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국제학석사학위논문

**Resetting the Strategic Rivalry:
Challenges in U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control**

**전략적 숙적 관계의 재설정:
미국-러시아의 핵군축의 난제**

2018년 2월

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Master's Thesis

**Resetting the Strategic Rivalry:
Challenges in U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control**

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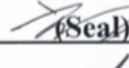
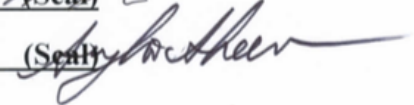
Resetting the Strategic Rivalry: Challenges in U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control

전략적 숙적 관계의 재설정: 미국-러시아의 핵군축의 난제

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Abstract

Resetting the Strategic Rivalry: Challenges in U.S.-Russian Nuclear Arms Control

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After decades on the brink of nuclear war, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War in 1991 ushered in a new era of global peace and economic liberalization. Yet mutual efforts by the United States and Russia to substantially reduce their nuclear weapons arsenals have fallen short of their objectives. This brings up the question: what are the main barriers hindering further progress for the mutual reduction of nuclear weapons for the United States and Russia?

Although both countries are currently obligated to reduce their deployed nuclear warheads stockpile numbers to 1,550 by 2018 under New START, there has been no further nuclear arms reduction cooperation between the two countries. This thesis will examine the military-technical factors and geopolitical factors hindering the prospects for deeper nuclear arms control cooperation. Regarding military-technical factors, disagreements on missile defense between Moscow and Washington, in

particular NATO's missile defense system in Europe, have continued to stall closer nuclear arms control cooperation. On the other hand, geopolitical factors have reignited the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry. Russia's annexation of Crimea during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis created a permanent rift between the Obama and Putin administrations. This rift was further exacerbated by a clashing policy agenda in the Syrian civil war and as a result, U.S.-Russian relations have deteriorated at an alarming rate. Given that both Ukraine and Syria are still ongoing conflicts, this thesis will attempt to offer a preliminary analysis of the evolving nature of nuclear arms control cooperation between the United States and Russia in a post-Cold War era up until the end of the Obama administration in 2016.

Keywords: U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation, post-Cold War security dynamics, missile defense, 2014 Ukrainian conflict, strategic arms control negotiations

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국문 초록

전략적 숙적 관계의 재설정: 미국-러시아의 핵군축의 난제

Sarah Kunis

서울대학교 국제대학원

국제학과 국제협력 전공

핵전쟁 발발 직전의 상황이 수십 년간 지속된 뒤, 소련 연방이 붕괴하였다. 연방의 해체에 따라 1991년 냉전도 종식되었다. 세계 평화와 경제 자유화로 대변될 수 있는 새 시대가 열렸고, 시대의 변화로 미국과 러시아는 상당한 양의 핵무기를 감축하고자 노력했으나 목표를 달성하지 못했다. 미국·러시아 간 상호 핵무기 감축의 진전을 저해한 요인은 무엇이었을까?

신전략무기감축협정(New START)에 따라 양국은 2018년까지 배치된 핵탄두를 1,550기로 줄여야 할 의무를 지녔음에도, 핵군축 협력과 같은 후속 조치를 취하지 않았다. 이에 본 논문은 심도 있는 핵군축 협력의 미래를 가로막는 군사·기술적 요인과 지정학적 요인을 검토하고자 한다. 군사·기술적 요인에서는 미사일 방어에 대한 모스크바와 워싱턴의 의견 불일치, 특히 유럽에 배치된 북대서양조약기구(NATO)의 미사일 방어 시스템으로 인해 핵군축의 긴밀한 협력

이 지체된 점을 밝힌다.

지정학적 요인에서는 지리적 입지가 미국과 러시아의 전략적 숙적관계를 심화시킨 점을 조명한다. 2014년 우크라이나 사태 당시 러시아의 크림반도 합병은 양국의 영구적 균열을 초래했다. 양국의 균열은 시리아 내전을 두고 각국의 정책이 부딪히면서 틈이 더 벌어졌다. 그 결과 미러 관계는 급속도로 악화되었다. 본 논문은 우크라이나 사태와 시리아 내전이 현재 진행 중인 분쟁이라는 점을 고려하여, 냉전 이후부터 2016년 오바마 행정부 시기까지, 미국과 러시아의 핵군축 협력의 진화 과정에 대해 예비 분석 결과를 제시하고자 한다.

주요어: 미국, 러시아, 핵군축 난제, 미사일 방어망, 2014 년 우크라이나 사태, 미국·러시아의 전략적 숙적 관계, 시리아 내전

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

English Abstract.....	i
국문 초록.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Graphs, Tables, Maps.....	vii
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Research Question.....	6
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1. Theoretical Framework	8
2.1.a. U.S.-Russian Strategic Rivalry	11
2.1.b. Strategic vs. tactical nuclear weapons	15
2.2. Historical Framework.....	17
2.2.a. 1971-1990: SALT I Interim Agreement.....	20
2.2.b. 1991-2000: 1991 START Treaty.....	24
2.2.c. 2002-2007: Moscow SORT Treaty.....	29
2.2.d. 2010-2016: New START Treaty.....	34
III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	38
IV. CASE STUDIES.....	40
4.1. Missile Defense Disagreements.....	40
4.1.a. Implications for Nuclear Arms Control Cooperation.....	46
4.2. Ukraine.....	48
4.2.a. Background of the Ukrainian conflict.....	48
4.2.b. Shifts in nuclear policy.....	55
4.2.c. Implications from the Ukrainian Case Study.....	63
4.3. Syria.....	68
4.3.a. Background of the Syrian civil war.....	68
4.3.b. Implications from the Syrian Case Study.....	73
V. CONCLUSION.....	77
VI. WORKS CITED.....	84

LIST OF GRAPHS, TABLES, MAPS

GRAPHS

1. Graph 1: Estimated U.S.-Russian Nuclear Warhead Inventories 1977-2018.....18
2. Graph 2: New START Numbers for Deployed Warheads and Deployed Delivery Vehicles.....36

TABLES

1. Table 1: U.S.-Soviet Arms Control Agreements.....19
2. Table 2: U.S.-Russian Arms Control Agreements19
3. Table 3: START Provisions.....27
4. Table 4: European Phased Adaptive Approach to Missile Defense.....45

MAPS

1. Map 1: Map of Eastern Ukraine 2015.....52
2. Map 2: Map of Syria and Iraq as of October 2017.....72

INTRODUCTION

“To put an end to Cold War thinking, we will reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and urge others to do the same.”¹ President Obama’s visionary 2009 Prague speech on nuclear peace inspired hope that finally, nearly 20 years after the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-Russian nuclear rivalry could genuinely move in the direction of significant arms reductions and friendlier relations. Looking back at the past century, the security dynamics of the world have undergone a series of drastic evolutions since the end of World War II. The end of World War II marked the beginning of a new rivalry between two of the world’s greatest superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War, lasting from 1947 until 1991, triggered a destructive arms race and competition for global influence between the United States and the Soviet Union. The ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union led to the spread of liberal economic policies and the abandonment of communism, opening the chapter for a new global order. Given that we live in a post-Cold War era in which the official arms race between the United States and Russia has lost its driving purpose and tensions have thawed to some degree, why has the subsequently planned reduction in nuclear weapons encountered so many barriers?

¹ Obama, Barack. “Remarks of President Obama.” 5 Apr. 2009, Prague, Czech Republic, Hradčany Square.

Despite Obama's optimistic and stirring Prague speech, internalized in the hearts and minds of many who have hoped for the eventual realization of a world free of nuclear weapons, the reality remains that the legacy of the Cold War lives on today in many forms, notably in the physical form of the remaining nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia. The hard-learned lessons of nuclear deterrence and the dangers of nuclear brinkmanship in a post-Cold War world are no longer limited to the U.S.-Russian rivalry, as new states have joined the nuclear club. The threat of nuclear warfare today is most imminent in the Korean peninsula as North Korea continues its quest to develop functional nuclear weapons.

Therefore, the strategic value of nuclear weapons is far from obsolete today. Despite the fact that no atomic bomb has been detonated since Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the waning months of World War II, nuclear weapons are a greater threat than ever:

Nuclear weapons, once the bone of contention between Cold War superpowers, within that context evolved into props and supports for stability- that is, for helping to freeze a political glaciis that maintained a pacified Europe from the end of World War II until the end of the Cold War and beyond. In the twenty-first century, and especially outside of Europe, the role of nuclear weapons might prove to be less benign. The spread of nuclear weapons to revisionist states or regional rogues would certainly be accelerated if Iran became a nuclear weapons state, or if the proto-nuclear weapons capabilities of North Korea were not reversed in good time.²

² Cimbala, Stephen J. *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*. Ashgate, 2015, 10.

Unraveling the strategic value of nuclear weapons in a post-Cold War era is not complete without the inclusion of the other more recent nuclear states, such as India and Pakistan. However, this thesis will focus exclusively on the two-main original nuclear powers, given their history and crucial role in shaping the concept of nuclear deterrence. The United States and Russia continue to remain number one and two, respectively, in terms of the size of their nuclear arsenals and their special status as nuclear superpowers allows them to lead the international nuclear order.

Understanding the unique dynamics of the U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control relationship requires a two-fold examination of both military-technical factors and geopolitical factors. In spite of the fact that the official end of the Cold War has rendered the nuclear arms race between the U.S. and USSR obsolete, the fact that the U.S. and Russia have refused to completely dismantle their nuclear arsenals reveals how there are convoluted and underlying factors in the U.S.-Russian security relationship. Unraveling the military-technical factors will necessitate a thorough examination of the issue of missile defense, which became a contentious issue during George W. Bush's administration and continues to remain a sticking point for Russia. Russia has consistently maintained its view that one of the greatest impediments against further nuclear arms control is the issue of missile defense: "...Russian

expectations about the future of New START were specifically related to the issue of missile defense”³

The geopolitical factors obstructing nuclear arms control are the 2014 Ukrainian conflict and, to a lesser extent, the 2011 Syrian Civil War. The reasoning behind the selection of these two case studies is that they represent both direct and indirect security dilemmas for Russia and the United States and have been the greatest source of tension between the two countries during the Obama administration: “These tensions have been compounded and exacerbated in recent months in the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, and now increasingly by events in Syria as well.”⁴ Greater analytical weight will be placed on the Ukrainian conflict, which is situated in a geopolitical hotspot between Europe and Russia. The Ukrainian conflict presents a more direct geographical and existential security threat to Russia. Furthermore, the Ukrainian conflict has implications for the NATO alliance, which ties it to the U.S.’s strategic interest. The events of the Ukrainian conflict had a direct and immediate impact on U.S.-Russian strategic relations and the Russian annexation of Crimea can be pinpointed as the turning point in solidifying the U.S.-Russian estrangement into a permanent rift.

³ Cimbala, Stephen J. “U.S.-Russian Strategic Arms Reductions: Nonlinear Challenges, Practical Opportunities.” *Foreign Policy Research Institute Elsevier Ltd.*, 9 Aug. 2013, pp. 574–594., doi:doi: 10.1016/j.orbis.2013.08.005, 576.

⁴ Futter, Andrew. “War Games redux? Cyberthreats, US–Russian strategic stability, and new challenges for nuclear security and arms control.” *European Security*, 25:2, 2016, (163-180), 165.

The deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations as a result from the events in Ukraine spilled-over into other geopolitical conflicts. Although the 2011 Syrian Civil War began before the 2014 Ukrainian conflict, Syria had only a minor impact on U.S.-Russian strategic relations during the early onset of the Syrian Civil War. It was only after relations reached an all-time low due to Ukraine that Syria became an increasingly contentious issue between the U.S. and Russia. Given that the Syrian Civil War presents less of a direct and tangible threat to Russia and the United States, it can only be regarded as an indirect and subsequent geopolitical factor contributing to the U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control impasse.

In light of the fact that no nuclear weapons have been deployed in either of these conflicts to date, the research method of this thesis will examine how events in Ukraine and Syria have contributed to reviving the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry and therefore influencing each country's nuclear policy. This thesis will also operate under the definition of strategic rivalry as the following: "Strategic rivalry among major powers exists when one or more great powers see one or more other major powers as the primary national security threat, focus their defense effort on them, and form alliances against them."⁵ In the case of the United States and Russia, the defining element of their strategic rivalry has been nuclear weapons, as nuclear weapons were the distinguishing characteristic of the U.S.-Soviet strategic rivalry during the Cold War. Therefore, although the term strategic rivalry can encompass a range of security

⁵ Legvold, Robert. *Return to Cold War*. Polity, 2016, 22.

issues, this thesis will focus on the status of nuclear arms control cooperation as the most important aspect of U.S.-Russian strategic relations.

Research Question

The research question driving this thesis is: what are the main factors hampering the prospects for future U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation? This thesis proposes that the lack of impetus in nuclear arms control cooperation can be attributed to both military-technical and geopolitical factors, in the form of disagreements over missile defense and clashing geopolitical policy agendas in Ukraine and Syria.

In order to analyze the impact of these factors on nuclear arms control, the literature review will delve into the theoretical and historical framework of U.S.-Russian (formerly Soviet) strategic arms control cooperation. The theoretical framework will adopt the theories of realism, notably John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz's neorealist theories. The historical framework will delve into the historical context behind the evolution of U.S.-Russian strategic arms control, starting from before the end of the Cold War and leading up to the ratification and implementation of the New START treaty in 2011. Understanding the historical context will provide the framework to analyze contemporary factors that are influencing U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control, namely missile defense and the emerging geopolitical strategic rivalry between the U.S.-Russia from the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and discordant policy agendas in Syria.

Given that these conflicts are still ongoing and continue to aggrieve relations today, for the purpose of clarity and brevity, this thesis will focus the bulk of its analysis on the period spanning from the George W. Bush administration until the end of the Obama administration. During the George W. Bush administration, the issue of missile defense was one of the most significant disagreements between the United States and Russia. Although missile defense continued to plague the relationship during the Obama administration, the focus quickly shifted to the geopolitical clash in Ukraine and to a lesser extent in Syria. As of current, it is too premature to incorporate the policies of Donald Trump into this thesis and would require too much speculation. Hence, the timeframe that will be examined in this thesis will focus mainly on the Obama administration up until the end of 2016.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will consist of two main sections divided into theoretical and historical parts. In order to provide a solid theoretical framework to analyze the case studies, the theory of realism will be briefly outlined to provide a guiding framework to understanding the foreign policy doctrines behind U.S. and Russian nuclear policy and also the strategic rivalry between the two countries. In addition, the distinction between strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons (also known as “tactical”) will be succinctly described in order to clarify the terms of arms control negotiation.

