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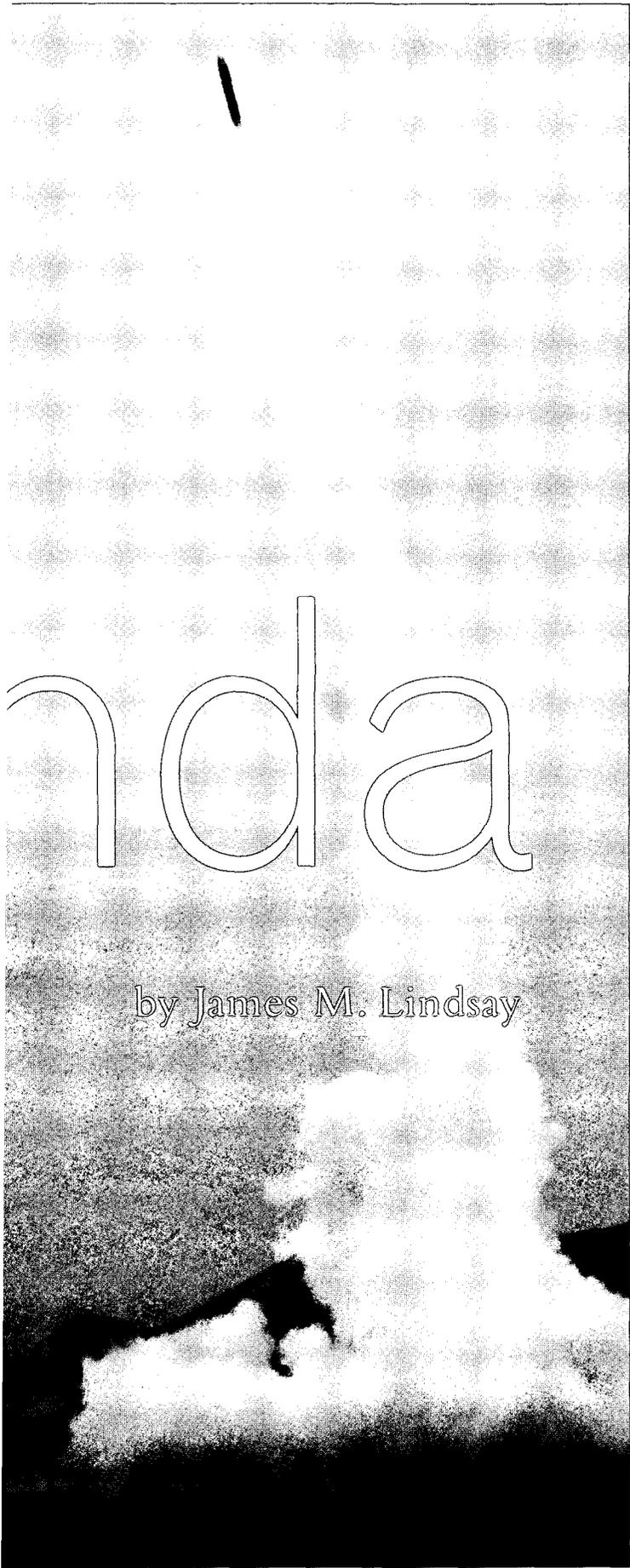
Nuclear

Arms Control and
Missile Defense Are
Back in the News

Age

The nuclear debate is back. After fading from the public eye in the 1990s, arms control and missile defense are once again at the forefront of the American national security agenda. Not surprisingly, the debate has broken down along well-worn lines. Arms control advocates argue that the United States should seek to limit and eliminate nuclear weapons, and they dismiss the idea of missile defense as a dangerous and costly folly. Missile defense advocates in turn question the value of arms control and argue that the United States should move aggressively to defend itself against missile attack. **Which side is right?** Neither and both. And therein lie the political and diplomatic challenges facing the next administration.

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by James M. Lindsay

Multilateral Arms Control

The first major issue on the nuclear agenda is the future of multilateral arms control, which the Senate threw into doubt with its rejection of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty last year. Substantive opposition to the treaty focused on the test ban's verifiability and on the need for tests to ensure the safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. But the treaty's rejection ultimately had more to do with the bitter partisanship that now characterizes executive-legislative relations than with policy. In a less divisive political environment, a compromise probably could have been achieved.

The consequences of the Senate vote are all too often exaggerated. As the opponents correctly point out, the test ban treaty was never going to be a cure-all. No paper pledge can end nuclear proliferation by itself, and the countries most likely to acquire nuclear weapons are the ones least likely to abide by the treaty's strictures. At the same time, the established nuclear powers continue to abide by the informal test ban that has been in place since the early 1990s. None looks poised to resume testing.

