

Tactical Nuclear Weapons

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The debate over tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) has resurfaced on the European agenda in the past few years. The 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference reaffirmed the commitment by the nuclear-weapon states ‘to reduce and ultimately eliminate all types of nuclear weapons, deployed and non-deployed, including through unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures’, and called upon those states ‘to promptly engage with a view to [...] address the question of all nuclear weapons regardless of their type or their location’.¹

Since 2010, the foreign ministers of Sweden and Poland have promoted an arrangement that would commit Russia not to deploy or store TNW in areas adjacent to the borders of the EU member states, particularly on the Kola Peninsula and in the Kaliningrad region. This initiative found a positive response in many countries and particularly in Norway.

Proposals were put forward within NATO suggesting that the US should withdraw its TNW from Europe. Although the Alliance remained divided on the issue, the withdrawal option gathered support in many European countries and in the US. At the same time, in November 2010, the desire ‘to seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on its nuclear weapons in Europe and relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members’ found its way into the new NATO strategic concept, which called for further steps to ‘take into account the disparity with the greater Russian stockpiles of short-range nuclear weapons’.²

The US government indicated in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review that it would seek to include TNW in the follow-up negotiations to the US-Russian New START of 2010. It was committed by the US Senate to seek an agreement with Russia on TNW at an early stage.

However, to date, there has not been much progress in handling the issue. Neither the intra-NATO debate over the US TNW in Europe yielded any definite outcome, nor was Moscow eager to engage in TNW talks. In 2012, the prospects for extending arms control to this class of nuclear weapons appear even more remote than a year ago.

This article begins with the discussion of which tactical nuclear weapons are followed by an assessment of the stockpiles and the status of the US and Russian TNW. It continues by reviewing the evolution of Moscow’s nuclear posture revealing the growing dependence of Russia on TNW, and the resulting extremely hesitant approach to any arms control measures singling out tactical weapons. The article further discusses the evolving approaches of the US government to handling the TNW in an eventual follow-up negotiation to the New START treaty or by early measures and it explores whether these approaches imply an added value from the Russian perspective.

The concept of Tactical Nuclear Weapons

In a narrow sense, tactical nuclear weapons are those developed for use on the ‘battlefield’. Therefore, while speaking of TNW, it is often implied that this concept stands for fairly short-range nuclear weapons, such as nuclear mines, artillery shells, short-range ballistic missiles, gravity bombs and air-to-surface missiles (ASM) for tactical (‘theatre’) aviation, depth bombs or nuclear torpedoes. Many such weapons have indeed become obsolete with the end of the cold war and have been either eliminated or significantly reduced.

1 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Final Document, NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I), pp. 20-21.

2 Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Adopted by Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, [2010], pp. 7-8.

However, in the context of arms control discussions, the TNW concept refers to a wider range of diverse weapons. This category includes all types of nuclear weapons which are not covered by US-Russian nuclear arms control treaties — those governing reductions of strategic offensive arms (START treaties) and the elimination of intermediate and shorter-range missiles (the 1987 INF treaty).

This category thus embraces all nuclear weapons with the range up to 500 kilometres which can be considered tactical weapons in the strict sense, but also gravity bombs which can be delivered by intermediate-range (500 to 5,500 kilometers) aircraft, as well as sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM). The reason for this is that the US-Russian INF treaty provided for the elimination of only ballistic missiles and their launchers but not of the entire class of intermediate-range systems. Nuclear munitions for air and ballistic defence systems represent another separate class of nuclear weapons not covered by existing treaties.

Often, the stockpiles of nuclear weapon states other than Russia and the US are also included in the TNW category. They are also not covered by the existing treaties. This is a reason why TNW are often referred to as non-strategic or sub-strategic nuclear weapons. The latter two concepts more appropriately reflect the greater diversity of those weapons and of their missions.

The concept of TNW, secondly, encompasses nuclear weapons (warheads) rather than their delivery systems. All TNW delivery systems (aircraft, missiles, artillery, etc.) are certified for dual, i.e. conventional and nuclear, missions. This makes TNW a very different subject for arms control. Any agreement on TNW would have to limit and/or reduce nuclear munitions rather than weapons systems.

It is also important to acknowledge that either the US or Russian TNW (nuclear munitions) are no longer operatively deployed. They have been removed from active service and are stored in nuclear depots apart from delivery systems.