The second part of the literature review of this thesis will look into the historical context behind the evolution of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control. This part will conduct a chronological overview of the evolution of strategic arms control cooperation divided into four parts: (1) the first part will examine the period from the 1972 SALT I Interim Agreement until the end of the Cold War in 1991; (2) the second part will pick up from the 1991 START Treaty until the end of Clinton administration in 2000; (3) the third part will focus on the 2002 Moscow (SORT) Treaty until the end of the George W. Bush administration; (4) finally, the fourth part will focus on the 2010 New START Treaty until the end of the Obama administration in 2016.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis will draw from the major realist and neorealist works of Hans Morgenthau, offensive realism by Kenneth Waltz, and defensive realism by John Mearsheimer. The neorealist framework developed by Waltz and Mearsheimer is crucial to framing U.S.-Russian nuclear relations today.

The decision to use a realist framework as opposed to a constructivist or an institutionalist framework is based on the assumption that nuclear weapons are inherently strategic weapons, and therefore to analyze them in a constructivist or institutionalist lens, although necessary for a holistic understanding, would not provide the best tools to analyze the nature of the strategic arms control partnership between the United States and Russia. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the U.S.-Russian strategic arms control partnership is not solely driven by realist factors. It

is also driven by institutionalist factors, such as the international nuclear regime codified most aptly by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and constructivist factors, namely President Obama's attempt to recast the ideological foundation of the strategic partnership into a partnership of peace and mutual nuclear reduction. However, realist factors continue to trump institutionalist and constructivist factors as the United States and Russia continue to view each other as strategic rivals, especially after the souring in relations from the 2014 Ukrainian conflict.

Despite realism encompassing a wide-ranging span of theories, this thesis will concentrate on the three most influential scholars in the school of realism: Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer. The works of each scholar will be briefly reviewed in the following sections.

Morgenthau is best known for proposing that "politics and society in general, are governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" as defined by a Hobbesian state of nature in which survival is based on a self-help basis in world operating under anarchy.⁶ In Morgenthau's classical realism, "interest as defined by power" is the *modus operandi* for understanding the behavior of states and it is futile to look for moral or ethical motivations behind the behavior of states.

Kenneth Waltz expands Morgenthau's classical realism by invoking three images of analysis: the first image of the individual, the second image of state, and the

⁶ Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, Fifth Edition, Revised, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, 4.

third image of the international system. According to Waltz, the international system is defined by the principles of realism in that under the conditions of anarchy, the strategies of other states need to be taken into account in the formulation of one's own strategy: "In international politics there is no authority effectively able to prohibit the use of force. The balance of power among states becomes a balance of all the capacities, including physical force that states choose to use in pursuing their goals."⁷ Therefore, the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry is inherently an international balance of power struggle between the two greatest nuclear states. Waltz's balance of power theory provides the foundation for defensive realism, in that "the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system."⁸ Under the assumptions of defensive realism, states are not aggressive in seeking to maximize their power in the international system; rather states are cautious and seek to build up their defensive capabilities and maintain the status quo.

On the other hand, Mearsheimer proposes the counter to defensive realism, known as offensive realism. Mearsheimer argues that states are always seeking to maximize their power and attain hegemony, and status quo powers are difficult to find. The international "system is populated with great powers that have revisionist intentions at their core."⁹ Following this logic, in offensive realism, absolute power is

⁷ Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw Hill (1979) p. 126 http://www.drmalikcikk.atw.hu/wp_readings/mearsheimer.pdf, 205.

⁸ Ibid, 126.

⁹ Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2014, 100.

not as important as relative power. During the Cold War, the objective was to amass a greater nuclear arsenal that was measured according to the relative size of your rival's arsenal.

Having briefly outlined the core tenets of the realist framework, the next section will explain concisely the specific way realism has manifested itself in aspects of the U.S.-Russian relationship, namely the strategic rivalry between the two countries. The existence of a strategic rivalry, which developed in the waning days of the end of World War II until it reached the full-blown rivalry of the Cold War, is the most straightforward way to measure how realist perceptions of hard power shape relations.

U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry

In the realist framework, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War was a textbook example of strategic rivalry: "The original Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union did satisfy handsomely the criteria of a strategic rivalry. Each saw the other as the main threat. Each wielded massive conventional forces and amassed vast arsenals of nuclear weapons specifically designed for the other."¹⁰

However, it is important to distinguish the difference between nuclear weapons and conventional weapons in terms of the balance of power:

Realist theories of international politics assume that states seek to maximize their power relative to other actors, and especially against rivals for regional or international hegemony. However,

¹⁰ Levgold, 24.

nuclear weapons do not “add up” in the same way that conventional forces do: more are not necessarily better, for deterrence or for crisis management. An imbalance in nuclear strike capabilities between larger and smaller powers might motivate the smaller power from acquiring a nuclear first strike capability. Rational deterrence theory also assumes that political leaders make cost-benefit decisions whether to attack on the basis of expected utilities for the “winner” of a nuclear exchange and expected disutilities for the “loser.” However, nuclear conflicts are as likely to begin from a flawed bargaining process in which states misestimate enemy intentions, capabilities, and mindsets.¹¹

The fact that nuclear weapons have their own unique dynamic can help us understand why states seem to place greater value on their nuclear arsenals. Returning to the research question driving this thesis- what can account for the breakdown in U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation today- the perspective of the United States must be examined separately from Russia’s perspective.

For the United States, the reasons for holding on to its nuclear arsenal are twofold in the realist framework:

First, the international security environment remains dangerous and unpredictable, and has grown more complicated since the dissolution of the Soviet Union...Second, nuclear weapons continue to play unique roles in supporting U.S. national security. Although not suited for every 21st century challenge, nuclear weapons remain an essential element in modern strategy.¹²

The inability to relinquish the important role nuclear weapons continue to play in U.S. national security policy has endowed nuclear weapons their enduring

¹¹ Cimbala, *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*, 20.

¹² Pelligrini, Dominick R. Nuclear Weapons' Role in 21st Century U.S. Policy. Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2010. Weapons of Mass Destruction Series. EBSCOhost, 41.

strategic value. Therefore, from the U.S. point of view, nuclear weapons have become an indispensable part of U.S. defense strategy in a world facing ever-evolving security challenges.

From Russia's perspective, its nuclear arsenal still represents its lifeline in a multipolar world no longer defined by the bipolar rivalry of the U.S. and USSR. The Russian military has not been able to keep up with the advanced technological innovation of the U.S military, and therefore cannot completely abandon its nuclear arsenal:

Postmodern Russia seeks to modernize its military and move beyond the nuclear dependency of the Cold War. But until it can catch up with post-Desert Storm conventional high-technology weapons of the kind deployed by the United States and NATO, Russia must rely on its nuclear deterrent, which now covers more possible scenarios than during the Cold War.¹³

It is the asymmetry in conventional power that feeds contemporary Russian insecurities today. Given that the United States far outstrips Russia in conventional forces, Russia's primary instinct is to cling onto its nuclear arsenal to maintain its status as a great power. In addition, the notion of parity still plays an essential role in shaping Russian perceptions of the utility of their nuclear arsenal and is quite useful in analyzing Russia's nuclear policy today:

... the logic of the Russian defense policy, which determines structure of the military-industrial complex, did not change since

¹³ Cimbala, Stephen J. and Peter Jacob Rainow. *Russia and Postmodern Deterrence: Military Power and Its Challenges for Security*. vol. 1st ed, University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Issues in Twenty-first Century Warfare. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=388649&site=ehost-live, xvi.

the Cold War. Today more factors objectively unite Russia and the US in the world rather than separates them. However, Moscow is still committed to maintaining a parity (or at least an illusion of parity) with the US in the strategic nuclear sphere and regards it as a criteria for its military security and maintenance of a great power status.¹⁴

In summary, viewing U.S.-Russian relations through a realist framework provides perspective on why nuclear weapons continue to remain relevant today, even after the end of the Cold War arms race.

Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how arms control treaties fit in the realist framework. Despite being generally understood to be tools of negotiation with the aim of diminishing security dilemmas, arms control treaties can sometimes exacerbate security dilemmas as much as they seek to diminish them. For example, given Russia's inferior conventional power, reductions in its nuclear arsenal would leave Russia in an overall weaker position. In order to avoid this, it is crucial to have thorough knowledge of the technical requirements of maintaining a valid nuclear arsenal:

For the time being, New START only reproduces the old logic of balances and counterbalances, because there are no discussions in Russia about criteria for determining a sufficient and optimal level of its nuclear arsenal, or about factors that should now determine the country's nuclear arms policy. Numerous myths and enormous Cold War inertia suggest an outdated understanding of what quantitative and qualitative levels of strategic nuclear forces meet the task of ensuring national

¹⁴ Suslov, Dmitry. "The US-Russia Relations and the Russian Strategic Defense Policy: Getting Beyond the Cold War Logic." National Research University Higher School of Economics, 2012, 2.

security, foreign-policy prestige and a place in the international system.¹⁵

Delving into the technical requirements of maintaining an optimal level of nuclear forces for strategic security requires a quick explanation of the difference between strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons, which will follow in the next section.

Strategic vs. tactical nuclear weapons

In the interest of clarity, it is necessary to define what is meant by the terms “strategic” and “tactical” nuclear weapons. Strategic refers to the idea that: “Strategic nuclear weapons that can threaten an adversary’s valued targets from afar are, and are likely to remain, essential for holding particularly well-protected targets at risk for deterrence purposes.”¹⁶ Therefore, strategic nuclear weapons are meant for high-yield destruction in warfare to achieve swift victory.

The counterpart to strategic weapons are nonstrategic weapons. Nonstrategic nuclear weapons refer to low-yield nuclear weapons such as “shorter-range ballistic and cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads.”¹⁷ In short, the main difference between strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons is their yield and intention. For offensive, longer-range reach, and higher yield weapons, there is a definitive strategic

¹⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁶ Foster, John S., Jr., and Keith B. Payne. "What Are Nuclear Weapons For?" *Forum on Physics and Society* 36.4 (2007): n. pag. *The American Physical Society*. Web. 1 May 2017.

¹⁷ Pifer, Steven. *The Future of U.S.-Russian Arms Control*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, *The Future of U.S.-Russian Arms Control*, www.brookings.edu/research/the-future-of-u-s-russian-arms-control/.

value. Low-yield, shorter range missiles with nuclear warheads for defensive purposes are seen as nonstrategic.

The matter of defining nonstrategic and strategic nuclear weapons is crucial for further arms control cooperation as “Washington and Moscow have yet to agree on a common, technical definition of tactical nuclear weapons...”¹⁸ Even so, the prospect of negotiations on nonstrategic nuclear weapons is a dim possibility:

Negotiations on nonstrategic nuclear weapons are unlikely for three reasons: verification, inequality, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). There simply are no good ways to verify limits on numbers of warheads, yet without verification, treaties are simply unilateral declarations under another name. An equally daunting problem is the disparity between the nonstrategic arsenals of the United States and Russia, with the Russian arsenal substantially larger, although authoritative public numbers are lacking on both sides. Finally, in any such negotiation the Russians would certainly seek the removal of the remaining U.S. nuclear weapons (all bombs) from Europe.¹⁹

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of realism is most suitable for analyzing the evolution of the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry, but the unique dynamic of nuclear weapons and the lack of a common technical definition of tactical nuclear weapons does not fit neatly into the realist framework. To truly understand the role nuclear

¹⁸ Zenko, Micah. *Towards Deeper Reductions in U.S. and Russian Nuclear Weapons*. Council on Foreign

Relations, 2010, Council Special Report, 7.

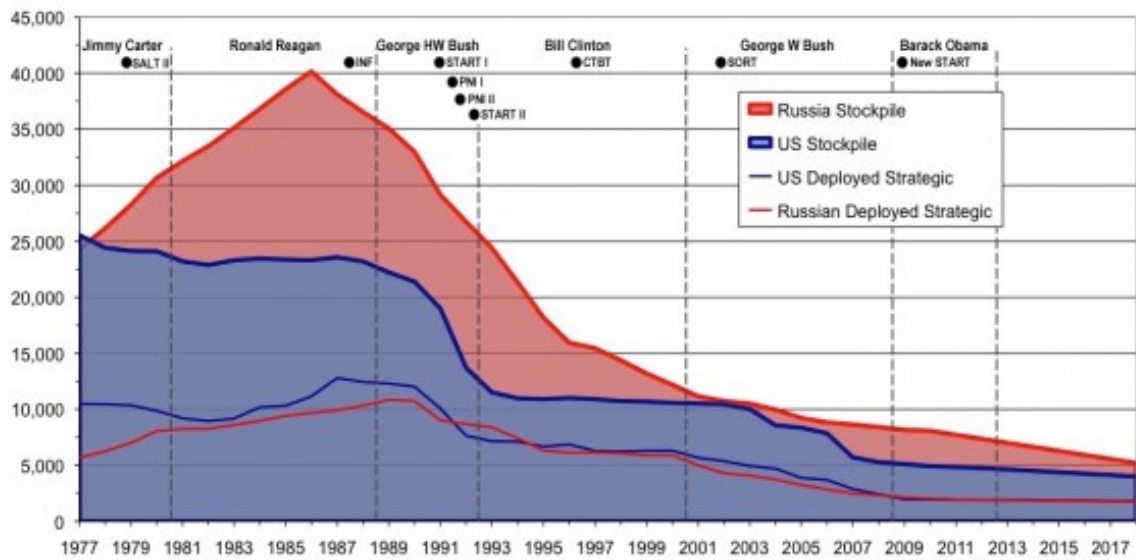
¹⁹ Brooks, Linton F. *Arms Control and U.S. Russian Relations*. Edited by Stephen J Blank, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), 2009, *Arms Control and U.S. Russian Relations*, permanent.access.gpo.gov/LPS110915/LPS110915/www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB892.pdf, 110.

weapons played in shaping U.S.-Russian relations, a historical overview of U.S.-Soviet/Russian nuclear arms control cooperation is needed. The next section will probe deeper into the historical context of U.S.-Russian (formerly Soviet) strategic arms control cooperation.