But on the whole the test ban's defeat does represent a missed opportunity to advance U.S. interests. Making the informal test ban binding would have raised the diplomatic costs to any country wishing to resume testing and (ironically enough) locked in U.S. nuclear superiority. The treaty also would have made it easier for the United States to detect clandestine nuclear explosions. It would create a worldwide monitoring system, including sensors in countries such as Russia, China, and Iran that are closed to U.S. intelligence. And nuclear tests have only limited value in checking the safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The U.S. weapons laboratories estimate that less than 1 percent of the defects found in the weapons stockpile have been uncovered through testing.

The Senate vote has also damaged U.S. diplomacy on nuclear proliferation. This is most evident in the foundering effort to strengthen the inspection provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In 1997, the signatories to the NPT agreed to develop more intrusive inspections in exchange for a written pledge by the established nuclear powers to negotiate and ratify a test ban treaty. With the United States unwilling to live up to its end of the bargain, many other countries are unwilling to live up to theirs. Today, more than 120 countries have still not reached agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency on the specifics of the new inspection regime. The administration's decision to join Russia, China, Britain, and France at the NPT review conference earlier this year in renewing their joint commitment to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons did little to restore momentum to the push for tougher inspections.

The arrival of a new administration creates an opportunity to depoliticize the test ban treaty and to reconsider it on the merits. Some Senate opponents have expressed regret that the vote took place—62 senators had publicly called for postponing it—and have suggested they might reassess their opposition if their substantive concerns are addressed. The Clinton administration took a step in this direction by asking former

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili to lead a bipartisan dialogue with the Senate on ways to make the treaty acceptable. The challenge is that with the Senate now formally on record against the treaty, addressing its concerns may require more than high-level briefings and cosmetic amendments. But if the price of Senate approval means rewriting core elements of the treaty, the whole enterprise is probably doomed. There are no signs that the other major powers are willing to reopen the treaty, and Russia, China, and other countries would undoubtedly exploit any American decision to do so for their own diplomatic advantage.

The START Talks and Deep Cuts

The second major issue on the nuclear agenda is reducing the size of the U.S. and Russian offensive nuclear arsenals. During the 1990s, both countries agreed to cut their forces sharply. The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) required each side to reduce its stock of strategic offensive nuclear weapons by more than a third, down to 6,000 warheads apiece. The START II Treaty, signed during George Bush's last month in office, required both countries to cut their arsenals further, to between 3,000 and 3,500 warheads. And in March 1997, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin agreed at the Helsinki summit to commit their governments to negotiate another reduction, to 2,000 to 2,500 weapons each.

The relatively quick presidential agreement, however, was not matched by similar legislative dispatch. The Senate and the Duma easily approved START I, but START II became embroiled in a power struggle between Yeltsin and the Duma's communist-led opposition. In 1997, when it was clear that the Duma would not approve the treaty in time to implement all its terms by the deadline of 2003, Moscow and Washington agreed to extend the treaty's completion date to 2007. Russian irritation over NATO expansion and the Kosovo War further delayed action on START II. After seven years of squabbling, the Duma finally approved the treaty and the extension protocol last March. Even then the Duma conditioned its approval on the willingness of the United States to ratify two amendments to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and to continue to abide by that treaty's provisions. The Senate, which has approved START II, has yet to take up either the agreement extending its implementation or the two ABM amendments.

Although action on START II remains to be completed, talks on START III have begun. Moscow now proposes reducing each side's force to between 1,000 and 1,500 warheads. The proposal reflects Russia's interests. By most estimates, budgetary pressures will force it to cut its arsenal to 1,000 warheads or less by the end of the decade.

The Clinton administration has stuck by the original Helsinki numbers, pointing out that top American military officers insist that the United States needs at least 2,000 war-

heads to maintain its nuclear deterrent. Other opponents of going down to 1,000 warheads argue that deep cuts would force the military to abandon the land-based leg of the nuclear triad, thereby making it theoretically easier for an aggressor to wipe out the U.S. deterrent in a first strike. And some opponents argue that it amounts to trading something for nothing because Moscow will go down to 1,000 warheads no matter what the United States does.

None of these arguments against deep cuts is compelling, and the United States should seek over the long term to reduce its nuclear arsenal to below a thousand warheads. The Pentagon's estimate of what it needs for a robust nuclear deterrent itself depends on presidential planning guidance, guidance that still reflects Cold War thinking. No one seriously contends that Russia is planning a deliberate first strike, and whatever residual threat Russia poses will fall as its arsenal shrinks. Nor is it plausible to argue that the United States can deter the rest of the world with 2,500 warheads but not 1,000 or 1,500. As for the triad, it could be maintained with as few as 1,500 warheads, and its eventual disappearance should not be a cause for alarm but a source of relief that the United States no longer faces a Soviet-style threat.

