



U.S.-Russia Security Relations

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The collapse of the Soviet Union created early hopes that American-Russian relations would be warm and broad-based. These hopes have been dashed by exaggerated expectations, a lack of political will, and recurring cold war-based tensions.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Bush administration immediately reached out to Russia in order to establish good relations. While promising Boris Yeltsin aid in return for political and free market economic reforms within Russia, Bush sought to increase U.S. security by improving the security of nuclear material in the former Soviet Union and by promoting arms control agreements.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, nuclear weapons were deployed in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. The Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program was created to help assist Russia in dismantling weapons on its territory and to aid in gathering nuclear weapons from the other former Soviet republics and

returning them to Russian control. But concern soon arose over the security of nuclear weapons and fissile material within Russia. Russia's economic troubles have severely undermined the nation's military and bankrupted its nuclear scientists. It is feared that some of those with access to nuclear materials might engage in theft for economic gain due to their desperate financial situation.

The CTR program was expanded to help create new research opportunities for Russia's nuclear weapons specialists and to provide assistance in transporting, storing, and dismantling nuclear weapons, and in the safe storage of nuclear materials.

Further, the Bush administration sought to take advantage of initial warm relations and to promote greater arms control. In January 1993 the U.S. and Russia signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II). This treaty mandates cuts in both sides' arsenals to between 3,000 and 3,500 deployed strategic warheads as well as elimination of all land-based missiles containing multiple warheads. The Russian Duma has not ratified START II (even though President Yeltsin supports ratification) in part due to the costs of implementation and in part because of the U.S.

expansion of NATO and its continued development of ballistic missile defenses.

President Clinton has taken some steps toward improving relations with Russia. In January 1994, Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to the largely symbolic gesture of detargeting missiles aimed at their respective countries. It only takes a few seconds, however, to retarget these weapons. The U.S. and Russia have also signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1993, the indefinite extension on the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995, and a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban (CTB) in 1996.

But what has been termed the "honeymoon period" (1992-93) in U.S.-Russian relations, when agreements came quickly and enthusiasm for future good relations was high, soon turned to disenchantment. Although many U.S. policymakers view the Soviet Union's successor as a defeated adversary, Russian politicians have come to believe that the U.S. seeks even further hegemony and Russian weakness.

Both Russia and the U.S. have become suspicious of each other's actions in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and central Asia. Expansion of NATO to the east has been especially troubling for Russia, which perceives NATO enlargement as a security threat. Russians have also been concerned by the failure of the U.S. to consult them over the use of force in regional disputes. Washington neglected to consult Russia about air strikes against Libya in 1993, Serbs in Bosnia in 1994, Iraq in 1995 and 1996, and most recently suspected terrorist facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan.

Russia is further troubled by U.S. intervention in Caspian politics, including the Clinton administration's support for dividing the seabed and endorsing the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline as the main export route from Azerbaijan. Russia hopes to develop oil production in the Caspian and wants the oil to flow north to Novorossiisk and south from Turkmenistan through Iran. The Caspian Sea has for centuries been viewed by Russia as within its sphere of influence, and Russians resent the American presence in the region.

The U.S. is concerned with Russian sales of state-of-the-art weapons systems to China and India. Similarly, the U.S. has strongly objected to Russian assistance in the construction of nuclear reactors in Iran. While foreign use of their weapons systems enhances Russian prestige, these sales highlight the dire economic situation of Russia's government and military.

Key Points

- U.S.-Russian security relations have slowly deteriorated since 1993.
- Russian economic and military erosion has negatively impacted its foreign and security relations.
- Tensions are growing over increased U.S. involvement in the politics of the former Soviet republics.

There have been three main areas of concern in U.S.-Russian security relations in recent years: the lack of progress in implementing substantial arms control agreements, NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, and the increasing rivalry between the two nations in central Asia.

The end of the cold war produced the hope that the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race would be stopped and quickly reversed. The Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) of 1987, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) of 1991, and the START II treaty of 1993 were major accomplishments that seemed to confirm the view that deep reductions would soon be implemented. These hopes have only been partially fulfilled. Deteriorating U.S.-Russian relations now threaten the advances already made in arms control.

The U.S. Nuclear Posture Review of 1994, which remains currently in force, adopted a strategy for managing the American nuclear arsenal that has been called "lead, but hedge." By hedging, the U.S. maintains its ability to rapidly redeploy thousands of nuclear warheads.

Under the START II treaty, both sides are required to cut their arsenals to between 3,000 and 3,500 missiles and to eliminate all land-based missiles containing multiple warheads or Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs). The START II treaty requires Russia to destroy its largest and most capable missiles, the SS-18s. Virtually all U.S. reductions are to be the result of removing warheads from missiles that will remain in service, unlike the Russian missiles. The U.S. clearly has a hedge if it were to abandon the treaty, since it would only have to rearm its missiles, whereas Russia would have to produce new missiles. Many Russians have come to view the START II treaty as nonreciprocal and hence placing Russia at a disadvantage.

There has also been a call from the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress to develop and deploy a national missile defense (NMD) system. NMD supporters argue that the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty is no longer relevant after the end of the cold war and that the U.S. should prepare for attacks from "rogue states" seeking to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). But such a policy may cause Russia to stop reducing its nuclear arsenal and begin developing its own ballistic missile defenses. This scenario would inevitably lead to a U.S.-Russian arms race that neither nation could afford.

Similarly, the U.S. policy of expanding NATO to the east has created an obstacle to improving U.S.-Russian relations. The drive to expand NATO was launched by President Clinton in 1994, although NATO did not invite Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to join the alliance until July 1997. This decision was ratified

by the U.S. Senate in April 1998. But rather than uniting Europe, NATO expansion has only created suspicion and distrust within Russia's leadership. It sends the message that Russia is still considered a potential threat rather than a partner in the European security arena.