Historical Framework

As mentioned previously, the historical framework will provide the crucial context to understanding how the U.S.-Russian strategic arms control partnership has evolved into its current state. A chronological outline of the major developments of the strategic arms control partnership will be divided into the following four time periods: (1) The 1972 SALT I Interim Agreement until the end of the Cold War in 1991; (2) The 1991 START Treaty until 2000; (3) The 2002 Moscow SORT Treaty until the end of the George W. Bush administration in 2007; (4) Finally, the 2010 New START Treaty until the end of the Obama administration in 2016. For a visual reference of the progression of nuclear arms reduction, the following graph is a useful guide:

Graph 1:
Estimated U.S.-Russian Nuclear Warhead Inventories 1977-2018



Kristensen, Hans M, and Robert S Norris, "Status of World Nuclear Forces," *Federation of American Scientists*, 2017

A summary of all the major arms control agreements produced between the United States and Soviet Union/Russia is also below:

Table 1:

U.S.-Soviet Arms Control Agreements			
Treaty/Agreement	Year	Format	Status
ABM Treaty	1972	Treaty	Entered into force in 1972; lapsed after U.S. withdrawal in 2002
SALT I Interim Agreement	1972	Executive Agreement	Entered into force in 1972, due to remain in force for 5 years
SALT II	1979	Treaty	Did not enter into force
INF	1987	Treaty	Entered into force in 1988; reductions complete in 1991; remains in force
START	1991	Treaty	Entered into force in 1994; reductions complete in 2001; lapsed in December 2009

Woolf, *Next Steps in Nuclear Arms Control with Russia: Issues for Congress*.

Table 2:

U.S.-Russian Arms Control Agreements			
Treaty/Agreement	Year	Format	Status
START II	1993	Treaty	Did not enter into force
Moscow Treaty (SORT)	2002	Treaty	Entered into force in 2003; would have lapsed in 2012, but lapsed on EIF of New START
New START	2010	Treaty	Entered into force in 2011

Woolf, *Next Steps in Nuclear Arms Control with Russia: Issues for Congress*.

(1) 1972-1990: SALT I Interim Agreement

This period will cover the 1972 SALT I Interim Agreement until the end of the Cold War in 1991. During this period, the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was in full swing, and dominated the international system. The ideological divisions between the two countries, which can be defined as the antagonism between democracy and communism, evolved into a global competition for influence, spanning several regions and encompassing several conflicts, including the Vietnam War and Korean War. The central pillar of the strategic rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union was the destructive strategic arms race, namely nuclear weapons. Even in the earlier stages of the U.S.-Soviet strategic rivalry, there was a mutual recognition for the need of some sort of arms control framework to curb the increasingly unsustainable and risky arms race. The unique destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons were recognized by both American and Soviet leaders and both countries ratified the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

Despite the mutual recognition that some sort of process for formal arms control agreements was needed even starting from the 1950s, early attempts at arms control negotiations floundered due to the deep distrust and suspicion between the two countries and also due to domestic political pressure to uphold the arms race: “Arms control was impossible in the late 1950s, given the mutual suspicions of both the

United States and Soviet Union over each other's intentions."²⁰ In addition, the Soviet military strongly resisted any notion of placing limits on their nuclear arsenal given their inability to surpass the size of the U.S. arsenal and doggedly pursued their goal of reaching "deep parity," which entailed that the "Soviet Union not only match America's intercontinental capabilities, but block its advantages in projecting military power around the Soviet frontier."²¹

Therefore, it was not until the Nixon administration reached out in 1969 to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev that serious arms control talks began. Despite strong objections from the Soviet military leadership, Brezhnev was more interested in pursuing a foreign policy of détente and lessening the economic burdens of the military. Brezhnev met Nixon at the negotiation table in Helsinki and after years of negotiation, the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) Interim Agreement was signed in 1972.

The essential aim of the SALT I agreement was to place a limit on the number of delivery systems and anti-ballistic missile systems in order to scale back the arms race. SALT I was seen as a work in progress and hence deemed an "interim agreement." Negotiations on contentious issues, such as whether U.S. forces outside of the continental U.S. should be included in the talks, continued until the SALT II

²⁰ Zaloga, Steve J. *The Kremlin's Nuclear Sword: The Rise and Fall of Russia's Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1945-2000*. Smithsonian Books, 2014, 141.

²¹ Ibid, 135.

interim agreement was finally reached in 1978. SALT II was focused on fourth-generation intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM):

The aim of the negotiations was to set an outer limit on the number of delivery vehicles and warheads acceptable to both sides. The United States attempted to leave itself open to field new cruise missiles outside the treaty, while the Soviet Union attempted to protect its flexibility in modernizing its missile force by resisting U.S. efforts to limit the development of new missiles.²²

However, the success of reaching the SALT II agreement was short-lived, as the U.S. Senate rejected its ratification. There was growing discontent on the American side regarding the SALT negotiations, as the talks did not stop Soviets from developing another generation of more advanced missiles. Therefore, prospects for continuing arms control talks faced opposition from conservative political factions, who believed that “the arms-control treaties had stalemated American strategic modernization, while the Carter administration was ignoring the scope and intent of the vigorous Soviet program.”²³

By the 1980s, Soviet-American arms control efforts hit a rough patch and mutual distrust between the two countries spiked again. The most obvious cause was President Reagan’s 1983 proposal for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), nicknamed “Star Wars.” The SDI proposal sought the installation of a large nuclear shield that could block a potential incoming nuclear attack. The Soviets were naturally

²² Ibid, 195.

²³ Ibid, 196.

quite distressed about the SDI proposal: “As former U.S. Defense Secretary and Director of Central Intelligence Robert M. Gates has noted: SDI was a Soviet nightmare come to life.”²⁴ SDI was a painfully stark reminder to the Soviets of their inability to keep up with the fast-pace of American technology and its vast economic resources: “SDI therefore presented to the Soviet leadership a two-sided threat of military obsolescence and of economic stress.”²⁵

By 1985, the Soviet Union, with new leader Mikhail Gorbachev at the helm, re-approached the United States in seeking a treaty to constrain intermediate nuclear forces (INF). By 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev were able to reach an agreement, called the INF Treaty. The INF Treaty marked the first time the USSR and USA were obligated to destroy the INF portions of their existing nuclear arsenal, but Gorbachev was not successful in seeking further concessions from the U.S. In the eyes of the Soviet military leaders, the INF Treaty was massively disadvantageous for the USSR. Not only did Gorbachev fail to link INF to SDI, but as part of the verification process, he also allowed the USSR to be open to “on-site inspections inside the USSR itself for the first time.”²⁶ Yet Gorbachev’s concessions went a long way in defusing hostilities between the two countries and creating faith in arms control efforts.

In conclusion, the period from 1972-1990 was pivotal in setting in place the arms control negotiations framework between the United States and Soviet Union.

²⁴ Cimbala, Stephen J. *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*, 181.

²⁵ Ibid, 181.

²⁶ Zaloga, 208.

SALT I and SALT II were the first steps in seeking to place limits on the size of the strategic forces, while the INF Treaty went a step beyond in requiring the reductions of forces. Although Soviet-American relations suffered from ups and downs, the most important achievement of this period was the mutual recognition that the arms race was unsustainable and fiscally irresponsible. By the end of the 1980s, when the political stability of the Soviet Union became increasingly shakier and its economic troubles worsened, two U.S. senators, Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, proposed the Nunn-Lugar Act, which created the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program to secure nuclear materials management across the Soviet region. The 1991 Nunn-Lugar Act would prove to be crucial for the next decade, after the fall of the Soviet Union plunged the region into turmoil, as the priority for both the United States and newly established Russian Federation became “removing nuclear weapons from Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, decommissioning nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons in Russia, and securing weapons-grade nuclear materials throughout the former Soviet Union.”²⁷ The next section will focus on arms control negotiations after the fall of the Soviet Union until the end of 2000.

(2) 1991-2000: 1991 START Treaty

Renewed efforts at arms control cooperation came in the form of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was signed in July 1991. START went a step

²⁷ Levgold, 39-40.

beyond, as “This arms-control treaty was the first to codify an actual reduction in the size of the nuclear arsenals on both sides, down to 1,600 delivery systems and 6,000 warheads.”²⁸ However, the details of implementing the Treaty were interrupted by the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union months later.

The Soviet Union’s collapse in the last days of December 1991 created a state of confusion and uncertainty, and the Soviet Strategic Missile Force (RVSN) was hit harder than any other branch of the Soviet military, especially since the Soviet Union had spread its nuclear forces across the region. “The newly formed Russian republic took over the control of the strategic nuclear forces, most of which were on Russian soil. But a significant fraction of the missile and bomber forces were at bases in the newly independent republics. As a result, Russia lost control of nearly a quarter of the ICBM force- 23.9 percent of all launchers, including some of the most recent fourth-generation systems.”²⁹

Negotiating and ensuring the removal of nuclear forces from the territory of former Soviet states was the most urgent task in the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The United States was eager to aid the new Russian state in securing its nuclear arsenal across the region. Both Kazakhstan and Belarus obliged Russia’s request to return the nuclear forces, yet Ukraine was a much trickier case and required the United States to step in and offer significant incentives:

²⁸ Zaloga, 222.

²⁹ Ibid, 215.

The United States tied aid and good relations to gradual denuclearization and pledged an aid package of \$700 million. With promises of U.S. support, the Ukrainian parliament ratified the START I treaty and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in November 1993. This was a critical step in the dismantlement of the strategic-missile force in Ukraine.³⁰

By 1993, the second component of START, known as START II, was negotiated and signed by Russia and the United States. START II sought deeper cuts, especially the elimination of “land-based missiles with MIRV warheads and specified a further reduction of warheads to 3,500. The two treaties aimed at eliminating about two-thirds of the nuclear firepower that existed at the end of the Cold War.”³¹ The motivating factors for Russia in the START negotiations were twofold: to provide an example to former Soviet countries (especially Ukraine) that Russia was serious in reducing its nuclear arsenal and also financial reasons in that Russia could not maintain the costs of its nuclear forces. While Russia was still processing its post-Soviet identity, Russian nuclear doctrine became open for debate:

the factors driving Russia to restructure and reduce its forces do not necessarily entail Russia's complete implementation of the START II treaty. Since the treaty was signed, debates over doctrine and force restructuring have emerged that suggest that alternative reductions and force structures may be more congenial to the Russian strategic community and military.³²

³⁰ Ibid, 219.

³¹ Ibid, 222.

³² Lepingwell, John W.R. “Start II and the Politics of Arms Control in Russia.” *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1995, pp. 63–91., www.jstor.org/stable/2539229, 71.

For a comprehensive overview of the stipulations of the START I and START II agreements, the following table is useful:

**Table 3:
START Provisions**

	START I	START II
Total Launchers	1,600	NS
Ballistic Missiles	4,900	NS
MIRVed ICBMs		0
Heavy ICBMs	154	0
Mobile ICBM RVs	1,100	NS
SLBM RVs		1,750
Weapons ^a	6,000	3,500
Warheads	8,500 (U.S.)	3,500
Implementation Date	December 2001 ^b	January 1, 2003 ^c
Duration	15 years, 5 year renewal	As long as START I remains in force

NOTES: RVs = Reentry vehicles. NS = not specified. START I limits would apply.

^a Under START I, bombers are counted as having fewer warheads than they are capable of carrying. Hence more warheads can be deployed than are listed as weapons or "accountable warheads." These special counting rules are not included in START II.

^b The START I treaty entered into force on December 5, 1994. The treaty calls for implementation within seven years of entry into force.

^c If, within one year of the START II treaty's entry into force, the United States and Russia agree to financial assistance for dismantling weapons, then the implementation date is moved forward to December 31, 2000.

Other key START II provisions: silos for decommissioned missiles must be destroyed, but 90 heavy ICBM silos may be specially modified for single-warhead missiles. One hundred and five MIRVed ICBMs may be "downloaded" so that they carry only one warhead. One hundred bombers may be converted to conventional bombing missions and not counted under the treaty.

Lepingwell, John W.R. "Start II and the Politics of Arms Control in Russia."

Therefore, the negotiations of the START I and START II Treaties do not provide a full picture of the state of U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation during this period, as there were many obstacles hindering implementation,

“principally, the unsettled political environment in Russia.”³³ It is worthwhile to delve into the Russian domestic political environment at the time, as this period marks a transition period in Russian foreign policy, which has impacted the arms control negotiation process. Notably, during this period, it is possible to discern a change in outlook from the part of the Russians:

The shift from a strongly pro-Western orientation to a more "realist" stance, based on a reassessment of Russian geopolitical interests, has increased strains in U.S.-Russian relations. Driving this process has been an underlying shift in the Russian polity, as the hardships of reform have triggered a resurgence of Russian nationalism and distrust of the West.³⁴

Coupled with this paradigm shift in Russian foreign policy doctrine were serious issues of funding and personnel for the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) (the successor to the RVSN), which have led to concerns about the fitness and quality of Russia’s nuclear arsenal: “the division of the defense industrial complex, combined with reduced defense budgets and aging missiles, has led to difficulties in the maintenance of existing systems.”³⁵

In addition, the Russian military leadership and politicians were re-examining their nuclear doctrine. Yeltsin’s 1993 release of Russian military doctrine principles revealed an indefinite reversal of the policy of nuclear no first use (NFU), which had been in place for decades. Concerned about the ring of NATO-allied states around its

³³ Ibid, 63.

³⁴ Ibid, 63.

³⁵ Ibid, 67.

vicinity, Russia withdrew its NFU policy against states that are in an alliance with a nuclear state or possess their own nuclear weapons.³⁶

In the end, START II never entered into force, despite the Clinton administration's efforts: "The administration was, however, unable to make much headway on further arms control, largely because domestic Russian politics and Russia's increasing opposition to other American policies stymied further negotiations."³⁷ The complex nature of Russia's struggle with its post-Soviet identity in domestic and foreign politics became tied to the arms control process:

Here again, the dual nature of the Soviet legacy is evident, for while Russia inherited commitments to arms control, it also inherited the Soviet Union's aspirations to superpower status and a lingering distrust of the West. These tensions in both domestic and foreign policy are evident in the case of the START II treaty, and may well be exacerbated as Russian politicians prepare for elections in 1995 and 1996.³⁸

The arrival of Vladimir Putin onto the Russian political scene at the end of the twentieth century would set Russia on an independent course diametrically opposed to the West and reshape the arms control partnership.

(3) 2002-2007: Moscow SORT Treaty

The 2000 Russian presidential election of Vladimir Putin and the election of George W. Bush in the 2000 U.S. presidential election brought two new leaders into office

³⁶ Ibid, 72.

³⁷ Stent, Angela E. *The Limits of Partnership U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton University Press, 2015, 29.

³⁸ Lepingwell, 76.

with strong foreign policy agendas. Moreover, the beginning of the twenty-first century ushered in new security challenges that would force each country to confront and re-evaluate their nuclear doctrine.

The most notable achievement in arms reduction during this period was the 2002 Moscow Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT). SORT was negotiated in a completely different geopolitical security environment, even though the Treaty called for continuing the trend in reducing the number of nuclear weapons. The Treaty obligated that operationally deployed warheads be limited to 1,700-2,200 each, but had no verification mechanisms and allowed each country to determine the composition of their nuclear arsenal as long as it complied with the limits.