In 1991, the US and the Soviet Union, followed by the Russian Federation in 1992, announced in the 'Presidential Nuclear Initiatives' (PNIs) that they would remove TNW from active service and significantly reduce their numbers, while a part thereof would be disassembled and destroyed.

Bearing in mind the different status of nuclear munitions,³ as a result of the implementation of PNIs, no US or Russian TNW are 'actively deployed' (i.e. operationally deployed on delivery systems) or available for early use. Instead, they are stored either as 'active non-deployed' weapons (i.e. they are available for eventual deployment on delivery systems) or are in the process of being fully retired (i.e. are no longer available for actual deployment).

All composite elements of the TNW concept have implications for arms control. Should those weapons be limited and further reduced by agreement in a verifiable manner, the parties to that agreement are supposed to open their nuclear depots and allow each other to inspect non-deployed munitions.

Although not entirely impossible, this is an extremely challenging task taking into account the sensitivity of even disclosing information on whether or not nuclear weapons are kept in a specific depot. Releasing such information is prohibited by both the US and Russian law. Not to speak of opening nuclear depots for inspection.

3 http://www.nrdc.org/nuclear/stockpile_2007-2012.asp (19/09/2010).

Apart from political considerations, this specificity of TNW has prevented the US and Russia from reaching any agreement on the issue despite previous attempts to do so which were repeatedly undertaken from the 1970s onwards.

US and Russian TNW stockpiles

Neither the US nor the Russian government has disclosed comprehensive data on its TNW before or after their reduction following the PNIs. They have simply reported and are believed to have implemented the PNIs and to have cut their TNW stock even more extensively than had been initially envisaged. Any available assessments are thus based on indirect estimates. Their correctness is often disputed but there is widespread expert consensus as regards the magnitude of the remaining US and Russian stockpiles.

In 1991, the US pledged to:

- withdraw to its territory and eliminate all TNW for ground forces;
- remove all and destroy half of naval TNW;
- reduce the number of US (and UK) nuclear gravity bombs in Europe from 1,400 to 700.

The Soviet Union in 1991 and the Russian Federation in 1992 pledged to:

- eliminate all TNW for ground forces;
- remove all nuclear warheads for antiballistic and air defences to centralized storage and destroy half of them;
- store all Air Force TNW in centralized depots and destroy half of them;
- remove all TNW from surface ships and submarines and eliminate one-third of them;
- destroy half of TNW for tactical naval aviation.

As a result, the US is supposed to have reduced its stockpiles from an estimated 11,500 TNW in the early 1990s to some 1,100 weapons.⁴ However, the number of operatively deployable weapons maintained for the purpose of forward deployment is smaller and includes some 180 nuclear gravity bombs stored in several countries in Europe, and some 320 nuclear warheads for SLCMs stored in the US. The latter, however, are to be retired under the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, while the gravity bombs, whether withdrawn to US territory or not, will be maintained. So will the nuclear capability of the US Air Force when the F-16 is replaced with the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter certified for nuclear missions.⁵

Russia is reported to have reduced its TNW from about 22,000⁶ to between 5,000 and 6,500 weapons. Analysts largely agree that this stock includes some 2,000 deployable weapons (active non-deployed) while the rest remains in reserve. The exact status of weapons in reserve, however, is not clear. It is not known how many of them are kept in centralized depots of the Ministry of Defence, how many in depots at the assembly and disassembly sites, and how many are regularly in transit between the sites.

The above numbers confirm the thesis of a disparity between the TNW stockpiles maintained by the US and Russia. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that both have dramatically reduced their deployable tactical

4 A.F. Woolf, *Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons*, Washington, Congressional Research Service, 2011, p. 15.

5 Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010, pp. xiii, 27-28.

6 A. Arbatov, 'Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons' in: *NATO-Russia Relations (Prospects for New Security Architecture, Nuclear Reductions, CFE Treaty)*, Moscow, 2010, pp. 33-34.

weapons roughly by a factor of 10 and are expected to further reduce them, although unilaterally rather than by agreement. The US is known to be planning to reduce its TNW to less than half of its current stock. In Russia, this process remains non-transparent, but the ultimate size of the deployable Russian TNW stock is limited by reduced industrial capacity as well as by the reduced number of delivery systems.

