives are unlikely to be considered mutually acceptable.

When discussing limitations on deployed and non-deployed, strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons, including both delivery systems and warheads, as Gottemoeller proposes, it must be recognized that, in addition to the already-mentioned problems, a number of further, highly complex issues would inevitably arise. These would require serious consideration and, in essence, could lead to a negotiating deadlock.

One of these issues concerns dual-use systems, platforms capable of delivering both nuclear and conventional weapons. For example, how should systems like the fifth-generation F-35 multirole fighter or the sixth-generation B-21 strategic bomber be counted or limited? If only nuclear warheads are subject to ceilings, and delivery systems are left unrestricted, then how can the total number of nuclear warheads be reliably verified? Under current conditions, this is a task that is nearly impossible to achieve, even from purely technical and procedural standpoints, and, in essence, does not meet the goal of effective nuclear arms limitation.

Moreover, the question arises as to how to determine which nuclear warheads should be subject to restrictions and which should not. It must be taken into account that, in the United States, for example, according to some expert estimates, out of a total stockpile of approximately 5,000 nuclear warheads, more than 3,600 are classified as reserve or decommissioned and are awaiting dismantlement [14]. In the author's view, reaching agreement on clear and mutually acceptable criteria for distinguishing between these categories of nu-

⁹ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

¹⁰ Gottemoeller R. *Op. cit.*

clear warheads is an insurmountable task. Added to these challenges is the need to develop control procedures for nuclear aerial bombs deployed on the territory of European states.

Another alternative for maintaining nuclear arms control between Russia and the United States is the idea of preserving only the verification regime of the 2010 New START Treaty [4]. However, this approach presents a serious problem. Under Russian law, classified information regarding nuclear weapons cannot be provided to a foreign partner, whether through notifications or data declarations related to START, without a legally binding agreement in force. It is also clear that Washington will not voluntarily grant Russian inspectors access to its nuclear facilities without reciprocal arrangements. Issues such as immunity, the protection of classified information, and the financing of inspection activities are just a few of the complex challenges that would arise in the absence of the legal framework provided by the 2010 START Treaty.

Furthermore, strictly speaking, maintaining the Treaty's verification regime alone, without addressing other highly sensitive issues, does not serve Russia's interests. The earlier thesis from past negotiations remains relevant: "the Americans need only verification, while the Russians need 'ceilings' on launchers and ammunition".

The expert community is also discussing the idea of a possible agreement between the two nuclear powers on coordinated unilateral measures (similar to the U.S. and Russian Presidential Initiatives of 1991–1992), accompanied by corresponding notifications. In this case, to ensure predictability, the approach used in the START I Treaty could be employed, whereby the parties

would agree to maximum "ceilings" for their arsenals and provide each other with annual notifications indicating the number of relevant weapons for the current year, along with planned figures for the following five years (broken down by year). Such an arrangement would enhance predictability regarding the state of nuclear arsenals on both sides [4].

VI

In considering the future of nuclear arms control, the author would like to highlight one additional point. In the context of future efforts, resuming open discussions and face-to-face meetings between non-governmental experts within the framework of Track II diplomacy appears both important and useful. Clearly, the results of such exchanges could become valuable when official dialogue between nuclear powers on arms control resumes.

Certainly, alternative approaches to the limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons, beyond those discussed in this paper, may be agreed upon in the future. However, regardless of the chosen negotiation format in such a sensitive area, one key factor remains unchanged: appropriate conditions must be created. Above all, this requires a certain level of bilateral relations, which presupposes the restoration of mutual trust and a shared understanding of the necessity and importance of preserving strategic stability. At present, it appears that such conditions have not yet fully matured. Nevertheless, with Donald Trump's return to power in the United States, a trend toward improvement has been observed. How this will actually develop, however, remains difficult to predict.

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