Russia was far more involved in pushing for the Moscow Treaty- the Bush administration was far less enthusiastic. Bush did not subscribe to the importance of nuclear treaties, which he viewed as outdated and counterproductive:

The Bush camp signaled that it considered nuclear arms treaties to be relics of the Cold War era, which the United States no longer needed, even if Russia had not recognized this reality. The dismissive attitude toward arms control was a source of anxiety for Russia, because its nuclear arsenal was the basis of its remaining great-power status and arms control treaties were one of the few areas where Russia and the United States were still equals.³⁹

From the past experiences of negotiating arms control treaties with the Soviet Union, the bureaucratic and time-consuming process of arms control treaty negotiations was

³⁹ Stent, 57.

seen as cumbersome and ineffective, yet forgoing the negotiations proved to be more anxiety-invoking for the Russians, who wanted to maintain their superpower status:

For Russia, strategic nuclear arms talks have been key to ensuring that it could maintain parity with the United States, particularly in the post-Cold War period. By negotiating treaties that forced both sides' numbers down, Russia could build a force it could afford while maintaining deterrence against the United States and status as its equal as a nuclear superpower. Arms control also made possible a Russian voice in how the United States built and deployed its forces and provided a forum in which it could articulate its preferences and concerns, even if it did not always attain all of its aims.⁴⁰

Nonetheless, despite Russia's insistence otherwise, the Bush administration maintained its stance of arms control negotiations as counterproductive: "To the contrary, Administration officials argued that formal arms control negotiations represented an adversarial process between the United States and Russia and they were no longer appropriate..."⁴¹

In addition, on December 13, 2001, President George W. Bush announced his decision to withdraw the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which had been in place since 1972. This marked a major reversal in arms control cooperation, and Moscow became wary of the Bush administration's increasingly assertive foreign policy. The Russian response was swift and decisive: "Russia, for its

⁴⁰ Oliker, Olga. "U.S.-Russian Arms Control: The Stakes for Moscow." *Arms Control Today*, May 2017, pp. 6–13, 7.

⁴¹ Woolf, Amy F. *Next Steps in Nuclear Arms Control with Russia: Issues for Congress*. Issue brief. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Congressional Research Service, 6 Jan. 2014. Web, 8.

part, declared itself no longer bound by the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) in response to the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.”⁴²

The overarching reason why the Bush administration turned its focus away from arms control cooperation was due to the rapidly changing geopolitical environment. The 2001 September 11 World Trade terrorist attacks left Americans reeling and grasping for some semblance of security. President George W. Bush embarked on a hawkish campaign against global terrorism and his “you’re either with us, or against us” attitude and resolute use of unilateral force proved to be extremely polarizing. Furthermore, the strategic value of nuclear weapons was seen as too valuable to discard in a time of uncertainty when fears of another terrorist attack continued to loom large: “When combined with the global war on terrorism and the reliance on using U.S. military forces for regime change, the Bush administration was seen as much more reliant on nuclear weapons than the actual policy record reflects.”⁴³

Another element of Bush’s foreign policy was his push for liberal democratic values. As the U.S. became increasingly occupied in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the American fight against global terrorism incorporated ideals of democracy and freedom. Bush’s anti-terrorist rhetoric wholeheartedly embraced the promotion of democracy and freedom worldwide. This was met with uneasy trepidation by Moscow,

⁴² Olikier, 7.

⁴³ Wolfsthal, Jon. “How Will Trump Change Nuclear Weapons Policy?” *Arms Control Association*, 1 Nov. 2017, www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-11/features/trump-change-nuclear-weapons-policy, 2.

which still had an uneasy relationship with the concept of democracy. The color revolutions in the former Soviet states were a source of anxiety for Russia:

Precisely because the political system in the post-Soviet states resembled that of Russia, the Kremlin felt threatened by these revolutions. Post-Soviet Russia viewed politics in the post-Soviet states as an extension of its own domestic politics. After all, if Ukrainians could take to the streets and overthrow their government, so could Russians. The fact that Western NGOs were actively promoting civil society and encouraging people to demand greater transparency and accountability in their societies made it easy for the Kremlin to portray these movements as yet another example of American attempts to weaken Russia's influence in its rightful sphere of influence.⁴⁴

The message of these color revolutions was clear: reform-minded citizens were ready to break free from the clutches of Soviet influence and exercise their right to elect their government in a transparent and democratic manner. The Rose Revolution in Georgia culminated in the peaceful transition of power in January 2004 from close Kremlin ally Eduard Shevardnadze to the popular and young reformer Mikheil Saakashvili. Tensions between Georgia and Russia would eventually escalate into armed conflict in the summer of 2008, leading to Russian victory and acknowledgement of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution in late 2004- triggered by the massive discontent from the lack of transparency and corruption during the presidential elections- was viewed by Moscow with alarm. Moscow feared losing its sphere of influence in these

⁴⁴ Stent, 101.

former Soviet states. These fears would manifest themselves ten years later in the 2014 Ukrainian conflict, which will be explained in more detail in the case study.

In summary, it is possible to discern how geopolitical factors began to creep into arms control cooperation- with the Bush administration pursuing its unilateral foreign policy agenda using force abroad and Moscow viewing the American global democracy promotion campaign as antagonistic to its own interests in the former Soviet states. It would take the election of Barack Obama to lead arms control cooperation back on its course.

(4) 2010-2016: New START Treaty

President Barack Obama's prioritization of U.S.-Russian relations and arms control cooperation was a marked change from the previous Bush administration and the election of Barack Obama in 2008 reopened the door for nuclear arms control cooperation. The Obama administration emphasized its willingness to prioritize the trend of nuclear reductions, and unlike the previous Bush administration, embraced a more idealist outlook, calling on all nations to begin taking steps towards realizing a world without nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Obama administration viewed Russia as a potential partner in this endeavor to achieving nuclear zero- a world without nuclear weapons. Unlike his predecessor, Obama's foreign policy agenda ranked nuclear disarmament as a top priority and early on in his presidency, the Obama administration attempted to mend relations with the Russians. Obama's efforts happened to coincide with Russia's desire to seek another arms agreement:

Nuclear nonproliferation and arms control- including a commitment to an ultimate ‘global zero’- were at the heart of Obama’s foreign policy priorities. Signing another arms treaty was also a priority for Moscow, partly because a reduction in nuclear weapons would free up economic resources to spend on other priorities. Equally important was the fact that negotiating an arms control agreement with the United States boosted Russia’s international prestige and was one of the few areas in which the United States and Russia as the world’s two nuclear superpowers dealt with each other as equals. Whereas the Bush administration denigrated START-type agreements as a Cold War relic, the Obama administration embraced them.⁴⁵

In short, a fortuitous mix of timing, leadership, and concurring agendas set the stage for a new chapter of closer nuclear cooperation.

The result was a new arms control treaty called “New START.” It was signed in Prague in April 2010 and represented “the biggest nuclear arms pact in a generation and was the first- and arguably the single most important- achievement of the reset.”⁴⁶

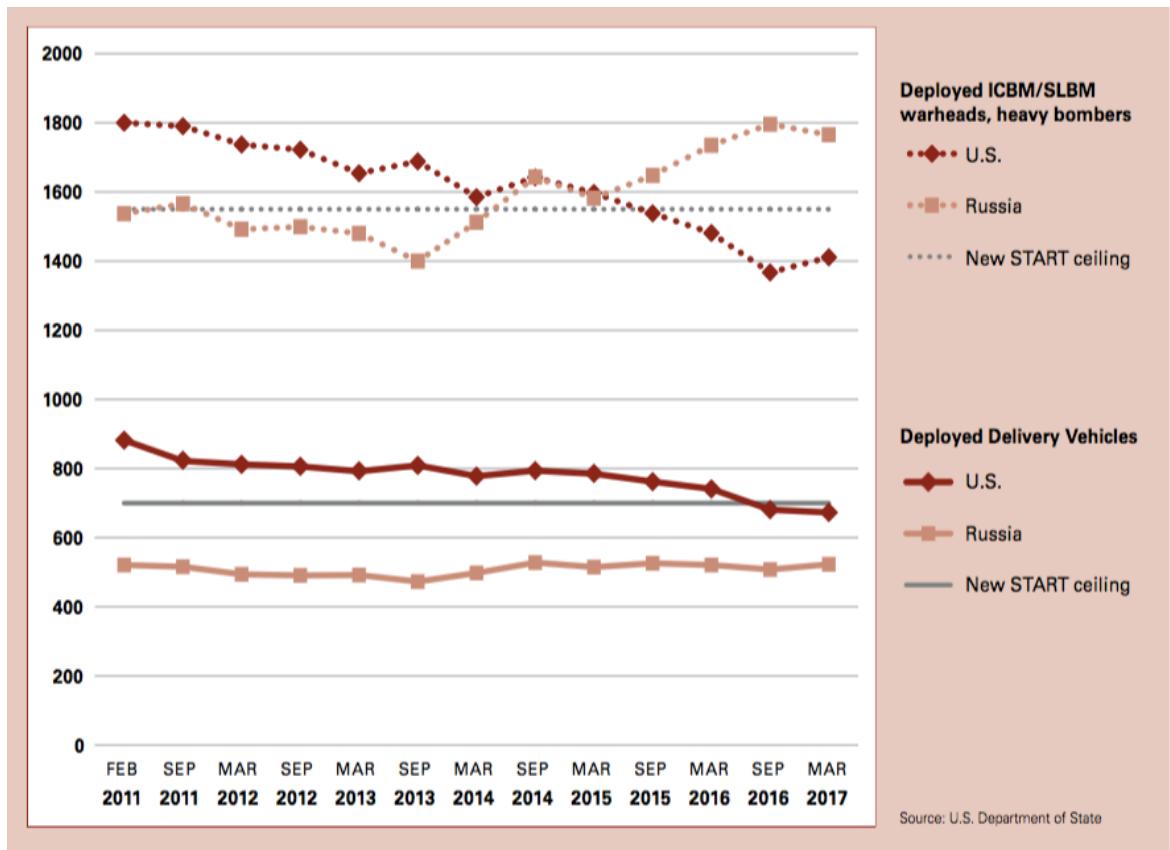
New START was signed by Presidents Obama and Medvedev in April 2010 and the stipulations of the treaty entailed that: “within seven years after the New START Treaty goes into effect, the United States and Russia must reduce their arsenals to 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed strategic missiles and bombers.”⁴⁷ These grand and sweeping reductions held the promise of a global step towards the vision of a world of nuclear zero. The graph below outlines the progress of the New START reductions:

⁴⁵ Stent, 222.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 223.

⁴⁷ Zenko, 7.

Graph 2:
New START Numbers for Deployed Warheads
and Deployed Delivery Vehicles



Oliker, Olga. "U.S.-Russian Arms Control: The Stakes for Moscow."

For the Russians, New START was a breakthrough achievement for both symbolic and financial reasons:

Russian officials viewed New START as a vindication of their arguments about the importance of bilateral arms control treaties that the Bush administration had belittled. Despite their failure to link New START to missile defense, they believed it reinforced their claim to great-power status. Moreover, New START was economically advantageous because it would enable Russia to reduce its strategic nuclear arsenal while maintaining a significant nuclear posture.⁴⁸

At present, more than seven years have elapsed since the signing of New START, and it is clear that the promise of New START to pave the way for further nuclear arms control cooperation and closer relations has not come to fruition; on the contrary, relations have deteriorated to the point where arms control cooperation itself is in peril of being consumed by the negative turn in relations. The return of Vladimir Putin as president in 2012 also brought back a more skeptical and confrontational approach to relations with the United States. Under Putin's leadership, "Russia views with a lot of skepticism the global strategy of nonproliferation and counterproliferation declared by the United States, seeing in it a policy based in the practice of double standards and an attempt to veil other political, military, and commercial interests, including nuclear exports, with the goal of nonproliferation."⁴⁹ Putin's muscular foreign policy style clashed greatly with the cautious style of the Obama administration, which tended to rely on multilateral approaches.

⁴⁸ Stent, 224.

⁴⁹ Blank, Stephen J. *Prospects for U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation*. Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), *Prospects for U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation*, permanent.access.gpo.gov/LPS110915/LPS110915/www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB892.pdf, 23.

To have a deeper understanding of Russia's nuclear policy, one must look at its ideational roots, which stem from Putin's leadership style and his vision for Russia: "Putin had come into office determined to reverse the humiliating decade of the 1990s, guarantee Russia's territorial integrity and restore Russia's role as a great power..."⁵⁰ Although Putin is first and foremost a pragmatist and recognizes the need to cooperate with the West in certain areas such as modernizing the economy and welcoming Western investment, in regards to Russian foreign policy, Putin remains fiercely independent from the Western worldview. For Putin, restoring Russia's international influence and status as a global superpower requires a foreign policy doctrine with a compass fixed firmly in the direction of pursuing its own national interest. The case studies will examine Russia's evolving foreign policy doctrine in greater detail and seek to analyze its implications on nuclear arms control.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in mind the theoretical framework and historical context from the literature review, the case studies will be examined in the following section. Given that this thesis has divided the main causes of stalled arms control cooperation into military-technical and geopolitical factors, the first case study will be on the military-technical

⁵⁰ Stent, 52

issue of missile defense. Disagreements about missile defense are tied into larger issues of NATO and have been a consistent sticking point on the Russian side. Understanding how the missile defense issue shapes the greater arms control debate will illuminate the Russian perspective and domestic political pressures.

On the other side, geopolitical factors have complicated the arms control process and the two case studies of the 2014 Ukrainian conflict and, by extension, the 2011 Syrian civil war, will be analyzed for their influence on U.S.-Russian arms control cooperation. Both these case studies are still ongoing and unresolved, but their impact on arms control cooperation is still important to examine. Although the signing of New START in 2010 was seen as a great success, relations in the aftermath have been bleak:

However, and despite the successful negotiation and agreement of the New START treaty in 2010, US–Russian strategic relations have declined markedly over the subsequent years, reaching a nadir perhaps not seen since the Cold War. As a result, trust and cooperation have slowly evaporated and the push for further bilateral nuclear cuts has therefore naturally stalled.⁵¹

In particular, the 2014 Ukrainian conflict can be considered a turning point in U.S.-Russian relations. The Russian annexation of Crimea can be pinpointed as the spark that ignited the simmering tensions of the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry into full-blown hostility. The Ukrainian case had a more direct impact on the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry due to the fact that Russia was directly involved in Europe's backyard,

⁵¹ Futter, 165.

which had implications for NATO. The impact of Crimea trickled over into other geopolitical conflicts, namely the Syrian conflict. Although the Syrian conflict began earlier in 2011, Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict did not escalate until 2015, when Putin decided to send military troops to support the Assad regime. The U.S. and Russia have been diametrically opposed regarding Syria from the start- with the U.S. providing support to the rebel factions and Russia providing crucial support to Bashar al Assad. The Syrian case presents a more indirect impact on arms control cooperation, but will still be examined to understand the full impact of how Russian actions in Crimea have reverberated in other geopolitical conflicts.