Whilst the US has preserved only two types of TNW — nuclear gravity bombs stored in Europe and warheads for SLCM — and is going to reduce them to only one after the remaining SLCM warheads have been retired, Moscow maintains not only a larger total stockpile of TNW but also a much greater variety of such weapons than the US does.

Russia is generally believed to have destroyed, as anticipated by the PNIs, all TNW for ground forces,⁷ although this is questioned by some analysts.⁸ Most Russian TNW are assigned to the air force and the navy. Although a large proportion of the air force, navy and air defence TNW are no longer in active service, a number of nuclear weapons are still assumed to remain operative and to be kept at air and naval bases close to delivery systems. Thus, despite the significantly reduced alert readiness, an unspecified quantity of TNW are supposed to be available for relatively quick deployment.

In contrast to the US, Russia has maintained not only short-range tactical dual-capable (conventional and nuclear) platforms, but also nuclear weapons for them, such as short-range ASM for frontal and naval aviation, as well as anti-ship and anti-submarine depth bombs and torpedoes. The distinctive mission of such weapons, in contrast to longer-range weapons, is to deter or repel large-scale attack operations on the battlefield.

At the same time, like the US, Russia has maintained longer-range (or intermediate) nuclear capabilities. Those are represented by sea-launched cruise missiles with a range of up to 3,000 km for nuclear attack submarines as well as by longer-range nuclear capable Tu-22M aircraft.

The existing assessments of the US and Russian TNW stockpiles thus reveal a numerical and structural disparity which favours Russia. This disparity, however, reflects a more comprehensive reality: Russia and the US find themselves on different trajectories as regards their definitions of the future role of nuclear arms in their postures. While the US, as highlighted by the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, anticipates that any further development of its advanced conventional capabilities would lead to diminishing the role of nuclear weapons, it is precisely the advance of US non-nuclear capabilities that represents the major source of concern for the Russian defence establishment and causes it to project a growing role for nuclear weapons in the future.

These two distinct trajectories largely explain the differences in the two countries' approaches to TNW arms control and make any agreement on TNW less rather than more likely to materialize at any time soon. They also explain why Moscow, which has a long record of championing arms control solutions aimed particularly at this class of nuclear weapons, has become increasingly sceptical, to say the least, with regard to including TNW within an arms control regime over the past decade.

The increasing role of TNW in the Russian defence posture

7 M.A. Pomper, W. Potter, N. Sokov, *Reducing and Regulating Tactical (Nonstrategic) Nuclear Weapons in Europe*, Monterey, 2009, p. 7.

8 R.S. Norris, H.M. Kristensen, 'Russian nuclear forces, 2010' in: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, January/February 2010, p. 79.

The notion of the increasing role of nuclear weapons in the Russian defence posture has become conventional wisdom among experts since the early 1990s.⁹ Mirroring the US and NATO posture of the Cold War period, nuclear weapons and particularly TNW are supposed to compensate for the continuous decline of conventional forces of Russia, for the numerical and qualitative conventional superiority of NATO, as well as for the numerical inferiority of the Russian forces vis-à-vis China.

Several developments contributed to anchoring this conviction among the Russian defence establishment and political elites. Firstly and most importantly, it was the increasing weakness (many defence analysts speak of a virtual degradation) of the conventional forces of the Russian Federation which are considered unlikely to be able, in the time to come, to repel any large-scale or even limited regional conventional attack. This diagnosis has become commonplace in open publications by representatives of the Russian defence establishment. This has led defence analysts to believe that nuclear weapons remain the single most important means of preserving Russia's military security by deterring and preventing not only a nuclear but also a conventional attack.¹⁰

Secondly, lessons learned by the Russian defence community from the wars of the last twenty years implied that any future war involving advanced military powers was most likely to entail a stand-off via the deployment of long-distance precision-guided munitions, such as conventional ballistic and cruise missiles in conjunction with space-based intelligence and information systems. It is believed that this further complicates the task of Russian general purpose forces to respond appropriately to a conventional attack, thus almost automatically elevating nuclear arms to the weapons of choice for an asymmetric response.

Confronted with a declining conventional defence capability and a growing gap in advanced military capabilities, Russia is increasingly relying on its nuclear arms to offset its growing inferiority by assigning multiple roles to various classes of nuclear weapons in virtually any sort of contingency. This is where TNW come into play.

