

## MOSCOW SUMMIT: THE FUTURE OF ARMS CONTROL & DISARMAMENT

*Malik Qasim Mustafa* \*

The U.S. and Russia, the two erstwhile Cold War rival, are now energised to improve their bilateral relations by pressing the “reset button”.<sup>1</sup> Among other issues, arms control and disarmament are on the key agenda of the current Russia-U.S. multidimensional approach towards normalisation of their relations. The U.S. wants to play a leading role in elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide. In 2008, responding to an *Arms Control Today* set of questions; Obama stated that the U.S. would set a new direction to the elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide by making it a central element of its nuclear policy. However, the U.S. would not disarm unilaterally.<sup>2</sup> Obama stated that, as a first step, he would seek Russia’s cooperation in reduction of nuclear armament by extending the landmark 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) before it expires on December 5, 2009. He also said that he would initiate a high-level dialogue among all the declared nuclear weapons States to first move towards reduction and eventually the elimination of all nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that the 1991 START was a major disarmament instrument which helped build confidence and stability by slashing each nation’s strategic warhead deployment from about 10,000 to less than 6,000 each, and limited each country to no more than 1,600 strategic delivery systems.<sup>4</sup> However, since the START, the leadership of both the States has failed to reach any significant arms control and disarmament agreement. On January 3, 1993, U.S. President Bush and Russian President Yeltsin signed START II in Moscow and set a limit of 3,000-3,500 strategic nuclear warheads for each nation and banned the deployment of multiple warhead land-based missiles. However, the subsequent events; the 1998 British air strikes against Iraq, NATO’s 1999 bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, and the 2002 U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty; compelled Russia to end its efforts to bring the entry of START II into force.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Russia and the U.S. failed to negotiate the START III framework agreement and also to materialise the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) which was signed on May 24, 2002, in Moscow. The SORT called for each country to deploy no more than 1,700-2,200 strategic warheads by the end of 2010.<sup>6</sup>

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\* The writer is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

In this perspective, if we analyse the current strategic force level of Russia and the U.S., it is evident that still both the countries possess enough nuclear arsenals to destroy the world many times over in a matter of minutes. According to their 2009 START declarations, the United States has 550 land-based ICBMs, 432 sea-based missiles on 14 submarines, and 216 bombers, which together can deliver 5,576 warheads. Russia possesses 469 nuclear-armed land-based ICBMs, 268 sea-based missiles on eight submarines, and 79 nuclear-capable bombers, which together can deliver 3,909 warheads.<sup>7</sup> The United States is believed to deploy at least 2,200 strategic nuclear warheads, with a comparable number of warheads in reserve. The exact number of deployed Russian strategic warheads is not available, but is believed to be 2,000-3,000. In addition, Russia has at least 2,000 additional non-strategic nuclear bombs available for use, and another 8,000 in reserve or awaiting dismantlement. The United States has several hundred non-strategic nuclear bombs for possible “battlefield” use.<sup>8</sup>

In order to make up for the missed opportunities, on April 1, 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met in London and agreed to begin negotiations on a post-START treaty to significantly reduce strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> The international community appreciated this move and termed the initiative a right step towards disarmament. The Washington-based Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission in its declaration adopted on April 30, 2009, stated, “It is encouraging that President Obama, President Medvedev and many other political leaders are coming out in support of the clear and vital goal of a nuclear weapon-free world. The Commission thinks it is attainable. Governments must begin now to think how they will design their countries’ future security without these weapons.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of the London meeting, both sides held many rounds of consultations. Later, on July 6, 2009, Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed a “Joint Understanding” to work out to slash nuclear weapons within a limit of 1,500 to 1,675 each, deployed on 500 to 1,100 delivery vehicles, during the highly anticipated Moscow summit.<sup>11</sup> There is likelihood that a final agreement in this regard would be reached by the fall of 2009.