CASE STUDIES

I. Missile defense disagreements

One of the most long-standing disagreements in the U.S.-Russian relationship has been the issue of missile defense. “Attitudes toward missile defenses are one of the clearest examples of a disconnect between U.S. and Russian public postures and perceptions.”⁵²

The inability of both sides to see eye-to-eye on missile defense has been exacerbated by Russia’s insistence on linking missile defense with nuclear arms control. “If the linkage between U.S. and NATO plans for European missile defenses and further

⁵² Olikier, 11.

progress in U.S.-Russian strategic nuclear arms reductions was not yet a hostage relationship, it was clearly a problematic connection.”⁵³

Furthermore, the issue of missile defense is also complicated by the U.S.-led NATO alliance structure, which Russia sees as one of its foremost security challenges. NATO expansion, another long-standing issue in U.S.-Russian relations, has been directly connected to the missile defense issue, especially with the inclusion of Eastern European states seeking protection from Russia. Unpacking the missile defense issue will illuminate the Russian perspective and also explain a core component of the post-Cold War U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry. The aim of this case study is to conduct an overview of the missile defense issue from the perspectives of both the U.S. and Russia in order to piece together how missile defense disagreements impact arms control cooperation.

Historically, U.S. missile defense systems have always been a source of anxiety and distrust for the Soviets. Disagreements about missile defense have spanned decades, starting from Reagan’s plans for a missile defense shield in the form of SDI, which was eventually abandoned in the crisis of U.S.-Soviet relations during the 1980s. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Clinton administration also faced hurdles in arms control cooperation due to the issue of missile defense but remained committed to the ABM Treaty and floated the idea of constructing a “regional theater missile

⁵³ Cimbala, “U.S.-Russian Strategic Arms Reductions: Nonlinear Challenges, Practical Opportunities,” 577.

defense (TMD) that could shoot down shorter-range missiles but not long-range Russian missiles.... The Clinton administration was interested in developing a TMD system that would have enabled Washington to keep the ABM Treaty in place.”⁵⁴ Even though the Clinton administration failed to resolve the missile defense disagreement, relations were not seriously damaged by the missile defense issue itself. This would change with the election of George W. Bush.

The arrival of George W. Bush into the White House reopened the debate on U.S. missile defense policy:

The Bush administration came into office determined to jettison Cold War-era arms control agreements...Whereas the Clinton administration sought ways of reconciling missile defense with maintaining the 1972 ABM Treaty, the Bush administration had made it clear from the outset that the ABM Treaty was an unnecessary impediment to the United States deploying missile defense components to fend off a potential attack from Iran or North Korea.⁵⁵

Bush decided to withdraw from the ABM Treaty at the end of 2001. As anticipated, the Russians were upset with America’s unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and also wanted reassurance: “Fearing that the White House would jettison the other pillar of arms control- the START treaty- Putin had told Bush at the Shanghai APEC conference in October 2001, ‘I need a treaty.’ So Bush, rejecting the advice of the extreme arms control skeptics in his administration, agreed to a new treaty.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Stent, 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 73.

Although the Moscow SORT Treaty was successfully negotiated, Bush would persist with his plans for a missile defense system in Europe.

The core of the disagreement stems from Russia's insistence that a U.S. missile defense system in Europe would undermine Russian security, while the U.S. and NATO insist that European-based missile defense systems are only intended to counter threats from rogue states such as North Korea and Iran. Yet, Russia continues to insist that the presence of a missile defense system has the potential to threaten Russia's second-strike capabilities:

Russians, however, have long held that the system over time will be sufficient to significantly mitigate if not eliminate a Russian strategic nuclear second strike, thus its deterrent capacity. Russia's fear is of a future defense capability, even as NATO's planning is directed against a future non-Russian threat.⁵⁷

From the perspective of the Bush administration, the need for missile defense protection from rogue states such as Iran and North Korea was becoming increasingly necessary. Hence, plans were drawn to station U.S. Patriot missiles and a radar system in Europe, specifically in Poland and the Czech Republic. The selection of these two countries was particularly controversial, especially given the history of Soviet invasion of these countries: "The Czechs and Poles wanted the missile defense sites because they were a physical manifestation of U.S. support, with all that conveyed. As former

⁵⁷ Olikar, 11.

Warsaw Pact members, their support of America's project was particularly galling for Moscow.”⁵⁸

Although the U.S. went as far as to sign agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic for the installation of the missile defense shield and deployment of Patriot air defense missiles, Russian outcry over the plan stalled its implementation. The U.S. proposal for a missile defense system in Europe would prove to be the most contentious obstacle hindering further nuclear arms control cooperation: “During Bush's two terms as president, U.S. plans for missile defense- particularly the deployment of radars in the Czech Republic and ten interceptors in Poland- became one of the most difficult and corrosive problems in U.S.-Russian relations.”⁵⁹ The failure of both sides to reach an understanding of the intended purpose of the European missile defense system, compounded by other external factors, such as the U.S.'s condemnation of Russia's invasion of Georgia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, led to a breakdown in communication and cooperation.

It wasn't until the transition from the Bush administration to the Obama administration that further headway on the issue of missile defense could be made. The Obama administration carefully re-evaluated the European missile defense system plans and came up with the European Phased Adaptive Approach to Missile Defense (EPAA), which consisted of a four-phase plan to introduce missile defense capabilities

⁵⁸ Stent, 154.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 225.

to Europe. EPAA retracted the Bush administration's plans for deploying missile defense components to the Czech Republic and resisted deployment to Poland until the third and fourth phase. The outline of the plan is below:

Table 4:

European Phased Adaptive Approach to Missile Defense				
	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV (canceled March 2013)
Timeframe	2011	2015	2018	2020
Capability	Deploying today's capability	Enhancing medium-range missile defense	Enhancing intermediate-range missile defense	Early intercept of MRBMs, IRBMs, and ICBMs
Threat	To address regional ballistic missile threats to Europe and deployed U.S. personnel and their families	To expand the defended area against short-and medium-range missile threats to southern Europe	To counter short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missile threats to include all of Europe	To cope with MRBMs, IRBMs, and potential future ICBM threats to the United States
Components	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kürecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IA off the coast of Spain	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kürecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IA off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore with SM-3 IB/IA in Romania	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kürecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IA off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore with SM-3 IB/IA in Romania and Poland	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kürecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IA off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore with SM-3 IB/IA in Romania and Poland
Technology	Exists	In testing	Under development	In conceptual stage when canceled
Locations	Turkey, Germany, ship off the coast of Spain	Turkey, Germany, ship off the coast of Spain, Romania	Turkey, Germany, ship off the coast of Spain, Romania, Poland	Turkey, Germany, ship off the coast of Spain, Romania, Poland
Kaya, Karen. "NATO Missile Defense and the View from the Front Line"				

Key: Aegis Ashore = land-based component of the Aegis BMD Systems; AN/TYP-2 (FBM) = Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance, Model 2 (Forward-based Mode); BMD = ballistic missile defense; C2BMC = Command, Control, Battle Management, and Communications; ICBM = intercontinental ballistic missile; IRBM = intermediate-range ballistic missile; MRBM = medium-range ballistic missile

Eventually, the Obama administration halted the implementation of phase four of the EPAA, but this did not assuage Russian resentment:

In March 2013, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced plans to modify the original plan for EPAA by abandoning the originally planned deployments of SM-3 IIB interceptor missiles in Poland by 2022. But this step failed to reassure Russian doubters about US and NATO claims that their regional and global missile defenses were not oriented against Russia. Russian officials reiterated demands for a legally binding guarantee from the USA and NATO that Russian strategic nuclear forces would not be targeted by the system.⁶⁰

Russia failed to obtain a written assurance that the EPAA would not be used against Russia and negotiations sputtered and eventually broke off.

Implications for Nuclear Arms Control Cooperation

The most obvious linkage of missile defense to nuclear arms control is manifested in the arms control negotiation process between the two countries. Russia has long insisted that nuclear reductions be tied to limitations on missile defense: “...Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and his predecessor-successor Vladimir Putin have made it clear that Russia’s geostrategic perspective links U.S. and NATO missile

⁶⁰ Cimbala, Stephen J. “Strategic ‘defensivism’ and post-reset blues: US–Russian nuclear arms reductions, missile defenses and minimum deterrence” *Defense & Security Analysis*, 30:1, 29–43, 8 Jan. 2014, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2013.864871, 31.

defenses to cooperation on other arms control issues.”⁶¹ Yet the U.S. has continued to treat missile defense as a separate issue from arms control. Although it is clear that a mutual understanding on missile defense is an imperative requirement for further cooperation on nuclear arms control, there have not been any successful strides towards this goal.

The negotiation of New START Treaty, which does not restrict the U.S. from moving ahead with missile defense plans, was another attempt by Russia to tie further arms control cooperation to missile defense: “After seeking to link missile defense to New START, Russia eventually accepted that the treaty would not limit missile defense, although it left open the possibility that, if missile defense deployments went ahead, Russia could withdraw from New START.”⁶²

Missile defense has been a perpetual source of disagreement and tension in U.S.-Russian relations, but has not completely stalled arms control cooperation, as demonstrated by the signing of the Moscow SORT Treaty and New START Treaty. Yet, when combined with the emergence of bitter clashes over geopolitical conflicts in Ukraine and eventually Syria, U.S.-Russian relations would deteriorate to the point where the entire arms control cooperation framework was in danger of being derailed. The next case study will delve into the events of the 2014 Ukrainian conflict and their implications for U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control.

⁶¹ Cimbala, “U.S.-Russian Strategic Arms Reductions: Nonlinear Challenges, Practical Opportunities,” 577.

⁶² Stent, 225-226.

II. Ukraine

Background of the 2014 Ukrainian conflict

Before analyzing the implications of the present day Ukrainian conflict on U.S.-Russian relations, it is important to begin with the historical context in order to trace the tensions that erupted into the 2014 Ukrainian conflict. Historically, Ukraine has wrestled with its national identity and has struggled to find its place between the West and Russia for centuries, as the “lands of contemporary Ukraine and the forebears of today’s Ukrainians were parceled out among Poland, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Habsburg Empire” up until the early 1900s.⁶³ Therefore, the enduring debate on Ukraine’s place between the East and West remains an ongoing issue and is compounded by the presence of a minority group of ethnic Russians in Ukraine:

One of the most contentious issues in Ukraine is the extent and nature of its integration with the West. Broadly speaking, alignment with the West resonates most strongly in central and western Ukraine, while support for Russia predominates in the south and east. Ukrainians in the east and south are more closely connected- culturally, emotionally, and politically- to Russia than their fellow citizens are.⁶⁴

Under this historical backdrop, the series of events that took place after Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich’s fateful decision to withdraw Ukraine from negotiations with the European Union in November 2013 led to the crisis known as the

⁶³ Menon, Rajan, and Eugene Rumer. *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*. The MIT Press, 2015, 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 2.

2014 Ukrainian Conflict. Yanukovych's decision to move away from the EU and cling to Russia proved to be the catalyst for civil unrest, as thousands flooded the streets of the capital Kiev to protest. The violent tactics of the riot police acting under the order of Yanukovych escalated the protests into a full-scale revolution known as the Euromaidan Revolution. By February 2014, the revolution turned deadly, with the number of casualties increasing to the point where Yanukovych had no choice but to concede his position and seek a truce with the protesters. However, the truce was quickly abandoned due to the intensity of the opposition against him, and Yanukovych was forced to flee the country on February 22. Yanukovych's departure did not quell the revolution, but merely set the stage for further chaos and division.

Home to a large majority of Russian speakers, Crimea became the focus of international attention after its decision to hold a referendum on secession from Ukraine on March 16, 2014, despite the Ukrainian parliament having deemed the referendum as unconstitutional. President Putin had already ordered the deployment of Russian troops (deployed stealthily as "out of uniform" vacationers) throughout Crimea and the southeastern part of Ukraine. It was undoubtedly the presence of these troops that sealed Crimea's fate:

Vladimir Putin used a methodology of combined soft and hard power that we might refer to as 'military persuasion' in occupying and then annexing Crimea from Ukraine in February and March 2014. Russia's form of indirect warfare against Ukraine included the use of covert special operations forces, strategic deception, disinformation, and fifth column surrogates inside the Ukrainian military and police establishments, in addition to local pro-Russian sympathizers. Putin's fait accompli in Crimea created a

temporary atmosphere of crisis in Europe and prompted a reaction from NATO and the European Union that included more assertive military exercises by NATO and economic sanction imposed against Russia by the United States and European Union.⁶⁵

After Crimea held a referendum of dubious legality and voted to secede from Ukraine, Russia readily accepted Crimea's request to be annexed on March 18.

The controversial annexation of Crimea became the turning point for Russia's relations with the United States. The legality of the Crimean annexation was formally deemed to be void by the United Nations General Assembly on March 27 with the passing of a non-binding resolution 68/262, which not only declared Crimea's referendum to be invalid, but also called upon "all States to desist and refrain from actions aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including any attempts to modify Ukraine's borders through the threat or use of force or other unlawful means."⁶⁶

Unfortunately, the violence and use of force did not end with Crimea. Rebels in the eastern Donbas region, notably in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, began seizing territory and declaring independence, as the Donetsk's People's Republic and Luhansk's People's Republic. As of February 2017, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported the estimated number of casualties in the region to be over 9,900 and the situation has turned into a full-blown

⁶⁵ Cimbala, *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*, 225.

⁶⁶ "Resolution 68/262 Territorial Integrity of Ukraine." *United Nations*, 1 Apr. 2014, www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/262&referer=https://en.wikipedia.org/&Lang=E

humanitarian crisis: “Countless families have lost members, had members injured, and lost property and their livelihoods as parties to the conflict continued to disregard and violate international humanitarian law and human rights law”⁶⁷

A map of the eastern region of Ukraine where the conflict continues to rage is provided below:

⁶⁷ *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 November 2016 to 15 February 2017.* Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 16 November 2016 to 15 February 2017*, www.un.org.ua/images/stories/17th_HRMMU_Report_ENG.pdf.

