



British American Security
Information Council

REPORT ON A VISIT TO MOSCOW – November 28-30, 2011

November 30, 2011

BASIC executive director Paul Ingram travelled to Moscow and participated in several meetings on nuclear arms control with a focus on tactical nuclear weapons. On the last day of his trip, he participated in a meeting which covered Russian perspectives on Iran's nuclear program. Below is his personal report on the visit. The program was made possible with the support of the Ploughshares Fund.

Nuclear Disarmament and Arms Control: next steps and the role of the Russian-European dialogue

Seminar organised by the PIR Center at MacArthur Institute, Moscow, November 28

Fifteen experts attended, including: Dmitry Polikanov, Deputy Head of the Central Executive Committee of the United Russia Party; Prof. Alexander Radchuk, Advisor to the Chief of General Staff, Russian Armed Forces; Gen. Viktor Yesin, Advisor to the Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Missile Forces; and an official from the Foreign Ministry's Department of Security and Disarmament Affairs. Proceedings were conducted in English and Russian in consecutive interpretation.

The Role of Nuclear Weapons in European Security, and the NATO-Russian Strategic Dialogue

Seminar organised by and at Carnegie Moscow, November 29

Over 30 people attended, largely made up of a number of Russian experts on related issues including Alexei Arbatov (IMEMO) and Victor Slipchenko, but also: Mikhail Kustovsky of the Foreign Ministry's Department of Security and Disarmament; Col. Oleg Kulakov, Lev Kondratov and Tamara Appoeva of the Military University of the MoD; and Lev Ryabev of Rosatom.

Inviting suggestions on UK contributions for disarmament

I invited participants to make suggestions on how Britain could best contribute to the prospects for disarmament, and specifically in multilateralising the process. One response was that British and French nuclear weapons should come under the limits accepted by the Americans, but I said that this was not realistic, would unhelpfully reinforce the sense of cold war attitudes and was backward-looking, and does not recognise that the rationale for UK and French deployments was minimum (or sufficient) deterrence, not as a balance to other powers. The United Kingdom and France have said they are ready to take part when the United States and Russia come down closer to their levels. However, there was some chance of their involvement in the Russian proposal to multilateralise the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Indeed the French had

already ensured that this is EU policy. The manner of UK and French contributions beyond unilateral measures has already been the focus of transparency measures through the P5.

One Russian participant took this theme up by suggesting that the United Kingdom held great hope as a leader in the moves towards disarmament (it is 'ideally positioned for political and technical reasons to start the global process'). He suggested in particular that the United Kingdom could voluntarily and unilaterally declare its possession and plans under Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) definitions in a manner that could be verified, and that it is abiding by the new START transparency measures, including confidence-building measures and inviting in inspectors from the United States and Russia on the same basis that those two countries already do. The objective would largely be to start a process of multilateralisation – a really challenging and complex process that could benefit from such an initiative.

He questioned the technical arrangements that enabled the United Kingdom to declare that its submarines were on days or weeks' notice to fire. He was particularly interested because he thought that Britain may have something to contribute to the current discussion on de-alerting. We answered that although the United Kingdom did not have a policy of 'no-first-use', it was generally geared towards an invulnerable second-strike capability necessary for a minimum deterrent. We thought that there were no technical obstacles to rapid response on the submarines themselves, but rather the barriers were in the structured and systematic approach to decision-making prior to the decision to prepare and fire. Without giving anything confidential away, were we on the right track? If so, there still may be something important that the United Kingdom can contribute.

Discussing tensions over Ballistic Missile Defence

These seminars were held the week after a President Dmitry Medvedev threatened to deploy Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad to target ballistic missile defence (BMD) installations, and other counter-measures, if the United States and NATO did not take seriously the needs to collaborate with Russia and to mitigate concerns that BMD could eventually threaten Russia's strategic deterrent.

I was asked by one participant whether there would be any counter-steps announced by the West? The Russian frustration expressed by the premier was also reflected by some of the participants. One expressed the view that Russia had much to offer – with technology and finances – and that an agreement would have far-reaching consequences, not least in uniting East and West in dealing with Iran. I and others pointed out that this was not the perception in Washington and in much of Europe. BMD was seen as the jewel in the crown of US strategic advantage, acquired at significant cost, and that they would not give up this advantage easily by sharing it. Achieving an agreement within Europe around objectives and sharing of technology has been difficult enough. There would be strong opposition in Washington and parts of Europe to any significant sharing of the technology with Russia.

It was pointed out that much of the debate in Europe is influenced by ignorance of the rationale behind Russian military modernisation. There is almost a naive assumption that if Russia were friendly that it would not need to modernise, and that any signs of modernisation demonstrates malign intent towards its neighbours. Having a better explanation of the thinking behind plans and transparency around deployments would help a lot. Obviously there remain significant challenges, and for example there needs to be some replacement to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) process to tackle differences of opinion in conventional force deployments.

