



# Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past Present and Future

*Stephen J Blank*

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As of November 2010, the so-called “New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty)” treaty between the United States and Russia that was signed in Prague, Czech Republic, on April 8, 2010, awaits a ratification vote in the Senate. Regardless of the arguments pro and con that have emerged since it was signed, it is clear that the outcome of the ratification vote will not only materially affect the Obama administration’s re-set policy towards Russia, but also the strategic nuclear forces of both signatories. Indeed, throughout the Cold War, both sides built up their forces based on what each was thought to have or be building. Although the Bush administration (2001-09) rhetorically announced its intention to sever this mutual hostage relationship, it failed in that regard. As a result, critical aspects of that relationship still survive in Russia’s orientation to the United States and in the language of the treaty, especially in its preamble, which explicitly affirms a link between nuclear offense and defense. Therefore, whatever the fate of the treaty and the reset policy, it is clear that both Moscow and Washington stand before crossroads in regard to the future of their strategic nuclear programs and force structures. Moreover, each side’s course of action will tangibly affect the future course of action of the other side regarding the panoply of issues and policies connected with the development of nuclear weapons and the missions for them. With this in mind, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) organized a conference bringing together several distinguished experts on Russian nuclear weapons. The conference took place at the National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, on June 28, 2010, and the papers that follow are the revised versions of the papers presented at this conference. Each author was asked to answer several different questions pertaining to the present and future posture of Russia’s nuclear weapons (including tactical nuclear weapons). Moreover, it quickly became clear that Russia’s nuclear future in many ways, large and small, depends greatly on the degree of success that Moscow will have in its current large-scale efforts at comprehensive military reform. These reforms encompass virtually the entire military structure and are the most thoroughgoing reforms since Mikhail Frunze’s reforms in 1924-25. Consequently, no analysis of nuclear present and future posture is possible without a systematic analysis of those reforms and their impact. Therefore, the following chapters provide an examination of Russia’s military and political motives behind nuclear weapons policy as they pertain not only to the U.S./North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but also to China, whose rising power has clearly caught the Kremlin’s attention. Dale Herspring and Roger McDermott present a systematic exposition and analysis of the reforms of the conventional forces and the impact this might have on nuclear issues. Andrei Shoumikhin, Pavel Baev, and Nikolai Sokov closely examine the ways in which Russia has previously thought about nuclear weapons, how it does so at present, and as well as how it might think about them in the future. Daniel Goure and Stephen Blank analyze some of the larger strategic issues driving Russian security and defense policy and their connection to nuclear weapons. Stephen Cimbala relates both the U.S. and Russian structures to issues tied to nonproliferation and to what future reductions to a 1,000 warhead level might look like, while Jacob Kipp analyzes the deep-seated strategic challenges that Russia faces in its Asian-Pacific Far East. Richard Weitz provides an in-depth analysis of the vexing issue of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) that are already a source of friction between the two sides and one that will figure prominently in any future arms control negotiation.

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