Map 1:
Map of Eastern Ukraine in 2015



BBC News "Ukraine Conflict: Battles Rage in Donetsk and Luhansk."

The failure of the Minsk Agreements, signed in September 2014 and again in February 2015, to implement a lasting ceasefire has rendered the Ukrainian conflict an ongoing humanitarian and political crisis. The consequences of the Ukrainian conflict stretch far beyond its borders. The United States and European Union imposed a series of economic sanctions against Russia for its involvement in supporting the rebels and the fragmentation of Ukraine. In July 2014, a Malaysia Airlines airplane heading to

Amsterdam from Kuala Lumpur was shot down over eastern Ukraine “almost certainly by a missile fired by the insurgents at what they had assumed was a military aircraft.”⁶⁸ The result was the death of 300 passengers and crew members onboard, which pushed the U.S. and Europe to ramp up sanctions against Russia. The sanctions opened up a rift between Russia and the West: “Moscow responded to the sanctions with an amalgam of nonchalance and defiance, rolling out its own economic penalties and threatening more. The sanctions, the suspension of Russia from the G-8 bloc of global economic powers, and the cessation of NATO’s political cooperation with Moscow shredded the relationship between Russia and the West and threatened the entire post-Cold War European political-military order”⁶⁹

From the American perspective, Ukraine demonstrated Russia’s increasing aggressiveness and territorial ambition, which had been an underlying fear of the U.S. since the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Although President Obama had been eager to reset relations with Russia at the beginning of his term, the Ukrainian crisis stripped away any remnants of goodwill: “...Russian actions in Crimea catapulted U.S.-Russian relations into a fourth and ultimate stage of decline.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, the Russians saw U.S. opposition towards its policy in Ukraine as the ultimate demonstration of the U.S.’s plan to undermine Russian influence and power:

Viewed from Moscow, Ukraine was the final proof that the United States was bent on marginalizing Russia, pushing it back

⁶⁸ Menon and Rumer, xiii.

⁶⁹ Ibid, xiii.

⁷⁰ Levgold, 116.

into a geopolitical cage and transforming the countries on its border into bulwarks of US influence. Worse, as the months passed, Putin and his inner circle deceived themselves into believing the US role in the Ukrainian crisis was not only a threat to Russia's national security but an existential threat to the regime itself.⁷¹

Given Ukraine's geographical location as a buffer zone between Europe and Russia, the geopolitical consequences of the Ukrainian conflict invoke NATO and inspire flashbacks to the original days of the Cold War:

The crisis in Ukraine, beginning with Russia's annexation of Crimea and its role in the Donbas war, tripped the wire, and the two sides have rushed back to the familiar posture of preparing to fight each other, only this time, and in contrast to the situation in the last decades of the original Cold War, they are acting out a sense of immediacy. Among NATO members a genuine nervousness exists that Russia may not stop with whatever its objectives are in Ukraine but boldly strike against NATO itself, say, by testing the security guarantees in the Baltic region. Among Russians the fear grows that the United States has seized on the Ukrainian crisis to reconstitute its military power on Russia's border and already itself and NATO to strike Russia where further instability elsewhere in the region to provide a pretext... Hence the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, with its continuing risk of escalation is a large, menacing part of a far graver problem. At the very heart of the new Russia-West Cold War, Russia, the United States, and its NATO allies are returning to the defining feature of the original Cold War: the militarized standoff over the future of a divided Europe.⁷²

It is clear that the Ukrainian conflict reignited the embers of the strategic rivalry between the United States and Russia. The impact of the Ukrainian crisis on the respective nuclear policies of each country will be examined in the next section.

⁷¹ Ibid, 117-118.

⁷² Ibid, 53.

Shifts in Nuclear Policy

To be able to detect any potential shifts in nuclear policies, it is useful to quickly review the status of each country's nuclear doctrine before the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict. For the United States, the most recent nuclear doctrine can be found in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review and 2013 Nuclear Employment Strategy. Russia has similarly published its nuclear doctrine strategy in 2010 and most recently in 2014. All of these documents will be briefly examined for their core policy postures. In addition, given Russian actions in Crimea, changes in Russian military doctrine will be examined for their influence on Russian nuclear doctrine.

To establish a baseline reference for U.S. nuclear policy, a brief overview of the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review will be conducted. In 2010, the U.S. had undergone a comprehensive review of its nuclear strategy and arsenal with the publication of the Defense Department's Nuclear Posture Review Report. In this review, five key strategies guiding the U.S. nuclear posture were outlined: (1) "Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism; (2) Reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy; (3) Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels; (4) Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring U.S. allies and partners; and (5) Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal."⁷³ These five strategies reflected President Obama's agenda in reducing U.S. reliance on

⁷³ United States, Nuclear Posture Review Report. Department of Defense, 6 Apr. 2010. www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf, iii.

nuclear weapons and moving towards a national security strategy more suitable for the 21st century, not the Cold War era.

In addition, the U.S.-Russian nuclear relationship was emphasized and future cooperation was the key priority at the time of the publication of the report in 2010:

Russia remains America's only peer in the area of nuclear weapons capabilities. But the nature of the U.S.-Russia relationship has changed fundamentally since the days of the Cold War. While policy differences continue to arise between the two countries and Russia continues to modernize its still-formidable nuclear forces, Russia and the United States are no longer adversaries, and prospects for military confrontation have declined dramatically. The two have increased their cooperation in areas of shared interest, including preventing nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation.⁷⁴

The report portrays the working relationship between the U.S. and Russia as one focused on advancing the goals of nuclear cooperation, despite policy differences. The positive light in which U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation was portrayed reveals how much President Obama had hoped to create a sustainable and productive relationship with Russia.

The 2010 report further stresses the need for the establishment of an open and sincere dialogue with the Russians regarding the U.S. missile defense programs and Russian modernization plans, to prevent misinterpretations of intentions and reduce the security dilemma:

A strategic dialogue with Russia will allow the United States to explain that our missile defenses and any future U.S. conventionally-armed long-range ballistic missile systems are

⁷⁴ Ibid, iv.

designed to address newly emerging regional threats, and are not intended to affect the strategic balance with Russia. For its part, Russia could explain its modernization programs, clarify its current military doctrine (especially the extent to which it places importance on nuclear weapons), and discuss steps it would take to allay concerns in the West about its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, such as further consolidating its non-strategic systems in a small number of secure facilities deep within Russia.⁷⁵

In determining the suitable and appropriate level of reductions of the nuclear arsenal, the report affirmed that the method of parity, in terms of the number of forces, is no longer relevant. This is important to remember, since numerical parity was one of the most urgent driving forces during the Cold War arms race:

Russia's nuclear force will remain a significant factor in determining how much and how fast we are prepared to reduce U.S. forces. Because of our improved relations, the need for strict numerical parity between the two countries is no longer as compelling as it was during the Cold War. But large disparities in nuclear capabilities could raise concerns on both sides and among U.S. allies and partners, and may not be conducive to maintaining a stable, long-term strategic relationship, especially as nuclear forces are significantly reduced. Therefore, we will place importance on Russia joining us as we move to lower levels.⁷⁶

After the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, the Obama administration released its Nuclear Employment Strategy in 2013, which reaffirmed the White House's commitment to scaling back its nuclear arsenal by one-third under New START:

After a comprehensive review of our nuclear forces, the President has determined that we can ensure the security of the United States and our allies and partners and maintain a strong and credible strategic deterrent while safely pursuing up to a one-third reduction in deployed strategic nuclear weapons from the level

⁷⁵ Ibid, x.

⁷⁶ Ibid, xi.

established in the New START Treaty. The U.S. intent is to seek negotiated cuts with Russia so that we can continue to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures.⁷⁷

This indicates that despite bumpy relations with Russia, particularly the Kremlin's 2013 decision to grant asylum to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, the United States remained on track to uphold its New START obligations and keep foreign policy disagreements from tainting its nuclear relationship with Russia.

For the Russians, the core element of nuclear doctrine is based on its Cold War superpower status. Russian nuclear doctrine remains grounded in the belief that Russia must be restored to its former position of international superpower:

Contemporary Russian strategy and foreign policy are focused on restoring the power of the nation in its traditional area of influence or dominion and defending Russia from external challenge. For a variety of reasons, the current (and most likely for the near future) leadership in Russia wishes to regain some degree of the suzerainty it enjoyed before the collapse of the Soviet empire.⁷⁸

The official Russian government statement on nuclear doctrine released in 2010 reiterates this belief that nuclear weapons use is strictly limited to situations in which the very existence of the state itself is threatened, which demonstrated that “official

⁷⁷ United States, Office of the Press Secretary. “FACT SHEET: Nuclear Weapons Employment Strategy of the United States.” The White House, 2013. *President Barack Obama*, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/19/fact-sheet-nuclear-weapons-employment-strategy-united-states.

⁷⁸ Colby, Elbridge. *Russia's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine and Its Implications*. La Fondation Pour La Recherche Stratégique, 12 Jan. 2016, www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/russia-s-evolving-nuclear-doctrine-and-its-implications-2016-01.

statements of Russia's military doctrine, however, appeared to narrow Russia's declaratory policy on nuclear use."⁷⁹

The Ukrainian conflict marked a significant turning point not only in U.S.-Russian relations, but also in military doctrine, specifically Russian military doctrine. As Ven Bruusgaard points out, there were three fundamental changes in Russian military doctrine during the Ukrainian crisis, specifically in Crimea: first the "active use of subversion and covert actions," secondly the "overt use of Russian quick-action forces," and finally "non-contact warfare/escalation control."⁸⁰ The changes in Russian military doctrine are important because of their impact on Russian nuclear policy:

Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea in late February and early March 2014 might seem at first blush to have little or nothing to do with nuclear weapons. But US and Russian nuclear forces and threat perceptions hung over the unfolding crisis, creating two kinds of effects. First, Russian President Vladimir Putin chose against an acknowledged and overt Russian military invasion of Ukrainian state territory. Instead, Russia occupied Crimea with clandestine special operations troops, supported by already deployed forces on their previously leased base there, and combined with political disinformation and strategic deception. Second, the behavior of NATO and Russia even in the face of further provocations and disputes, including the shoot-down of a civilian airliner (Malaysian Airlines MH-17) over eastern Ukraine on July 17, was restrained by the awareness on both sides of the danger of military escalation in Europe overlaid by nuclear weapons deployed there or elsewhere in the states' arsenals.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ven Bruusgaard, Kristin. "Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul". 2014. *Parameters* 44 (3): 83-84.

⁸¹ Cimbala, *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*, 202.

Therefore, Russian actions in Ukraine, notably the covert use of its military, strategic deception, and the manipulation of information, marked a departure from previous Russian military doctrine, to the dismay of the United States.

Furthermore, in August 2014, President Putin was explicit in reminding the world that Russia was and still is a great power with nuclear capabilities. Addressing a youth camp, Putin stated, “Let me remind you that Russia is one of the world’s biggest nuclear powers. These are not just words—this is the reality. What’s more, we are strengthening our nuclear deterrent capability and developing our armed forces.”⁸² Following Putin’s lead, the Russian government officials also emphasized their nuclear power:

During the Ukraine crisis, Russian leadership highlighted Russia’s nuclear status to signal that Russia’s stakes were higher than those of the West. In addition, Russian diplomats and former officials threatened nuclear use against NATO members and partners. Russian aircraft ‘buzzed’ vessels, risking accidents, and engaged in other hazardous activities.⁸³

Therefore, the combination of changes in Russia’s military doctrine and the linkage between military doctrine and nuclear weapons, demonstrate how the Ukrainian conflict has fundamentally altered Russian nuclear policy.

⁸² Putin, Vladimir, excerpts from transcript of meeting with Seliger 2014 Forum participants, August 29, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46507>.

⁸³ Loukianova Fink, Anya. “The Evolving Russian Concept of Strategic Deterrence: Risks and Responses.” *Arms Control Association*, 10 July 2017, www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-07/features/evolving-russian-concept-strategic-deterrence-risks-responses, 3.

Yet, understanding exactly the extent to which Russian nuclear policy has been altered is much trickier, and in fact, leads to more contradictions than affirmations of Russia's perceived heightened nuclear reliance. Contrary to belief, according to officially released statements, Russia has declared its nuclear strategy to have become more selective, yet given the secretive nature of nuclear doctrine, determining the actual nuclear policy is a challenge:

The current Russian military doctrine, issued in 2014, states that nuclear weapons can be used 'when the very existence of the state is under threat,' compared to the more expansive conditions laid out in 2000. Nonetheless, many nuclear hawks claim that a classified document outlining nuclear deterrence strategy, which Russia retains in addition to the openly declared military doctrine, must spell out the nuclear de-escalation theory. This may be so: We have yet to see any leaked or other information on this. An alternate interpretation of the lack of official confirmation of the de-escalation theory is that this is not, in fact, a dominant aspect of Russian warfighting strategy. It would be nonsensical for the secret and public documents to blatantly contradict one another.⁸⁴

In order to avoid escalating into a wider regional conflict, Russia has been careful to steer clear of any indications that it is interested in continuing to assert its presence internationally through nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons still remain an essential element of Russia's national security policy and military doctrine, but Russia has decided to focus less on the specific conditions of the use of nuclear weapons, and instead focus more on their deterrent value:

⁸⁴ Ven Bruusgaard, Kristin. "The Myth of Russia's Lowered Nuclear Threshold." *War on the Rocks*, Texas National Security Network, 21 Sept. 2017, warontherocks.com/2017/09/the-myth-of-russias-lowered-nuclear-threshold/.

By 2014, official Russian strategy documents reflected this development; the main novelty in the 2014 military doctrine was its introduction of non-nuclear deterrence: 'A complex of foreign policy, military and military-technical measures aimed at preventing aggression against the Russian Federation through non-nuclear means.' At the height of Western post-Crimea stress syndrome and nuclear paranoia, the timing of this publication is interesting. If ever there was a perfect time to cement the Western perception of a Russian "madman" nuclear strategy, this would be it. The Russians missed it, opting instead for a concept that increased, rather than decreased, the requirements for nuclear use.⁸⁵

Russia has come to embrace the deterrent value of nuclear weapons, which means Russia has come to the realization that nuclear parity, in terms of maintaining numerical parity by matching the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal in terms of quantity, is becoming less and less important.

