

**Confidential**

---

# RUSSIA

The circulation of this report has been strictly limited to the members of  
the Trialogue Club International  
and of the Centre russe d'études politiques.

This issue is for your personal use only.

Published monthly in Russian and in English  
by Trialogue Company Ltd.

Issue № 4 (254), vol.17. 2018

---

July 13, 2018

Andrey Baklitskiy reports from Moscow:

## CAN PUTIN-TRUMP SUMMIT FIX RUSSIAN-US ARMS CONTROL?

### SUMMARY

*Russian and American experts have widely assumed that on July 16, 2018, one of the issues that may come up during the Russia-US summit in Helsinki is arms control. Unlike many other issues, it would also be a less controversial topic for the US administration battled by the accusations of "collusion with Russia." All US presidents - Republicans and Democrats - discussed arms control issues with Moscow since 1970s. Now, with the Russia-US relations at the record low and deteriorating, the issue of arms control between two nuclear superpowers has gained urgency unseen since the end of the Cold War. Both countries are modernizing their nuclear forces, pursuing new types of weapons aimed at deterring each other, and sending mixed messages about their nuclear postures. With a range of possible conflict points from Syria to Ukraine and from the high seas to cyberspace, Moscow and Washington can ill afford a crisis in the nuclear sphere on top of it. PIR Center Consultant Andrey Baklitskiy argues why the reality is more nuanced and why the Helsinki summit cannot solve all Russian-US arms control problems.*

When the summit between the Russian and US presidents was announced, it was widely accepted among Russian and American politicians and experts that arms control would be on the agenda.

Russian Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov assumed that "global stability and the disarmament dossier"<sup>1</sup> would be discussed at the summit. Head of Russian State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration, and Compatriot Affairs Leonid Kalashnikov said the issue of Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty would be raised<sup>2</sup>. US National Security Advisor John Bolton expected that arms control topics would "come up in the meeting between the two presidents<sup>3</sup>." Some Russian experts even went as far as to say that "arms control and the strategic stability dialogue would probably become the key topic" of the summit<sup>4</sup>.

**The reality, however, is more nuanced. While the topic of arms control will inevitably be raised at the summit, it will hardly be the main issue. There are few signs that the topic will get a meaningful and detailed discussion, and almost zero chances of any breakthroughs.**

### **What is at stake?**

Russian-US nuclear arms control is based on three pillars: the INF treaty, New START treaty, and a broader concept of strategic stability. The situation in all three of those spheres is bad and keeps deteriorating.

1987 **INF Treaty** between the US and the USSR banned ground-based missiles with the range between 500 and 5500 kilometers. The US maintain that Russia violates the treaty by testing and fielding 9M729 missile with the INF range. Russian authorities have on several occasions stated that the missile in question is INF compliant<sup>5</sup>. Moscow has accusations of its own with the biggest being MK-41 launchers of US missile defense sites in Romania and Poland, which are capable of firing INF range ground launched cruise missiles. The US calls Russian accusations baseless. Since the verification provisions of the treaty have expired, there is no way to resolve the issues automatically. Attempts to address disagreements in the format of Special Verification Commission failed.

Both governments maintain that they want to preserve the INF treaty. US had a clear chance to use alleged Russian violations to include the deployment of INF range missiles in the new Nuclear Posture Review, but decided not to. However, there are influential groups in the US that push for stronger actions that could destroy the treaty. There are those who believe Washington needs INF range missiles to deploy in Asia-Pacific, those who believe that the Russian violation needs a proportional response, and those who oppose arms control as a concept. In 2017, Congress mandated the Defense Department to conduct R&D on the INF range ground launched cruise missiles<sup>6</sup> (which is treaty-compliant unless the missile is

<sup>1</sup> Russia, US agree on Putin-Trump summit. TASS News Agency. June 27, 2018. <http://tass.com/politics/1011159>

<sup>2</sup> Toward the meeting. Kommersant Newspaper. July 12, 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3683213>

<sup>3</sup> Plans Set for Trump-Putin Summit. Arms Control Association. July/August 2018. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-07/news/plans-set-trump-putin-summit>