NATO expansion in combination with Russia's economic weakness may force Moscow to further emphasize dependence on nuclear weapons as its only economically affordable response to NATO. This view can be seen in part by the Duma's resistance to ratifying START II and in Russia's abandonment of its long-held nuclear policy of "no first use."

An American-Russian rivalry is emerging in the Caspian Sea region, which may have a dampening affect on further security relations. It is estimated that anywhere from 25 to 200 trillion barrels of oil and comparable reserves of natural gas lie below the Caspian seabed. The five nations that border the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan) in addition to major Western oil corporations are eager to explore and further develop Caspian oil and gas reserves.

As a key player in the Caspian Sea's resource exploration, the U.S. intends to help the former republics of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan develop their oil and gas industries in order to help promote economic growth and regional stability. With economic growth, it is hoped that these nations will move away from Russia's sphere of influence. Caspian oil development also means investment opportunities for American oil and construction companies. Politically, the U.S. seeks to influence the oil's transport to the international market in order to diversify its own sources of supply and to keep oil prices low. Washington has sought to contain both Russia's and Iran's roles in the region by supporting pipeline routes that pass east-west through Turkey rather than north-south through Iran and Russia.

Russia is concerned that the U.S. seeks to oust it from its traditional sphere of influence in the Caspian region. It is also worried that investment in the Caspian Sea oil-fields will divert Western financial backing and interests from Russian oil production in Siberia and the Far East. In U.S.-Russian competition over Caspian oil, Russia sees the potential for the erosion of its geopolitical position in the region and the loss of important economic resources.

Key Problems

- Deteriorating U.S.-Russian relations threaten existing arms control agreements.
 - NATO expansion has created suspicion and distrust within Russia's leadership.
 - The U.S.-Russian rivalry in the Caspian Region has led Russia to fear for its geopolitical position in the region and the loss of important economic resources.
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U.S.-Russian security relations have become troubled over the last few years, each side blaming the other for the relationship's decline. The U.S. should take the initiative in repairing this important security link. Several steps can be taken to begin this process: put greater emphasis on the security of Russian nuclear weapons and weapons-grade materials, jump-start negotiations on arms control and disarmament, and slow down (if not stop) further expansion of NATO.

The danger of nuclear theft in Russia represents a serious threat to U.S. national security, and efforts to combat the possibility of nuclear smuggling deserve a higher priority within policymaking circles. The U.S. has created a number of cooperative programs, such as the CTR and the Material Protection Control and Accountancy programs (MPC&A), to prevent the theft

or diversion of nuclear weapons or materials and to reduce the amount of fissile matter possessed by the two countries. But these efforts are progressing slower than required by the scale of the problem.

These cooperative programs require greater political and financial support if they are to achieve their goals. The U.S. should act now to strengthen accounting and control programs

for highly enriched uranium and plutonium. Assistance should be expanded in order to improve the ability of customs officials to detect and stop nuclear smuggling along Russia's border. The U.S. should increase legitimate purchases of Russia's highly enriched uranium to ensure its safekeeping and use within civilian nuclear power plants. Although U.S. government-owned enrichment plants were implementing this policy of buying uranium from Russia, the ongoing privatization of these plants hurts the prospects for future purchases and should be reversed.

In the realm of arms control, the U.S. should take the lead in encouraging negotiations. The current U.S. position is that no further formal negotiations regarding strategic nuclear arms control can occur until the Russian parliament ratifies the START II treaty. This U.S. policy has delayed negotiations on cutting strategic

arsenals and has made progress on arms control dependent upon the whims of hard-line nationalist forces within the Duma.

Some experts estimate that Russia's operational warheads will decline to 1,000 or less in the next decade due to lack of funds. This is why Russia wants START III now. The U.S. and Russia should begin formal negotiations on START III, whether or not Russia's parliament has ratified START II.

The U.S. should continue to abide by the ABM treaty signed in 1972 and not develop or deploy systems that are questionable under the treaty. Any efforts to deploy an ABM system by the U.S. may lead to a renewed arms race with Russia, which neither nation can afford.

Additionally, the policy regarding NATO expansion has been and will continue to be a source of friction between Russia and the United States. Russia perceives that NATO expansion is directed solely against it and threatens its future security. To avoid worsening relations, the U.S. should back away from its January 1998 pledge to help the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania prepare for future NATO membership. Russia's current leadership is extremely hostile to potential NATO membership for the Baltic states or for any other former Soviet republic, especially Ukraine. Inviting any of these countries to join NATO could spark a serious crisis in the future.

The U.S. needs to make a sincere effort to reassure Russia about NATO expansion. Reassurances could be made by investing real political and military value in the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which is meant to provide a framework for cooperation between Russia and NATO. Additionally, the NATO-Russian Permanent Joint Council should be considered a serious forum for the discussion of European security issues. These efforts would help to engage Moscow in the European security architecture rather than marginalizing Russia.

U.S.-Russian relations have developed a certain amount of resilience in withstanding the stresses and strains caused by poorly conceived U.S. policies. Much of this resilience has come from the personal relationships formed by both Presidents Bush and Clinton with Russian President Yeltsin. It remains to be seen if the successor government to the Yeltsin regime will be as complaisant.

Key Recommendations

- Increase funding for nuclear material control and accounting efforts at Russian nuclear sites.
- Jump-start arms control talks with Russia immediately by opening formal START III negotiations.
- Back away from NATO membership for the Baltic states.

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