In sum, the difference between Russia's rhetoric, as articulated by Putin's fighting words affirming his vision of a tough Russia, and its official nuclear policy released in 2014, is puzzling. While Putin seems to maintain Russian flexibility in employing its nuclear option and indeed greatly cherishes the status nuclear weapons bestows upon Russia's international reputation, the cautious increase in the requirements for Russian nuclear use in the official strategy memos published in 2014, paint a different picture. Russia appears to have been willing to rely on the rhetorical power of nuclear weapons, while cautiously limiting the likelihood of their actual deployment. Yet, the explicit condition that nuclear first use is still permitted when the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

existence of the state is under threat, has led some scholars to interpret Russia as aggrandizing its nuclear policy, given that this was not the case during the Cold War: “...Russian military doctrine, unlike Cold War Soviet doctrine, no longer forswears the option of nuclear first use in cases of conventional conflicts that could pose a vital threat to Russian national interests.”⁸⁶

Implications from the Ukrainian Case Study

It is without doubt that the Ukrainian conflict has inflicted irreversible damage on U.S.-Russian relations. The tensions that had long been simmering since the end of the Cold War reached a boiling point in the Ukrainian conflict, with Russia’s annexation of Crimea being the turning point. The fact that Russia was able to discreetly invade a sovereign country and then annex the territory of Crimea under the guise of a democratic referendum was a stunning blow to the United States and completely expunged any pretense of the two countries being on friendly terms. The implications of the Ukrainian conflict on the overall U.S.-Russian arms control cooperation framework can be divided into three categories: (1) the worsening of U.S.-Russian relations; (2) the emergence of a more aggressive and assertive Russian foreign policy agenda; (3) finally, the push for both countries to modernize their nuclear arsenals.

It was only a mere 20 years ago when the United States and Russia had been cooperating in Ukraine on the removal of remaining nuclear weapons left from the

⁸⁶ Cimbala, Stephen J. *The New Nuclear Disorder: Challenges to Deterrence and Strategy*, 235.

Soviet era. Today, it is hard to foresee any sort of cooperation between Russia and the United States in Ukraine. Despite Obama's early promising willingness to partner with Russia in reducing their mutual nuclear arsenals with New START and his ambitious "agenda of nuclear related objectives, including a strengthened Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NT), US ratification of the Comprehensive (nuclear) Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), sponsorship of an international agreement to cap the production of weapons grade material (the so-called Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty, or FMCT)," the events in Ukraine seemed to have permanently soured U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation for the foreseeable future.⁸⁷

Even though the likelihood of another Cold War is extremely slim and there has been no direct confrontation between the two countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the status of the strategic rivalry between the two countries is a cause for concern, specifically due to the fact that Russia and the United States still remain the world's greatest nuclear powers. It is possible to see the subtle influence of nuclear weapons in the Ukrainian conflict: "Nuclear weapons were not the explicit concern of policymakers and military strategists during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2014. But nuclear weapons were important parts of the background leading up to the crisis and of the context within which it took place."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid, 227.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 22.

The Kremlin is sending strong messages that it will continue to flex its foreign policy might. Despite there being no published evidence that Russia has significantly revised its nuclear doctrine from the latest doctrine released in 2014, there is evidence of shifts in Russian nuclear doctrine:

...recent events and statements from the Kremlin and other authoritative Russian sources strongly suggest that Moscow envisions nuclear weapons playing a significant role in a limited conflict with the West, a conflict that appears less implausible in the wake of Moscow's seizure of Crimea, its continuing incursions into eastern Ukraine, and its broader posture of antagonism towards the West and interest in revising the post-Cold War political settlement in the areas in and around the former Soviet Union. Nor does this situation appear likely to improve, especially with the Russian military playing an increasing role in the Kremlin's foreign policy. Vladimir Putin and the broader Russian leadership appear to have concluded that relations with the West have fundamentally deteriorated and that political confrontation will continue. It therefore appears likely that the Kremlin will continue to view nuclear weapons as a key part of Russia's strategy and military posture, and will look upon them as a method of compensating for the country's weakness in relation to NATO.⁸⁹

There is also the question of how NATO will deal with the consequences of the Ukrainian conflict. Although Russia has been treading carefully in Ukraine post-Crimea, given that the Ukrainian conflict is located in Europe's backyard, the question of the future of NATO's nuclear forces is automatically invoked:

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that the crisis in Crimea would have an impact on the nuclear doctrines of NATO countries. And this could mean that the NATO countries will disavow their oral guarantees, given to Russia, about not

⁸⁹ Colby.

moving nonstrategic U.S. nuclear weapons, based in Europe today, onto the territories of new member states in the east – for example, in Poland, Romania and Hungary. This also means that it will be impossible to speak about any missile defense cooperation today. In the worst-case scenario, it will mean the resumption of the nuclear arms race. Apparently, at least until 2018, when the period of disarmament under the New START Treaty of 2010 ends, it is possible to forget about any major initiatives, from major nuclear powers, in the field of nuclear disarmament.⁹⁰

Although this reflects an extreme worst-case scenario, nevertheless, the fact that Russia has embarked on an irreversible course of hegemonism in Ukraine is a clear cause for concern on the part of the United States.

Finally, there is the push for the modernization of the nuclear arsenals of both countries. Instead of quantity, Russia is focusing on the quality of its remaining arsenal. Russia is currently undergoing a comprehensive modernization process and upgrading its arsenal:

Russia is modernizing its strategic and nonstrategic nuclear warheads.... It is in the process of retiring all Soviet-era ICBMs and replacing them with new systems, a project that according to Moscow is about halfway complete...Russia's upgrades to its nuclear arsenal help justify modernization programs in other nuclear weapon states, and raise questions about Russia's commitment to its obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Kolbin, Alexander. "Will the Ukrainian Crisis Undermine Global Nuclear Security?" *Russia Direct*, 27 Mar. 2014, www.russia-direct.org/opinion/will-ukrainian-crisis-undermine-global-nuclear-security.

⁹¹ Kristensen, Hans M, and Robert S Norris. "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2015." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1 July 2015, thebulletin.org/2015/may/russian-nuclear-forces-20158299.

In connection to Russia's plans to modernize is the U.S. claim that Russia has been in violation of the INF Treaty:

In July 2014, the U.S. State Department officially assessed that Russia was in violation of the agreement due to its production and testing of a prohibited ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM). The United States called a meeting of the Special Verification Commission, the dispute resolution process created by the treaty, in November 2016 to raise the issue. In March 2017, U.S. Air Force Gen. Paul Selva, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified at a congressional hearing that Russia had deployed the missile in dispute, the SSC-8.⁹²

Russia has vehemently denied that it is in violation of the INF Treaty and has pointed out that U.S. defense missile systems in Europe have the same capability as GLCMs. Neither side has been able to reach an agreement on this issue and it has become yet another issue hindering closer arms control cooperation. The United States has also announced its plans to modernize its nuclear arsenal:

Under Obama, it was decided that the United States would pursue replacements for all three legs of the nuclear triad while investing resources to ensure that the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and its laboratories, which maintain and monitor U.S. nuclear weapons, have what they need to keep U.S. weapons safe, secure, and effective.⁹³

Although both countries are facing serious financial challenges in modernizing their nuclear arsenal, the fact that both the U.S. and Russia have remain committed to investing enormous amounts of funding and resources into upgrading and modernizing

⁹² Sanders-Zakre, Alicia. "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: Russia." *Arms Control Today*, Nov. 2017, 34.

⁹³ Wolfsthal, 6.

their nuclear arsenals conveys the impression to non-nuclear states that the United States and Russia are more interested in revamping their remaining nuclear arsenal than pursuing steady reductions to reach the ideal goal of zero nuclear weapons.

In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing ramifications Ukrainian conflict, the gap between the United States and Russia has only continued to grow. The Syrian conflict has only ensured that the rift remain permanent.

III. Syria

Background of the Syrian Civil War

During the early stages of its onset in March 2011, the pro-democracy protest against President Bashar Assad appeared to be a continuation of the Arab Spring movement sweeping across the Middle East. Yet in hindsight, few would have been able to fathom the destructive and destabilizing extent to which the Syrian civil war has escalated, stretching towards its seventh year at the time this thesis is being written. As of early 2017, the estimated death toll in Syria has peaked at 465,000, including those reported missing, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a “Britain-based war monitor.”⁹⁴ Untangling the myriad of events that have resulted in this staggering death toll is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, a

⁹⁴ McDowall, Angus. “Syrian War Monitor Says 465,000 Killed in Six Years of Fighting.” Edited by Julia Glover, *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 13 Mar. 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-casualties/syrian-war-monitor-says-465000-killed-in-six-years-of-fighting-idUSKBN16K1Q1

concise outline of the major events of the Syrian civil war is necessary in order to analyze how U.S.-Russian relations have been impacted by the Syrian conflict.

The eruption of widespread anti-government protests against the Assad regime in the first half of 2011 was met with decisive force by Assad, who ordered the Syrian Army to resort to violence in order to put down the protesters. The violence only magnified the intensity of the protests, and by October 2011, the opposition presented a united front by forming a body of “internal and exiled opposition activists” known as the New Syrian National Council.⁹⁵ By March 2012, efforts to seek a peaceful resolution in light of the escalating violence resulted in a non-binding UN Security Council resolution devised by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, yet the peace plan failed to take root. After reports on the use of chemical weapons by Assad’s forces against Syrian civilians surfaced in August 2012, Obama responded with his “red line” policy on the use of chemical weapons, which was later viewed as a foreign policy failure by a majority of the American policy community due to the fact that Obama did not back his “red line” with any actionable plan.

The situation in Syria continues to deteriorate and the use of chemical weapons have complicated Syria’s future prospects for a peaceful resolution. In September 2013, the United Nations confirmed the use of chemical weapons in an attack against Syrian civilians by government forces, resulting in the death of hundreds of civilians.

⁹⁵ “Syria Profile - Timeline.” *BBC News*, BBC, 24 Aug. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995.

In a brush of diplomatic luck, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was able to reach an agreement with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on a plan to destroy Syria's remaining chemical weapons arsenal. The U.S.-Russian agreement was facilitated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and gave Syria until early 2014 to dispose of all of its chemical weapons.

Yet, efforts to further seek a peaceful resolution to the Syrian civil war through diplomatic negotiations in Geneva have so far been doomed to fail, largely due to Assad's outright refusal to allow any sort of challenge to his power, such as the creation of a transitional government. However, by 2014, Assad would face greater challenges to his rule, specifically the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS), a jihadist militant group that has been designated as terrorist group and is known for its especially brutal and ruthless methods of violence. ISIS has created further instability in the region, and has swiftly gained a foothold in Iraq and Syria. In the face of the rise of ISIS and its global campaign of terrorism, the U.S., along with five other Middle Eastern states, began to deploy airstrikes against ISIS-held territory in Syria in September 2014.

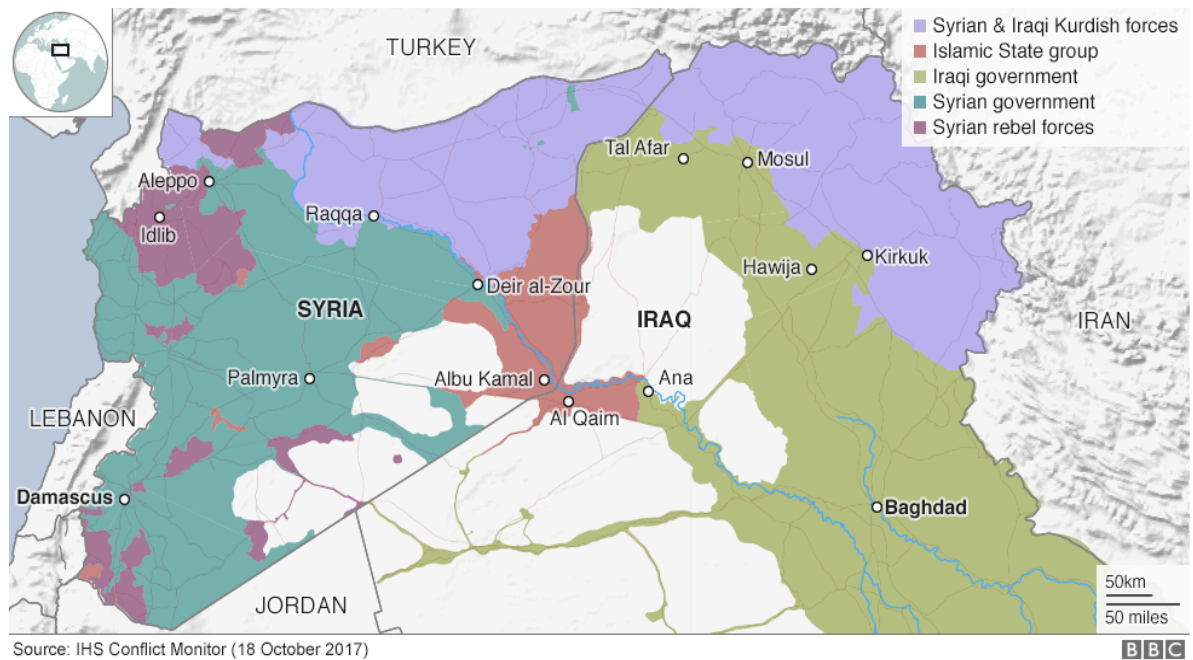
ISIS has proven to be a unifying common enemy for all the actors in the Syrian civil war. As the Assad regime's staunchest ally, Russia has consistently vetoed any possible international proposal to resolve the violence in Syria that calls for the removal of President Assad. Russia's continued support of Assad's regime has made it a target of Western criticism, and Russia would eventually lose its seat at the UN Human Rights Council in 2016. Nonetheless, ISIS has changed the nature of Russia's

involvement in Syria. To combat the spread of ISIS, Russia began launching its own airstrikes against ISIS strongholds in September 2015. Russia's increasing military involvement in Syria has resulted in a growing casualty rate, but its number is tightly guarded from the Russian public to avoid any potential domestic political backlash arising from Russia's involvement:

The true level of casualties in the Syrian conflict is a sensitive subject in a country where positive coverage of the conflict features prominently in the media and ahead of a presidential election next year that incumbent Vladimir Putin is expected to win. The scale of Russian military casualties in peacetime has been a state secret since Putin issued a decree three months before Russia launched its operation in Syria. While Russia does not give total casualties, it does disclose some deaths. Discrepancies in data may be explained partly by the fact that Russia does not openly acknowledge that private contractors fight alongside the army; their presence in Syria would appear to flout a legal ban on civilians fighting abroad as mercenaries.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Tsvetkova, Maria. "Exclusive: Russian Losses in Syria Jump in 2017, Reuters Estimates Show." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 2 Aug. 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-casualty/exclusive-russian-losses-in-syria-jump-in-2017-reuters-estimates-show-idUSKBN1AI0HG.