<sup>4</sup> Helsinki Summit: A game against the tendency. Valdai Club Website. July 9, 2018. <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/sammit-v-helsinki/>

<sup>5</sup> Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs confirmed that new cruise missiles 9M729 are INF compliant. RIA News. December 21, 2017. <https://ria.ru/world/20171221/1511428569.html>

<sup>6</sup> US 'developing ground-based cruise missile, banned by Cold War treaty, over Russia threat'. The Telegraph. November 16, 2017. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/16/us-developing-ground-based-cruise-missile-banned-cold-war-treaty/>

tested). This year the House version of National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (Section 1239) declared that the INF Treaty would no longer be binding to the US after one year of enactment unless the President certifies that Russia has returned to compliance (though this measure is mostly symbolic and probably won't survive in the final version of the bill). Both civilian and military Russian officials agree that the treaty should be preserved. The response to alleged US violations and INF R&D has been measured. There is no talk about Russia's own INF R&D; however, this may change if US plans move forward.

**In case the treaty collapses, there will be an incentive for both sides to develop and deploy ground launched INF range cruise missiles. US cruise missiles in Eastern Europe with a very short flight time would put Russian missiles in the European part of the country under threat. Russian missiles in the West of the country and Kaliningrad region would target NATO infrastructure across Europe and US missile defense sites. Both would undermine the stability and could trigger an escalation. The absence of the INF treaty would also undermine any strategic arms control treaties between Russia and the US by permitting parties to develop a new type of strategic missiles and test them to the range below 5500 kilometers.**

The **New START Treaty** entered into force in 2011 and limited Russia and the US to 1550 deployed strategic warheads. It was a culmination of the latest round of bilateral arms control and the beginning of the largest hiatus in US-Russian negotiations on the issue since 1970. The treaty will expire in early 2021 if not extended for a single 5-year term (in which case it will expire in 2026). There have been no arms control negotiations between Moscow and Washington since. New START has been implemented successfully by both parties. The central limits were met by Russia and the US by February 5, 2018. However, in his campaign, Donald Trump criticized the treaty as one-sided, and in his first phone call with President Putin he allegedly declined a Russian proposal to extend the New START calling it one of President Obama's "bad deals"<sup>7</sup>. There is also a strong opposition to the New START extension in US Congress. The House version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act would have prohibited the use of funds to extend New START unless Russia returned to compliance with the INF Treaty. However, the final version of the NDAA didn't contain the provision<sup>8</sup>. In 2018, in another plot twist, Moscow announced that it could not confirm that Washington met its New START obligations because it reconfigured certain submarine ballistic missile launchers and heavy bombers in a way in which Russia "could not confirm that these strategic arms have been rendered incapable [...]"<sup>9</sup>.

US opposition to the extension of the New START **left the door open for negotiations of the new arms control treaty** in the remaining two and a half years (the New START was negotiated approximately in a year). However, it's hard to see how countries could work on a new treaty without touching other issues like missile defense, space security, hypersonic weapons, and non-strategic nuclear weapons - which would take much longer. Also, **US Congress probably wouldn't**

<sup>7</sup> Exclusive: In call with Putin, Trump denounced Obama-era nuclear arms treaty – sources. Reuters. February 9, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-putin/exclusive-in-call-with-putin-trump-denounced-obama-era-nuclear-arms-treaty-sources-idUSKBN15O2A5>

<sup>8</sup> Defense bill wouldn't limit extension of arms treaty with Russia. The Hill. September 11, 2017. <http://thehill.com/policy/defense/359709-defense-bill-would-not-limit-extension-of-arms-treaty-with-russia>

<sup>9</sup> No Talks on New START Treaty Between Russia, US Underway – Moscow. Sputnik International. March 7, 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201803071062324682-russia-us-no-talks-new-start-treaty/>

ratify a new arms control agreement with Russia unless the INF issue was resolved, and could even condition it on solving "elections interference" issue, which is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Expiration of the New START treaty will leave the US and Russia with no limits on their respective nuclear forces. The lack of information about each other's force structure because of the ending of mutual inspections and data sharing could push two countries in a nuclear arms race.