This thinking became deeply rooted in the Russian defence and nuclear defence industrial establishments in the early 1990s. Ever since, they have constituted a powerful lobby for the preservation of a sizable tactical nuclear capability and have sought to win acceptance of their views within the political establishment. The 1999 Kosovo air campaign, the 2003 war against Iraq, and the 2008 Russo-Georgian war proved extremely conducive to anchoring this thinking among the Russian political establishment.

This is one reason why, under current circumstances, most Russian experts, and particularly the defence and the nuclear defence industrial establishments, are proceeding on the presumption that including TNW in arms control measures is not in the interest of Russia. Furthermore, there are virtually no significant

Russian constituencies with a vested interest in reducing or limiting TNW. Most Russian defence analysts consider the current dependence on nuclear weapons to be of a temporary nature. However, they believe that it would only be possible to anticipate a reduction in the role currently assigned to nuclear weapons after Russian forces have overcome a state of decline, after they have advanced in utilizing new military technologies and either have matched the advanced military powers or after the latter have agreed to abandon or at least to significantly limit and reduce their modern capabilities by means of arms control and thus have abandoned military options which

9 See: G. Arbman, Ch. Thornton, *Russia's Tactical Nuclear Weapons. Part I: Background and Policy Issues*, Stockholm, 2003, pp. 24-27.

10 V.I. Levshin, A.V. Nedelin, M.E. Sosnovskii, 'O primenenii yadernogo oruzhiya dlya deeskalatsii voennykh deistvii' (On the use of nuclear weapons for the de-escalation of military confrontation), in: *Voennaya Mysl'* (Military Thought), No 3, 1999, pp. 34-37.

the new technologies have opened or may open in the future.

Despite the formal priority given in Moscow to the introduction of advanced weapons technologies in long-term defence-related research and development, procurement programmes and defence planning, the anticipated time for attaining this goal is rather long term. While, thirteen years ago, it was anticipated that Russia would be able to close the gap within ten years (i.e. by now), it is now suggested that it will take no less than another decade. And it will not be taken for granted that, ten years from now, this goal will have been attained.

This implies that, even though regarded as a temporary solution, the dependence on nuclear and particularly on tactical nuclear weapons is likely to remain a long-term rather than a short or mid-term factor affecting Russia's defence posture and arms control agenda. This does not mean that Russia's existing TNW stockpile will not be further reduced. However, any reductions of this kind are more likely to occur unilaterally rather than on the basis of an international agreement.

However, the bottom-line approach for any measures in that direction is based on the presumption that the Russian armed forces shall retain TNW in their arsenals as long as other nations retain nuclear weapons, and, although those weapons have been stored in centralized storage facilities, shall maintain the option of redeploying them at any time, particularly to the Navy.

Russian approaches to TNW talks

The Russian agenda for arms control is wide and comprehensive. TNW, however, are not on this agenda. Neither the Russian government nor its political class appear to be interested in changing the existing status quo.

At the same time, Moscow has never rejected the prospect of TNW talks. Instead, it has formulated preconditions which ought to be met before any such talks begin. As a first step, it suggests reaching an agreement prohibiting nuclear states to deploy TNW beyond their national territory, i.e. an agreement committing the US to withdraw its remaining nuclear assets from Europe. According to the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, this is seen as an 'absolutely indispensable first step in any discussion of the issue'.¹¹

Secondly, Moscow wants to see a situation where the entire infrastructure that can serve the purpose of deploying US nuclear weapons in Europe, including in the new NATO members — former Warsaw Pact countries and the Baltic States from which Soviet TNW have been withdrawn, is 'finally and irreversibly eliminated'.¹²

The Russian defence establishment usually adds to these demands that no TNW talks make sense if they are not attended by 'third nuclear powers'.

While the above preconditions and caveats appear to justify the tactic of delaying discussions on TNW, Moscow's underlying approach to tactical nuclear arms control is defined by more complex considerations. In March 2010, while responding to the resurfacing of the TNW issue on the international stage, Lavrov claimed that any TNW negotiations should be placed in the wider context of a comprehensive arms control and disarmament agenda.¹³

11 RIA Novosti, 26 March 2010.

12 'MID Rossii prizval vyvesti iz Evropy takticheskoe yadernoe oruzhie SShA' (Russian MFA calls for the withdrawal of US tactical weapons from Europe), <http://www.glavred.com/archive/2010/02/05/013825-14.html> (14/07/2010).