It is a fact that the Cold War confrontationist thinking still exists among the Russian and U.S. public and official circles. There is a deep mistrust in Russia of U.S. intentions, particularly the enlargement of NATO; the U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty; the U.S. National Missile Defence System and its proposed deployment in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the U.S. is uncomfortable about the Russian use of force against Georgia in 2008 and Russia-Iran relations. During the Moscow summit, Russian President Medvedev said, “This is the first, but very important step in improving full-scale cooperation between our two

countries, which would go to the benefit of both states.” However, he injected a note of caution, saying discussions so far “cannot remove the burden of all the problems.”<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, on June 23, 2009, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, said that plans for the U.S. deployment of a missile defence system in Central Europe would remain an impediment to reaching a new agreement.<sup>13</sup> According to Ambassador Richard Burt, who was the top U.S. negotiator for START I negotiations, “There are a host of difficult issues that must be resolved in order to reach a new arms control agreement.”<sup>14</sup>

As far as international expert opinion on complete disarmament is concerned, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Washington, has stated, “What matters is not just words, but deeds. Momentum should be created by agreement on follow-up to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I (START I), and further ratifications of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).” The commission further stressed on strengthening of the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), agreement to end production of fissile material for nuclear weapons (FMCT), and to increase the ability of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for a real disarmament.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, on June 29, 2009, a group called “Global Zero” announced a “Global Zero Action Plan” for a phased, verified and proportionate reduction of all nuclear weapons to zero.”<sup>16</sup> The Global Zero Action Plan has projected 14 years (2010-2023) to reach a global zero accord and additional seven years (2024-2030) to complete the dismantlement of all remaining nuclear warheads. The Plan outlined the following four phases:<sup>17</sup>

- **Phase 1: 2010-2013**, U.S. and Russia to cut 1,000 total warheads each; increase the rate of dismantling their nuclear warheads; prepare multilateral negotiations; encourage nuclear weapons States not to develop more nuclear weapons, sign and ratify CTBT, FMCT; encourage de-alerting and no first use; and establishment of nuclear weapons-free zones.
- **Phase 2: 2014-2018**, negotiate and ratify multilateral accord; U.S. and Russia reduce to total 500 warheads each; other nuclear weapons States freeze their stockpiles; entry into force of the multilateral accord with a strong verification and enforcement system; civilian fuel cycle safeguards; full-scope IAEA safeguards; adoption of Additional Protocol; establishment and management of international fuel bank and enrichment/reprocessing facilities.

- **Phase 3: 2019-2023**, phased and proportionate reduction of all nuclear arsenals to zero and continuous international monitoring and enforcement.
- **Phase 4: 2024-2030**, complete elimination of all remaining nuclear warheads and a continuous international monitoring and enforcement.

However, under present day realities, there seems to be a very remote possibility of a world without nuclear weapons. A State's national interests, its geo-political location, its internal political and external security situation are some of the main factor for a State to go nuclear, and it is very difficult to abandon them without any substantial guarantees. Moreover, nuclear proliferation concerns, international terrorism, and growing role of militant/terrorist organisations and non-State actors are threatening international peace and security. So, without a serious commitment to root out threats to international peace and security, such agreements would be meaningless.

If both the United States and Russia want to win trust of each other for a lasting confidence to achieve success in their bilateral relations, they should eliminate the Cold War thinking and take a fresh start. The two should focus on areas where there is a desire for mutual cooperation. With the changing realities, the past nuclear doctrines are no longer valid. Both the States should initiate a new strategic dialogue with an objective to open windows into each other's strategic thinking. In this regard, any success in post-START would not only strengthen Russia-U.S. bilateral relations, but such a plan would fit best into their shifting strategic postures.

The U.S. is relying more on precision-guided conventional weapons, while Russia finds it cheaper to modernise its nuclear force by focusing more on short-range nuclear weapons to offset U.S. conventional superiority.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a post-START agreement would also set a precedent for other nuclear powers to pursue a path of arms control and to achieve the broader goals of nuclear disarmament. This agreement will also help bring a positive outcome from the May 2010 NPT review conference. However, a real disarmament effort would also require the support of other governments because cooperation is better than confrontation in advancing one's national interests.

## References

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- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>15</sup> Declaration adopted by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, op., cit.
- <sup>16</sup> "Group Lays Out Roadmap for a Nuclear-free World", *The Associated Press*, June 29, 2009.
- <sup>17</sup> "Global Zero Action Plan: A World Without Nuclear Weapons", Global Zero, June 29, 2009, [http://www.globalzero.org/files/pdf/gzap\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.globalzero.org/files/pdf/gzap_presentation.pdf)
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