The concept of **US-Russian strategic stability** is subtler and normally understood as a balance of strategic forces of two countries which removes incentives for the first nuclear strike. Apart from capping the numbers of strategic nuclear forces, it is also influenced by other strategic weapons not covered by the existing treaties (like hypersonic and space based weapons) and missile defenses. Russia was perceiving this balance as tilted in the US favor since Washington left the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 and started developing missile defense sites in the continental US and Europe. Russia was also concerned with US superiority in conventional precision guided weapons and potential weaponization of space.

On March 1, 2018, **President Putin** showcased a number of new nuclear delivery systems aimed at penetrating existing and future missile defenses and **invited the US to the negotiating table to discuss arms control**. Russian invitation was generally ignored by the West. New US Missile Defense Review due later this Summer will reportedly for the first time name Russia as a threat and will target hypersonic weapons which Moscow sees as a response to US missile defense. On June 18, 2018, President Trump announced the creation of the Space Force<sup>10</sup>, stoking Russian fears of US weaponizing outer space.

If not addressed, strategic stability issue could lead to multilayer asymmetric arms race, which will be heavily destabilizing.

Where are we now?

It would be naive to think that the US-Russian summit could solve all the problems mentioned above even in the best of times. However, even expecting that bilateral arms control would be widely discussed in Helsinki could be wishful thinking.

Russia would love to discuss arms control and strategic stability at the summit. Apart from addressing the long-held security issue, it would place Moscow and Washington on equal footing. On the US side, however, US National Security Advisor John Bolton, who oversees preparations for Helsinki summit, is a long-time security hawk. People who had a chance to interact with **Amb. Bolton** during his recent visit to Moscow got the impression that he was as anti-arms control as ever and **would prefer to further dismantle rather than strengthen the bilateral US-Russian arms control**.

<sup>10</sup> It's Official: Trump Announces Space Force as 6th Military Branch. Military.com. June 18, 2018. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2018/06/18/its-official-trump-announces-space-force-6th-military-branch.html>

President Trump has been agnostic about nuclear arms control. At different occasions, he has stated both "Our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been. There is no reason for this. Stop the arms race?"<sup>11</sup> and "Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all"<sup>12</sup>. Unlike the nuclear program of the DPRK, Russian nuclear weapons are not a point of great concern for the US electorate. Stepping into "Obama's shoes" to conclude yet another arms control agreement with Moscow doesn't look like a big win for the US president. A US official told Reuters that Mr. Trump would be ready to talk about New START, if President Putin raised it, but it was not a big US priority<sup>13</sup>.

The *Kommersant* newspaper reported<sup>14</sup> that the parties were working on a two-page joint communique for Trump-Putin summit, which would highlight the importance of the dialogue between the leaders, diplomats, militaries, and security services of two countries; development of economic and people-to-people ties. According to the sources of the newspaper, the US side was open for such format but insisted that the issue of election interference should be addressed in one way or another. While other topics from arms control to Syria, Ukraine or DPRK would probably come up during the talks, they were not reported as having a place in the final communique.

Even if both sides genuinely wanted to achieve an arms control breakthrough, it would have been complicated. If President Trump does not change his position toward the START agreement, the discussion will have to center around negotiating a framework for a new arms control agreement that will have to accommodate the divergent views of Moscow and Washington on the BMD and space issues. The US president, well known for his disdain for the details, wouldn't be an optimal negotiator.

The issue of the INF violations would be equally difficult to address. From the open source literature and discussions with experts and officials in both countries, it seems that there is no "smoking gun" violation on the Russian side, meaning that the missile in question (9M729) wasn't tested to the INF range, but rather US believes that it has the capability to fly on INF ranges. As an independent analyst and author of "Russian Nuclear Forces" research project Pavel Podvig puts it, "Given that U.S. experts have already reached that conclusion without seeing the actual missile, I don't see how they would reverse that judgement once they have a chance to inspect 9M729 up close. Since "range capability" is not a very well-defined concept, it would be very difficult to win this argument on technical grounds. At best, the parties will go back to square one, each insisting on their interpretation of the data"<sup>15</sup>. Any demonstration would also be risky for Moscow because it could trigger the issue of Russian launchers used for firing 9M729 missile, since all of them (including those used