Some agreed that the timing of Medvedev's statement was related to the Parliamentary elections, but this was denied by one official who said that rather this was a plea, with plenty of time prior to Chicago, for there to be

better progress well in advance of the summit. Russia's demands had been specific with a focus on legal guarantees, verification and confidence-building, and these were seen as being reasonable. But there seemed to be little chance of early progress. European states could not even agree on specifics around collaboration, and would be highly unlikely to contribute much to the plans beyond land and some provision of personnel.

Understanding NATO's nuclear posture

On the issue of NATO's own nuclear posture, the fact that NATO had committed to its own nuclear deterrent all the while any nuclear weapons existed had not gone unnoticed. Nevertheless, disagreements clearly existed within the Alliance around nuclear deployments, and those would continue beyond the Chicago summit.

Some participants expressed uncertainty about Germany's position. Given that Germany originally had such a clear position in the coalition agreement to withdraw NATO's tactical nuclear weapons, how could Germany and other countries seem to have gone along with the status quo since then? I pointed out that NATO unity and cohesion were of greater value for member states than such policy positions, but cohesion could easily turn in the other direction in a few years' time when the final investment decisions on aircraft will need to be made, and Germany will have to exit the game. Some participants expressed this as regrettable because it would delay progress on the next round of negotiations. This led to a conversation on the requirement agreed within the Alliance for Russian reciprocity before the Alliance would support making further reductions in TNW. There was recognition of conflicting objectives, including the acknowledgement that NATO's attachment to TNW focuses mostly on internal needs for cohesion and burden-sharing rather than on explicit deterrence of Russia.

Options in Dealing with Iran's Nuclear Program after the IAEA Report

Seminar organised by the Center for Energy and Security Studies at MacArthur Institute Moscow, November 30

This seminar hosted 33 attendees, most of whom were diplomats from Moscow-based embassies covering these issues. Participants included Vladimir Kuchinov, Advisor to the Director-General of 'Rosatom'; Col. Oleg Kulakov of the Military University of the Ministry of Defence; and a few Russian experts.

Discussion over differences on sanctions against Iran

The discussion focused on the nature, extent and effectiveness of the sanctions being imposed upon Iran, particularly by the United States and Europe. It was observed that Europeans in particular had come closer together in putting pressure on Iran over the last five years, and that Iran had been a foreign policy opportunity for Europe to build unity after the disastrous experience of disunity over the Iraq adventure. European scepticism around a strong approach towards Iran amongst capitals had largely evaporated. The United Kingdom and France had generally led in this regard (most recently with the United Kingdom imposing sanctions of the Iranian Central Bank), with severe measures for sanctions-busting. At the same time, states in other parts of the world have recently become more sceptical, and the issue has been eclipsed by the Arab awakening/Spring. There may have been several reasons for this, not least the experience of states like Switzerland, Brazil and Turkey who had attempted 'imaginative' solutions that had received rebuff from one side or the other. It was pointed out that the sanctions project had been a massive investment, and absorbed a great deal of diplomatic focus, so that any so-called imaginative solutions or alternative thinking had been interpreted as a threat, and had been quickly squashed.

The IAEA Report was seen by Russians in the seminar as harmful to the prospects for calming the crisis, and as damaging to the Lavrov proposals for a step-by-step climb-down from the confrontation. Russian participants

seemed to recognize that Iran presented some sort of a challenge, but there was resentment expressed that the West had persuaded the Russians down a track that had led to the current trap of isolating Iran. It was proposed that this would inevitably lead to an increase in the price of oil, and potentially enable Russia to spend more on military strength in response to the greater militarisation (missile defence) of Europe.

Other ways of approaching the Iran nuclear situation

Discussion around the 2012 WMD-Free Zone (WMDFZ) conference highlighted the ambiguity of Iran's involvement. While this uncertainty may give little comfort to Israel, it may also let them off the hook somewhat, and call their own engagement into question in an activity that needs to pull the Iranians into addressing concerns about their nuclear programme. The WMDFZ conference offered the chance in the longer term of regionalising the problem of WMD, and reframing the conflict over Iran's nuclear programme (an issue in which the key actors were currently caught in a trap).

We were asked whether the United States was ready to recognise the Iranian regime. There is a belief in Russia that it is more productive to engage and that this holds the best promise of reducing the extremist tendencies within Iran and the threat that they pose. While the importance of Iran in Russia's nuclear market has declined dramatically in the last decade, nevertheless there were still good political reasons to engage.

One Russian participant observed that whilst it seemed self-evident that Iran was building a breakout capability, and that we may not like this, they are perfectly within their rights to do so under the NPT. It will not be possible to persuade the Iranians to suspend enrichment, and so we need to change the demand to one that is more realistic.

One strategy for building trust would be to engage the Iranians on a number of other unrelated issues, such as common interests around Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran could play a role in stabilizing the region.

The meeting finished with the question of whether China played an important role in dealing with the situation. Whilst China has filled some of the gap created by European pull-out of business with Iran, Chinese officials have made it clear that they will not actively come to the political or strategic assistance of Iran. As members of the P5 they, like Russia, have accepted responsibilities to uphold the decisions of the international community, even if they are highly sceptical of the strategy.



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