

Don't Hold Arms Control Hostage to the Current Crisis

The Young Deep Cuts Commission (YDCC) argues for a separation of arms control, risk reduction and transparency issues on one hand from conflict in and over Ukraine and the issue of European security architecture on the other.

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YDCC STATEMENT

On 15 December 2021, the Russian Federation released two draft treaties for review by the United States of America and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries respectively. Among the provisions of the draft treaties were prohibitions on further eastward enlargement of NATO, in particular former Soviet States. [1]

These documents also contained several provisions related to arms control and risk reduction. For the NATO-Russian draft agreement, these include: exchange of information, such as on military exercises; the establishment of emergency telephone hotlines between NATO and Russia; a commitment to maintain dialogue and interaction on improving mechanisms to prevent incidents on and over the high seas, particularly in the Baltic and Black Sea regions; and, notably, the non-deployment of land-based intermediate- and short-range missiles in areas allowing them to reach the territory of NATO States and Russia.

The Kremlin requested written responses to the draft treaties, which were delivered on 26 January 2022. [2] In the same fashion as Russia's drafts, the responses by the USA and NATO conflate progress on the conflict in Ukraine with progress on arms control. The American response noted the United States government's position that progress "can only be achieved on these issues in an environment of de-escalation with respect to Russia's threatening actions towards Ukraine." [3] The NATO response asserted that the "reversal of Russia's military build-up in and around Ukraine will be essential for substantive progress." [4]

This statement does not aim to comprehensively enumerate the provisions of each proposal, but rather to argue for a separation of arms control, risk reduction and transparency issues on one hand from conflict in and over Ukraine and the issue of European security architecture on the other.

The exchange of documents occurred in a time of heightened tensions surrounding the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The Young Deep Cuts Commission (YDCC) considers the conflation of disagreement related to NATO enlargement and future European security arrangements with arms control to be counterproductive and detrimental to progress in either arena. It is the view of the YDCC that NATO, Russia and the United States should discuss these issues through completely separate and independent channels. First, the sides could address arms control, risk reduction and transparency issues through tangible short-term steps. Separately, they could focus on issues of European security arrangements. Including these separate issues in one agreement, with arms control and risk reduction being contingent on provisions related to wider European security issues, will seriously curtail any attempt to reach meaningful progress.

As the sides have identified a number of common concerns in the track related to arms control, risk reduction and transparency, it would be useful to consider which issues might most readily find agreement. It is the view of the YDCC that, while insulating such discussions from disagreements surrounding Ukraine, the following issues should be seen as priorities.

1 Nuclear Arms Control

It bears reminding that even during the tensest periods of the Cold War, Russia and the United States deemed it essential to pursue negotiations on nuclear arms control in the interest of curtailing the arms race and reducing the probability of nuclear war. This approach should continue to be the cornerstone of the strategic relationship between Moscow and Washington. The two sides should exercise political will to seek effective engagement in the framework of the Strategic Stability Dialogue on pressing nuclear issues, including the next nuclear arms reductions agreement, despite the existing broader security grievances.

2 Exchange of Information

All sides expressed the willingness to continue and increase the exchange of information, in particular through the establishment of telephone hotlines and notifications on military exercises. The Russian documents specifically mentioned an exchange of assessments of threats and security challenges, which could include cyber threats to critical infrastructure, and take place either bilaterally or under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council.



3

Preventing Military Incidents

All sides noted the benefit of improving mechanisms to prevent dangerous incidents at sea and in the air. Given its mention in both the Russian and US documents, the Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas may serve as a potential starting point for such a discussion. Proposals could include: not to conduct military exercises close to the line of NATO-Russia contact; to take necessary measures to prevent incidents on and over the Black Sea by, inter alia, flying military aircraft with transponders turned on. Given mutual concerns about the nuclear dimension of the crisis, the YDCC also urges NATO and Russia to forgo exercises imitating the use of nuclear weapons against each other. Moreover, the YDCC calls for consideration of limiting military exercises and strategic bomber flights in the vicinity of NATO States and Russia.

4

INF-Type Missiles

A discussion of INF-type missiles was included in all parties' documents and draws from a Russian proposal dating back to 2019. Given the contentious manner in which the INF Treaty disintegrated, any discussion between the US and Russia on verification of a prohibition of INF-type missiles in Europe would be controversial. The current discussion will no doubt generate similar controversy. However, without any guardrails, another "Euromissile" crisis remains a worrying prospect. As such, a proposal building on the Russian-proposed moratorium would be a positive first step, but an emphasis would need to be placed also on allaying US and NATO concerns regarding verification. It would be prudent for the Parties to include the 9M729 regardless of disagreements about its range. Russia and NATO states could then agree not to deploy land-based missiles of 500-5.500 kilometers in range in Europe. This would not come without commensurate steps focused on Aegis Ashore sites in Romania and Poland.

These are not all of the measures available to the United States, Russia and NATO. There are further reaching measures that could be taken in arms control, risk reduction and transparency, though the YDCC believes it is important to take the most immediate steps, which have the best chance of achieving agreement, at an early date.

In the immediate term, the United States, Russia and NATO should urgently focus on reaching consensus on:

- continued engagement in the framework of the Strategic Stability Dialogue;
- enhanced subjects and methods for information exchange;
- ways and means of reducing the likelihood and manageability of military incidents;
- reaching agreement on the non-deployment of INF-type missiles in Europe.

It would be detrimental to achieving such steps for the United States, Russia and NATO to make them contingent upon progress in resolving issues related to NATO enlargement.

Endnotes

- 1 “[Draft] Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021. Available at: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790818/?lang=en; “[Draft] Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 17 December 2021. Available at: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en.
- 2 “Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Press Availability,” U.S. Department of State, 26 January 2022. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-13/>. The responses by the United States and NATO were later obtained and published by the Spanish newspaper El País: Hibai Aribide Aza and Miguel González, “US offered disarmament measures to Russia in exchange for deescalation of military threat in Ukraine,” El País, 2 February 2022. Available at: <https://english.elpais.com/usa/2022-02-02/us-offers-disarmament-measures-to-russia-in-exchange-for-a-deescalation-of-military-threat-in-ukraine.html>.
- 3 “Documentos entregados por la OTAN y EE UU en respuesta al tratado que les presentó Rusia el 17 de diciembre de 2021 [Documents delivered by NATO and the US in response to the treaty presented to them by Russia on December 17, 2021],” published by El País, 2 February 2022. Available at: https://elpais.com/infografias/2022/02/respuesta_otan/respuesta_otan_eeuu.pdf.
- 4 El País, “Documentos entregados por la OTAN y EE UU.”

About the Young Deep Cuts Commission

Young Deep Cuts Commission (YDCC) is a group of twelve young arms control experts from Germany, Russia, and the United States with diverse academic and professional backgrounds. The Young Commissioners develop fresh ideas to strengthen and revitalize nuclear arms control and disarmament. YDCC is part of the Deep Cuts project, an independent, nongovernmental initiative, which provides decision-makers as well as the interested public with concrete policy options based on realistic analysis.

For further information please go to
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