In embracing the Russian call for deep cuts, the United States would not be doing Moscow a favor but advancing its own interests. The Defense Department expects to save \$1.5 billion a year by going down to 2,500 warheads. It would save hundreds of millions of dollars more by going down to 1,000. These are not huge sums by Pentagon standards, but they will help the services meet their growing procurement needs in the years to come. A firm commitment to deep cuts would also enable the United States to counter critics who charge that it has abandoned the cause of arms control and regain the moral high ground in the effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. And most important, deep cuts would improve American security by reducing the number of missiles aimed at the United States.

But numbers of warheads tell only part of the story. As important as reducing the size of Russia's arsenal is reducing the chances of accidental launch. Russia continues to maintain its nuclear forces on high alert even as its early warning system falls into increasing disrepair—a combination that invites disaster. Both countries recognize the problem, and in June they agreed to set up a shared early warning center in Moscow. Much more can be done, however, particularly in the area of reducing alert levels. The United States and Russia should take steps such as separating warheads from launchers, which would slow down the rate at which a crisis could develop.

The question remains, of course, how best to achieve the goals of slashing offensive weapons and reducing the chances of accidental launch. The Clinton administration relied on the traditional approach of negotiating formal arms control treaties. While such agreements provide clarity about each side's obligations, they are time consuming to negotiate. Gover-

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nor Bush has proposed reducing the U.S. arsenal unilaterally—though he has not said to what number—and inviting the Russians to follow suit. The main question here is whether Congress would tolerate unilateral reductions, especially if it believes Moscow is dragging its feet in response. Congress barred Clinton from unilaterally reducing the U.S. nuclear arsenal to START II levels until the Duma approved the treaty.

National Missile Defense

The third issue on the nuclear agenda and the one with potentially the most far-reaching consequences is national missile defense. President Clinton has pushed development of a ground-based defense that uses “hit-to-kill” technology to destroy warheads in space, though he has left the decision whether to deploy it to his successor. Unlike the more ambitious Strategic Defense Initiative, the Clinton system would be capable of shooting down no more than a couple of dozen warheads. The rationale for this limited system is the fear that North Korea, Iran, or Iraq might soon acquire the ability to threaten the United States with long-range missiles.

Despite its limited capabilities, the Clinton system has come under sharp attack abroad for potentially fueling a new arms race. Moscow rebuffed the administration’s proposal to modify the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to allow for deployment, arguing that the treaty is a cornerstone of strategic stability. Beijing has been an even more bitter critic for a very simple reason: if the Clinton system works, it would in theory render China’s force of some 20 long-range missiles obsolete. European capitals have also been hostile. They dismiss the threat from North Korea, fear the start of a new arms race, and worry that they will become a more tempting target for attack.

The Clinton administration’s system is proving to be increasingly controversial at home as well. The domestic coalition that pushed a reluctant president to embrace missile defense is fraying. Some missile defense proponents agree with the administration’s decision to pursue a limited defense but argue that it has chosen the wrong architecture. They call for developing boost-phase interceptors that shoot missiles down shortly after launch before they can deploy any countermeasures. Other proponents dismiss the Clinton system as too limited. They favor larger defenses that could defeat a Chinese attack or handle a large-scale accidental launch from Russia. And still others cling to Ronald Reagan’s vision of building an anti-missile shield that would render nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.”

So the real debate over missile defense is just beginning. Arms control advocates hope to frame the debate as a question of whether to build defenses at all. But that is not likely to be the debate, notwithstanding North Korea’s suddenly more moderate behavior. Both Al Gore and George Bush accept the need for missile defense in principle, though they differ sharply on the specifics, and the problem of missile proliferation is not going to fade away. Just as important, the Cold War is over. Washington and Moscow are no longer mortal enemies, and there is room to rethink the role of defense in Amer-

ican security. Russian President Vladimir Putin conceded this point himself with his proposal last June in the wake of the Moscow summit that Russia and NATO work together to develop a defense against the growing missile threat.

That is not to say that missile defense technology is ready today, that all defenses make sense, or that defensive deployments can be done cavalierly. Quite the contrary. The difficulties plaguing the Clinton administration’s limited anti-missile system—it flunked two of its first three tests—show that the Pentagon has a long way to go in perfecting defenses against even very small attacks. For that reason, talk about defenses that will negate the nuclear balance of terror or do away with mutual assured destruction is wildly premature.