13 RIA Novosti, 26 March 2010.

This statement acknowledged that TNW is not seen in Moscow as an isolated issue or a simple function of US-Russian arms control.

This approach matured in Russia from the late 1990s onwards. The resulting consensus was based on the underlying assumption that a further reduction of nuclear arms, including TNW, could put Russia's national security in jeopardy if it was not accompanied by the inclusion of advanced non-nuclear weapons technologies in arms control arrangements. As a result, responding to the West's argument based on the disparity in TNW, Moscow points to disparities in other areas and resists the logic singling out one specific asymmetry — that in TNW stockpiles — without addressing others in a comprehensive manner.

While considering eventual further steps towards nuclear disarmament, Moscow no longer concentrates only on the 'nuclear' balance with the US or third nuclear powers but tends to include in the strategic equation advanced military capabilities such as precision-guided munitions, ballistic missile defence, long-range conventionally armed weapons that can be assigned to strategic missions, and the potential weaponization of outer space.

Speaking at the parliamentary hearings on the ratification of the New START treaty in January 2011, Lavrov made this way of thinking explicit by emphasizing that it is impossible to single out one issue — that of TNW — from the complex agenda of maintaining 'strategic parity' without addressing such issues as the development of conventionally armed long-range strategic weapons systems, the weaponization of outer space, ballistic missile defences and the disparities in conventional forces.¹⁴

This implies that any progress on TNW is considered in Moscow in conjunction with substantial progress in discussing other issues and depends on whether concerns related to other areas of arms control that have been raised by Russia over the past decade are heard and acted upon. Taking into consideration that, as of now, the Russian government does not expect to achieve any progress with the Obama administration on either of the issues on its agenda and has yet to see what it can expect from the new US government to emerge from the 2012 presidential elections, it is clear that no progress in addressing the TNW issue will be anticipated at least in the few years to come.

The evolving US approaches to handling the TNW issue

While Russia remains hesitant on the issue of a potential TNW agreement, the US government has revealed the main features of its approach. This sets the stage for the time to come, making the discussion of alternative formats for negotiations less relevant, particularly as Moscow has not proposed any vision of TNW arms control of its own.

Firstly, the US intends to include TNW on the agenda of the next round of bilateral negotiations with Russia and, at this stage, does not intend to engage third nuclear powers.

Secondly, the particular objectives of the US remain ambiguous and comparably moderate. Secretary of State Clinton has emphasized that the US would 'seek Russian agreement to increase transparency on TNW in Europe',

¹⁴ Minister Lavrov's statement at the plenary meeting of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on the new START Treaty on 14 January 2011, <http://www.mid.ru/ns-dvbr.nsf/50ce23af9ceacf46432569ea00361254/432569d800226387c3257818005cddb2?Open Document> (24/01/2011).

and ‘relocate these weapons away from the territory of NATO members’.¹⁵

When ratifying the New START treaty, the Senate went a step further by suggesting that, in the anticipated negotiations, the US should seek an agreement ‘to address the disparity’ between the TNW stockpiles of the Russian Federation and of the United States ‘and to secure and reduce tactical nuclear weapons in a verifiable manner’. At the same time, the Senate emphasized the importance not only of negotiating verifiable reductions of TNW but also of improving the security and transparency of existing stockpiles by ‘establishing cooperative measures to give each Party to the New START treaty improved confidence regarding the accurate accounting and security of tactical nuclear weapons maintained by the other Party’.¹⁶

Thirdly, at a relatively early stage, the Obama administration took a decision on the method by which it wants to address the issue. The 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review envisaged combining the negotiations over non-deployed strategic weapons and those concerning TNW (also non-deployed), thus making the reduction of US strategic weapons in reserve conditional upon the reduction of the stockpile of Russian TNW.¹⁷ Although the US Government has not presented a detailed proposal to this effect, the US arms control community anticipates that it may seek to complement limits on strategic delivery vehicles and deployed strategic weapons with a single limit on all US and Russian nuclear warheads —deployed and non-deployed, strategic and tactical. An overall limit would leave each party with the flexibility to decide on the particular mix of weapons it holds in reserve.¹⁸

This approach seeks to exploit the Russian preoccupation with the large number of US strategic warheads in reserve. At the same time, the US does not want to link the reduction of TNW to either the modernization of the CFE regime or the withdrawal of US nuclear assets from Europe as neither provides Moscow with enough incentives to engage in a deal over its TNW.