Map 2:
Map of Syria and Iraq as of October 2017



BBC News “Islamic State and the Crisis in Iraq and Syria in Maps”

At the time of writing, the Russian military is still engaged in Syria and Russian involvement in Syria will continue to contribute to the emerging strategic rivalry between the U.S. and Russia, especially in the aftermath of the Ukrainian conflict:

After the direct Russian military intervention into Syria became a reality, some observers would assert that the primary motivation for Putin’s forceful move into the Middle East was to divert attention from Ukraine and to force the West to negotiate with

him. It was true that Putin used the advances of ISIS as an opportunity to engage Obama and the West on both crises.⁹⁷

However, the upcoming March 2018 Russian elections have forced Putin to reconsider his strategy towards Syria, especially in regards to justifying his policies to his domestic public: "...Putin does not want Syria to be a negative issue going toward the next presidential elections...[it] may be the major reason he has wanted to "solve" Aleppo so quickly and pivot again toward efforts to pose as a peacemaker."⁹⁸ Putin has purposefully left his Syrian policies open-ended and vague, but with an upcoming election and stagnant economy, it can be predicted that there will be some curtailment of future Russian involvement in Syria.

Implications from the Syrian Case Study

Even though there is no hard, empirical evidence of doctrinal changes in nuclear policy on the part of the Russians or the Americans, given that nuclear cooperation is overwhelmingly colored by political relations, it is quite clear that the Syrian conflict has contributed to the overall worsening of U.S.-Russian relations. The Syrian civil war has become a protracted international disaster on many levels, creating a refugee crisis and unstable geopolitical situation that will have lasting ramifications for years to come. Yet, the focus of this thesis has been on impact of the Syrian conflict on U.S.-Russian prospects for arms control cooperation along with the impact on overall

⁹⁷ Parker, John W. "Putin's Syrian Gambit: Sharper Elbows, Bigger Footprint, Stickier Wicket." *Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives*, vol. 25, July 2017, 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 59.

relations. After relations reached their lowest point in light of the annexation of Crimea, the Syrian conflict has only ensured that relations remain estranged.

American involvement in the Syrian War increased Russian distrust and wariness of U.S. foreign policy, which had been growing since the 2011 American decision to intervene in Libya:

On the heels of the Libyan intervention, the US campaign against Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war was perceived as more of the United States recklessly toppling regimes without considering the chaos that would follow...The administration in turn grew ever more convinced that Russia was not bent on stirring up trouble wherever it promised to create problems for the United States or, in the Syrian case, seeking short-term gains with no regard for the Assad regime's role in a barbarous war.⁹⁹

The Syrian civil war presents a complex and ever-shifting geopolitical conflict that is far from resolved today. The United States initially offered American support of the opposition forces against the Assad regime, but eventually this support would wane. On the other hand, Russia has increased its involvement over time. Russia's initial support of Assad was limited to blocking UN resolutions demanding Assad's removal, but later grew into full-scale military support. Therefore, it is clear that there is an asymmetry in the degree of involvement between the two countries. Yet, despite this asymmetry, the extensive and substantial geopolitical relevance of Syria's conflict compounded the negative tensions between the two countries.

⁹⁹ Legvold, 109.

Furthermore, the brief flickers of U.S.-Russian cooperation were not helpful in quelling any fears of a permanent estrangement between the two countries. The 2013 joint U.S.-Russian plan to ensure the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal was a brief but shining moment of U.S.-Russian cooperation on weapons of mass destruction. Yet, more examples of the United States and Russia seeing eye-to-eye in Syria are hard to come by. Although it is tempting to downplay the impact of the Syrian civil war as insignificant to U.S.-Russia nuclear relations, doing so would be a grave error. Despite the lack of formal changes in nuclear doctrine, the Syrian war did contribute greatly to increasing the hostility between the two nations, closing the door on closer cooperation, and fraying relations.

In the long-run, the Syrian conflict did more harm than good to the already fragile U.S.-Russian relations, as opportunities for closer cooperation quickly dried up after Moscow's 2015 decision to provide military support to Assad in his war against the Syrian people. This left the United States no choice but to abandon all hope of finding any possibility of being able to partner with Russia in resolving the disastrous humanitarian consequences stemming from the Syrian conflict. From Russia's perspective, it has been able to gain an elevated sense of international prestige from the Syrian conflict:

There is a clear prospect of Moscow achieving the main political aim of the 'Syrian gambit'—establishing a new kind of relationship with the United States and restoring 'geopolitical parity' with Washington in the global hierarchy. The emerging format of the Syrian settlement . . . would successfully get

Moscow out of the ghetto of 'regional power,' which it found itself in after getting bogged down in east Ukraine.¹⁰⁰

There is more and more glaring evidence that U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation is in decline. Russia's decision to skip out on the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit is an obvious demonstration of this trend. The spillover of politics into the realm of nuclear cooperation is a great cause for concern, especially given that both countries have always maintained that nuclear cooperation will remain above politics:

Russia's refusal to participate in the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C. at the end of March fundamentally changes the nature of U.S.-Russia relations. The interaction between Moscow and Washington has always been strained, and the past five to seven years have been marked by military and political crises. However, in spite of all their differences, the Kremlin and the White House kept claiming that they would never stop cooperating in two areas: counter-terrorism and nonproliferation...both sides declared their dedication to strengthening non-proliferation regulations, which made for a limited, but workable agenda for cooperation.¹⁰¹

Yet it appears that the Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, Syrian conflicts have created a permanent rift between the two countries and cooperation in both nuclear and terrorism issues are at a standstill: "Last year, the dynamics changed. The idea of a 'joint fight against terrorism' appears to have died over U.S.-Russia differences over Syria. Now it

¹⁰⁰ Frolov, Vladimir. "Igra na kompleksah. Kako cenoj dalos' peremirie v Sirii" [Game of Complexes: At What Price Does Syrian Cease-Fire Come?], *Slon*, February 22, 2016, available at <<https://republic.ru/app.php/posts/64338>>.

¹⁰¹ Fenenko, Alexey. "Why Is Russia Skipping the Nuclear Security Summit in 2016?" *Russia Direct*, 29 Mar. 2016, www.russia-direct.org/opinion/why-russia-skipping-nuclear-security-summit.

is starting to look like joint efforts on non-proliferation are following suit. Russia and the U.S. seem to be losing their last opportunities for stabilization.”¹⁰² Without cooperation in these two crucial areas anchoring the relationship, the U.S. and Russia are undoubtedly on a crash course heading towards confrontation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the military-technical barriers and geopolitical factors obstructing nuclear arms control between the United States and Russia. The literature review provided the theoretical and historical context of the evolution of the U.S.-Russian arms control framework in order to analyze the case studies. The case studies of missile defense and the Ukrainian conflict and its extension into the Syrian conflict illuminated the main challenges currently hindering closer arms control cooperation.

However, the findings point to a larger web of domestic political pressures impeding closer arms control cooperation. Putin’s vision of restoring Russia’s geopolitical status as a global superpower can be attributed in part to the need to satisfy domestic political pressures and has been demonstrated through his assertive foreign policy agenda in Ukraine and later in Syria. On the other hand, in a post-9/11 security environment, domestic political pressures in the United States have also contributed to

¹⁰² Ibid.

propelling the U.S. on a global campaign to fight terrorism and protect U.S. national interests. The clash of these two national interests have deepened tensions and worsened relations, with nuclear arms control cooperation becoming collateral damage.

As for the future outlook of U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation, the prospects for renewing New START and pursuing further reductions in nuclear arms are dim:

Even extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which is due to expire in February 2021, is in question. If the treaty reaches its end date with nothing to take its place, there will be no mutually agreed, verifiable limitations on strategic nuclear systems between the two countries whose arsenals make up more than 90 percent of the global total.¹⁰³

This bleak reality has serious implications for the future, yet there has still been no headway in seeking to reset arms control cooperation.

On the part of Russia, it remains adamant that missile defense be connected with the broader arms control negotiations framework:

Moscow has expressed little interest in further nuclear reductions. It instead prioritizes limiting missile defenses and has proposed a legally binding treaty in which the United States and Russia would agree not to target their missile defenses against the other's strategic missiles...Russian officials have also cited the lack of an agreement limiting conventional armed forces in Europe as a reason for not proceeding with further nuclear reductions. They have said that the next nuclear arms negotiation should be multilateral.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, it is imperative that the U.S. and Russia resolve their disagreement on missile defense in order to be able to move on with nuclear arms control cooperation.

¹⁰³ Olikar, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Pifer.

Given the enduring disagreements on missile defense and foreign policy differences, it is clear that, far from moving towards the warmer relations envisioned after the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia are currently re-engaging as strategic rivals. The reset of the U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry has many geopolitical consequences that expand far beyond the bilateral relationship, as scholars and policymakers alike continue to ponder whether the current U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry can be considered a revival of Cold War tensions.

More importantly for this thesis, the current U.S.-Russian estrangement has serious implications for the future of nuclear weapons. Even outside the sphere of U.S.-Russian relations, the consequences of declining nuclear cooperation have a major impact on the rest of the nuclear world order. Notably, issues such as the recent nuclearization of states like Pakistan and India, the enduring North Korean quest to be recognized as a nuclear weapon state, and the challenge of securing nuclear materials and preventing nuclear terrorism, all require full and utmost cooperation among the nuclear power states. In the midst of the growing U.S.-Russian strategic rivalry, there is also China's increasing economic strength and political influence. To deter any potential Chinese ambitions of expanding their nuclear arsenal, it is the responsibility of the United States and Russia to exercise restraint and demonstrate prudence in their nuclear policies to avoid triggering a greater global nuclear arms race.

Therefore, as the two greatest nuclear powers, the U.S. and Russia have an outsized influence on the rest of the nuclear order. This adds another dimension of

urgency to U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation. If U.S.-Russian arms control efforts do indeed come to a halting stop and the two countries no longer acknowledge the need to reduce their arsenals, this would negatively impact the international nuclear nonproliferation regime, sending a dangerous message to aspiring nuclear states. In this regard, U.S.-Russian arms control efforts are a benchmark in the broader framework of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. It is imperative that U.S.-Russian nuclear reductions continue to proceed and relations strengthen in order to defuse the risks of wider regional nuclear conflicts elsewhere in the world.

Looking forward, the question of how the two countries will be able to set aside their conflicting foreign policy agendas, reach an understanding on missile defense, and maintain their nuclear nonproliferation obligations is critical. One place to start is by sharing a strategic vision, which has not previously been the case:

The crucial missing piece for both sides- in fairness, a piece missing from the policy of all previous leaderships- was a strategic vision for the relationship. It need simply have been a notion of what each side wanted the relationship to be five or six years down the road; what each thought might be realistically accomplished over that period in areas where each had a vital role to play; and what obstacles stood in the way. And then the two sides would have needed to share their visions, decide where they were compatible, and set about pursuing them.¹⁰⁵

The lack of a common strategic vision indicates a bigger issue underlying the relationship: the lack of open and sincere dialogue between the two countries.

¹⁰⁵ Legvold, 108.

In addition to a common strategic vision, Washington and Moscow need to share their nuclear doctrines and clarify their positions on the use of nuclear weapons: “A doctrinal discussion would provide an opportunity to underscore the importance of maintaining a high threshold for nuclear use.”¹⁰⁶ Given the ambiguity of Russia’s doctrine, the United States should encourage more transparency through example. With the recent election of President Trump, the future of nuclear cooperation has become much murkier. Shortly after coming into office, President Trump issued a presidential memorandum that mandated “a new Nuclear Posture Review to ensure that the United States nuclear deterrent is modern, robust, flexible, resilient, ready, and appropriately tailored to deter 21st-century threats and reassure our allies.”¹⁰⁷ Yet, understanding how Russia will be viewed in terms of nuclear issues- as a partner or as a rival, is an important distinction the Trump administration has yet to make.

In conclusion, the future prospects for U.S.-Russian arms control cooperation are very much dependent on the ability of the two countries to reach an agreement on missile defense issues and resolve their foreign policy differences. Yet it must be acknowledged that even with the resolution of military-technical and geopolitical issues, domestic political conditions must be conducive in order to allow the

¹⁰⁶ Pifer.

¹⁰⁷ United States, Office of the Press Secretary, and Donald J Trump. “Presidential Memorandum on Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces.” *Presidential Memorandum on Rebuilding the U.S. Armed Forces*, 27 Jan. 2017. www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/presidential-memorandum-rebuilding-us-armed-forces.

facilitation of future arms control progress. With the election of Donald Trump, there is even more uncertainty:

Trump has yet to iterate a clear policy stance, in fact, so far, he has presented a series of contradictory statements before and after his election. The anticipated 2018 release of the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) report will reveal whether or not Trump will turn back time and seek to increase the nuclear stockpile or continue on the trend of nuclear reduction most ardently championed by the Obama administration.¹⁰⁸

Yet, the signs so far point towards the Trump administration reversing Obama's nonproliferation trend and instead ramping up its nuclear capabilities:

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has argued for a need to 'strengthen and expand' the U.S. arsenal, suggested that the United States has somehow 'fallen behind' in nuclear capability (a claim difficult to explain or support), and said that New START favors Russia over the United States.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, if the United States were to indeed expand instead of reduce its nuclear arsenal, the entire arms control cooperation framework would be in grave peril. There is the hope that Russia continues to push for arms control cooperation in spite of the uncertain U.S. commitment:

In this dynamic and worrisome atmosphere, it is in Russia's interests to maintain and bolster the infrastructure of arms control agreements developed over the decades. Indeed, with the United States potentially less interested and engaged—Trump reportedly voiced his doubts about New START to Russian President Vladimir Putin when the latter inquired about prospects for its extension—it is Moscow that faces an imperative to find resolutions to existing arms control challenges, including those of its own making. It must do this not just to keep from losing what

¹⁰⁸ Wolfsthal, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Olikier, 6.

it has today, but to give itself a real chance to attain greater security in the future.¹¹⁰

Despite the uncertain future, U.S.-Russian nuclear arms control cooperation has come a long way from the early and cautious U.S.-Soviet nuclear reduction agreements and the bilateral arms control relationship has survived the ups and downs of political disagreements, from “the rise and fall of the détente policy, the war in Afghanistan, President Ronald Reagan’s Star Wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement.”¹¹¹ Given the decades spent on the brink of nuclear war and the years invested in negotiating the strategic arms reduction treaties, too much is at stake for both sides to simply abandon their impetus for nuclear arms control cooperation.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 6.

¹¹¹ Pikayev, Alexander, A. *Arms Control and U.S. Russian Relations*. Edited by Stephen J Blank, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), 2009, *Arms Control and U.S. Russian Relations*, permanent.access.gpo.gov/LPS110915/LPS110915/www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB892.pdf, 115-116

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