Even if more ambitious defenses become practical faster than anyone expects, they still may not be desirable. The effort to build a defense against China is unlikely to produce any lasting U.S. advantage and could well undermine U.S. security. Beijing is technologically and financially capable of developing missiles that could penetrate any American defense, and it could become more disagreeable on other issues (such as nuclear proliferation) that matter to the United States. Proposals to build ambitious defenses to handle a large-scale Russian accidental launch are of similarly dubious value. Building anything other than a clearly limited defense risks derailing efforts to make deep cuts in offensive forces because at some point Russia will need to keep more offensive weapons to preserve its nuclear deterrent. In short, it is simpler, cheaper, and far less destabilizing to work with Russia to cut its arsenal, to lower alert rates, and to strengthen its command and control and early warning systems.

Washington should also take the diplomacy of missile defense very seriously. The wisest course of action would be to negotiate modifications of the ABM Treaty with Moscow and possibly even conduct joint programs with Russia. The reason for so doing is not that the ABM Treaty is sacred but that formal agreement reassures Moscow about American intentions and substantially reduces the diplomatic costs of deployment. After all, Europe can hardly object to a missile defense if Moscow doesn’t.

Of course, Moscow may prove intransigent on missile defense and leave the United States with no choice but to withdraw from the treaty. But if so, Washington should still seek to allay Russian concerns. At a minimum, it should pursue a tacit arms control policy that keeps Moscow informed of its plans and unilaterally accept intrusive verification procedures. No one should be under any illusion, however, that tacit arms control will be easy to establish. Not only is treaty abrogation an inauspicious foundation on which to build a new relationship with Moscow, but also domestic political support for tacit arms control could prove elusive. Critics will ask why the United States is sharing sensitive information with countries that target American cities and that are under no legal obligation to open their own nuclear arsenals up for inspection. The net result might be no arms control at all. Both Washington and Moscow should keep this in mind as they discuss the future of the ABM Treaty. ■

by Fiona Hill

RUSSIA

The U.S. Response to Cha

The 1990s were a disappointing decade for Russia, marked by severe economic decline and two devastating wars in Chechnya. Internationally, with the collapse of the USSR, Russia lost much of its stature on the world stage, and Western countries made incursions into its former spheres of influence—most notably by expanding NATO and intervening militarily in the Balkans. As the 21st century opens, the Russian state seems barely capable of the most basic political, social, and economic functions and incapable of projecting power abroad.

In the wake of the Cold War, Russia is still trying to reposition itself in its single most important relationship, that with the United States, and to define a new role regionally and globally. The greatest fear of Russian leaders, intent on retaining Russia's position as a great power, is to see their state relegated to the status of a "third world" country—"Upper Volta with missiles," as one Russian commentator once put it. The quest for international respect will pose major challenges for a new U.S. administration seeking to manage the relationship with Russia.

Russians have put much store in their new president, Vladimir Putin, who is promising to bring stability and prosperity at home and respect abroad. Putin is a product of the Russian political elite—a state functionary affiliated with the security services, plucked from relative obscurity by Kremlin insiders, and then designated to replace the ailing Boris Yeltsin and send a strong message to the outside world. His ascendancy represented a statement on behalf of all Russians that "we will henceforth define our own political and economic path." As a result, Putin will be forced to chart a policy course among the shoals of elite and public opinion and the competing demands of powerful political factions to whom he is beholden.

New Policy Imperatives in Russia

Stability and control have supplanted marketization and democratization as Russia's policy imperatives. Stability, in the form of peace, security, and legal order, has been repeatedly singled out in public opinion polls as the overriding goal of the Russian people. Control implies reestablishing a centralized, paternalistic government that will check

the chaotic devolution of authority to Russia's regions, strengthen the powers of the presidency, increase state regulation of the economy, and boost the powers of law enforcement agencies, the security services, and the armed forces to combat crime and corruption and threats from separatists.

Government policy actions this year have been consistent with these imperatives. To date, they have included the restoration of the Presidential Security Council as the primary decisionmaking body; the reduction of the powers of the Federation Council, the upper chamber of Russia's parliament; legislative attempts to enable Putin to remove regional governors; the creation of seven super regions in the Russian Federation and the direct appointment of presidential representatives to supervise them; and decrees to bring regional and federal laws into conformity. These measures have been complemented by the determined pursuit of the war in Chechnya to overcome the national humiliation of defeat there in 1996; the resurgence of the FSB, successor to the KGB; detentions and arrests of researchers, journalists, and oligarchs perceived to be acting contrary to state interests; and increasing restrictions on press freedoms.

The Russian political elite sees economic development as the best way to

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