Fourthly, as US-Russian follow-up talks to START are unlikely to open any time soon, and since the inclusion of TNW on the agenda of those talks would depend, at least, on the progress and outcome of consultations within NATO concerning the possible withdrawal of American TNW from Europe, the US Government is likely to explore a phased approach that seeks to improve transparency regarding the size, location and deployment status of TNW as well as their security before a formal agreement is reached. It would probably also explore the feasibility of other early measures, such as establishing exclusion zones.

The US proceeds on the assumption that each party would gain from such an approach by offering Moscow several incentives. It presumes that further reductions of strategic nuclear arms, which are supposed to be in the Russian interest, are unlikely if TNW is not addressed. At the same time, it would grant Moscow transparency and some control over the non-deployed US strategic weapons which, for a long time, have been the subject of Russian concern.

Is a TNW deal possible?

15 111th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate, Exec, Rept. 111-6, October 1, 2010, p. 60.

16 US Senate Resolution of Advice and Consent to the ratification of the New START Treaty of December 22, 2010, Conditions 12 (A) (i) and 12 (C) (i).

17 Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010, pp. xi, 47.

18 S. Pifer, *The Next Round: the United States and Nuclear Arms Reductions After New START*, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 25.

The issue boils down to two main questions: will Moscow accept the link between its TNW and further reductions of strategic arms as well as the US strategic warheads in reserve? Will it agree to take early measures, particularly those increasing transparency and/or introducing geographic restrictions regarding the storage of those weapons, before a more comprehensive agreement with the US has been reached?

The Russian debate over TNW does not provide any clearly affirmative responses to either of those questions.


Should Moscow, at some point, agree to include TNW in any arms control regime, a bilateral instrument negotiated with the US is considered to be the most appropriate first step to deal with the issue, despite the insistence of the Russian defence establishment on including third parties' nuclear forces in the arrangement. However, so far Moscow has clearly opted for continued unilateral rather than negotiated reductions of TNW, and the current approach of the US government does not offer it enough incentives to change its mind.

Moscow's interest in further negotiated reductions of strategic nuclear arms is often overestimated. The Russian establishment proceeds on the basis that the New START treaty is the best possible negotiable deal and sets an acceptable framework for the US-Russian 'strategic stability equation' for the next ten years. At the same time, anticipated uncertainties regarding the transformation of the security landscape beyond the New START time horizon (the implementation by the US of the third and particularly fourth phases of the missile defence deployments in Europe as well as the development of the conventional Prompt Global Strike capability) result in Moscow being hesitant in predicting how this equation could look like ten years from now. For this reason, it hesitates to enter into a commitment on any further reductions any time soon, and even hesitates to open any new negotiations before the New START treaty is fully implemented.

The attractiveness of the proposal to grant Moscow control over non-deployed strategic weapons at the price of subjecting its TNW to an arms control regime also appears to be overestimated. The main cause of concern expressed by the Russian defence establishment is not the total number of weapons which the US holds in reserve or the possibility of monitoring their status but, rather, the 'spare capacity' of US strategic delivery vehicles allowing the deployment of additional warheads and thus increasing the operationally deployable strategic capability of the US. The New START treaty has limited the US upload capability to about 100 'spare' delivery vehicles — a level relatively acceptable to the Russian defence establishment. Thus the added value of a trade-off between non-deployed strategic weapons and TNW is not obvious for Moscow either.

As long as the consultations proceed, early measures, for instance those on improving transparency on TNW stockpiles, may well be the subject of US- Russian deliberations. The added value of such measures for Russia, however, is not obvious either, since they would require Moscow to commit itself to particular action while it would have to wait for any benefit from them — if any was forthcoming — until after an agreement had been reached.

Thus the balance sheet of the current US TNW arms control approach is at best ambiguous from the Russian perspective. At the same time, the constituencies with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo on TNW, as discussed above, have powerful arguments to prove that any early progress in dealing with those weapons would unilaterally disadvantage the Russian Federation.



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