---

<sup>11</sup> Trump, D. [realDonaldTrump]. (2018, April 11). Our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been, and that includes the Cold War. There is no reason for this. Russia needs us to help with their economy, something that would be very easy to do, and we need all nations to work together. Stop the arms race? [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/984032798821568513>

<sup>12</sup> Let it be an arms race': Donald Trump appears to double down on nuclear expansion. The Guardian. December 23, 2016. <http://news.trust.org/item/20180711193901-8zu2x/>

<sup>13</sup> Trump, Putin may agree to resume stalled arms control talks. Thomson Reuters Foundation News. July 11, 2018. <http://news.trust.org/item/20180711193901-8zu2x/>

<sup>14</sup> On a double-page basis: What Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump can agree on in Finland. The Kommersant Newspaper. July 9, 2018. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3681374>

<sup>15</sup> Inspections will not resolve the INF Treaty dispute. Russian strategic nuclear forces. July 1, 2018. [http://russianforces.org/blog/2018/07/inspections\\_will\\_not\\_resolve\\_t.shtml](http://russianforces.org/blog/2018/07/inspections_will_not_resolve_t.shtml)

for launching Iskanders) would have to be eliminated in case the missile was found in violation of the treaty.

### **The art of possible**

**Despite the lack of deep arms control discussion, the upcoming summit could still prove to be important and consequential in this sphere. The biggest problem facing US-Russian arms control today is the possibility of it disintegrating on auto-pilot before a fix could be found. Absent the interest of the US president, it is Congress and the part of the executive that push (for different reasons) for the dismantlement of the current treaties and strategic balance with Russia.**

If the Russian side persuades Donald Trump not to take actions that would drag both countries into a costly arms race and to preserve whatever arms control left, while the foreign and defense ministries (Secretary of State Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mattis as opposed to Amb. Bolton) look for possible solutions, this would be a welcomed result. Putting this statement in the final communique would send a message to Republicans and other skeptics in Congress that the executive is in charge of the issue and has a plan of how to deal with Russia on arms control, which could alleviate the pressure in Washington. The parties would also be smart to try to avoid ambiguities or overstatements in the joint communique to avoid the situation following the Singapore declaration by the US and DPRK.

**While big arms control decisions are unlikely to be taken at Helsinki summit, it doesn't mean that they are impossible in the future with due preparation.**

Likewise, President Putin and Trump could agree to start negotiations on a new arms control treaty with new START left in place temporally until the new agreement is reached.

---

This article is written by Andrey Baklitskiy, PIR Center Consultant.

Editor: Yuliya Seslavinskaya

(c) Trialogue Club International: [trialogue@pircenter.org](mailto:trialogue@pircenter.org);

(c) Centre russe d'études politiques: [crep@pircenter.org](mailto:crep@pircenter.org)

Moscow, July 2018

**Confidential**

*Dear members of Trialogue Club International,*

The 2018 Club season continues, and we kindly **invite you to extend your membership in the Club for 2018 or for the 2018-2019 period.**

In 2018 Club members will continue to receive exclusive analytics on Russian foreign policy priorities and key challenges and threats to international security. We have scheduled **six meetings of Trialogue Club International** in 2018. Club Members will receive a series of articles in electronic form, **eight issues** of the Russia Confidential analytical bulletin, as well as other information and analytical bulletins.

As always, specialists of *Triologue Club International* and its partner organization PIR Center are open for exchange of opinions on key international issues.

In **2018**, membership fees are the same as in previous year:

<b>Period</b>	Individual	Corporate
01.01.17 – 31.12.17 (1 year)	50 000 roubles	80 000 roubles
01.01.17 – 31.12.18 (2 years)	90 000 roubles	140 000 roubles

We operate a **1+1 arrangement** for **corporate members**, whereby each corporate member is entitled to have **2 representatives** participating in Club events.

For all membership issues, please email us at [secretary@trialogue-club.ru](mailto:secretary@trialogue-club.ru) or call +7 (985) 764-98-96.

Sincerely,

Evgeniy Buzhinskiy

Chairman of the *Triologue Club International*