



BI-WEEKLY TREATY REVIEW



29 December 2009 – 11 January 2010

DTRA

GENERAL ARMS CONTROL

Secretary-General, in Meeting with Heads of Nuclear, Chemical Non-proliferation Agencies, Cites 'New Window of Opportunity' for Disarmament

United Nations, 08 January 2010, <http://www.un.org/>

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at a meeting with the heads of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO-PrepCom) in New York on 08 January 2010. (620 words)

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BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (BWC)

First U.S. National Health Security Plan Released

Global Security Newswire, 08 January 2010, <http://gsn.nti.org/>

The U.S. Health and Human Services Department yesterday released the country's first-ever National Health Security Strategy, which is designed to safeguard the health of the populace in the event of a bioterrorism incident or other large-scale crisis. (205 words) [Click here for full text.](#)

CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (CWC)

Depot Receives Approval for Closure of I-Block Storage Facility

Chemical Materials Agency, 29 December 2009, <http://www.cma.army.mil/>

The Umatilla Chemical Depot has received approval from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) for the closure of the I-block storage facility. (255 words)

[Click here for full text.](#)

Eighty OPCW Checks Conducted at Russia's Chemical Arms Disposal Sites Since 2002

Interfax-AVN Online, 30 December 2009, accessed via Open Source Center

Officials of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have carried out around 80 inspections at chemical weapons disposal facilities located in Russia since 2002, said Viktor Kholstov, director of the Russian Industry and Trade Ministry's department for convention-linked obligations. (208 words) [Click here for full text.](#)



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CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION (CWC) (CONT.)

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Global Security Newswire, 04 January 2010, <http://gsn.nti.org/>

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Anniston Disposal Facility Begins Short Maintenance Phase

Chemical Materials Agency, 05 January 2010, <http://www.cma.army.mil/>

Officials at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF) announced today the start of a scheduled maintenance phase. (232 words) [Click here for full text.](#)

Colorado Files Appeal to Force DoD to Meet CW Disposal Deadline

Global Security Newswire, 05 January 2010, <http://gsn.nti.org/>

Colorado has filed an appeal to a federal judge's determination that the state did not have the authority to require that the U.S. Defense Department meet a congressionally mandated deadline for destruction of chemical weapons, the Associated Press reported yesterday. (112 words) [Click here for full text.](#)

INTEGRATED SAFEGUARDS

Agreement Reached on Integrated Safeguards in European Union

International Atomic Energy Agency, 08 January 2010, <http://www.iaea.org/>

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in cooperation with the European Commission, has reached agreement on arrangements to implement "integrated safeguards" in all non-nuclear-weapon states of the European Union with significant nuclear activities. (287 words) [Click here for full text.](#)



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STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY (START)

Putin Urges United States to Share Missile Defense Data

Associated Press, 29 December 2009, accessed via Lexis Nexis

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that Russia wants the U.S. to share detailed data about its planned missile shield under a new arms control treaty, signaling potential new difficulties in the ongoing negotiations between Moscow and Washington. (592 words)

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Russians Remain Publicly Optimistic on New START Treaty

OSC Report, 07 January 2010, accessed via Open Source Center

Russian officials remained publicly optimistic that agreement on a new arms control treaty to replace the 1991 START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] was near at hand, even as they missed deadlines including the expiration of START on 5 December, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barack Obama on 10 December, and a meeting between President Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev in Copenhagen on 18 December. (725 words)

[Click here for full text.](#)

Obama's Nuclear Arms Pledge Hits Stumbling Block

TIME, 07 January 2010, <http://www.time.com/>

When President Barack Obama pledged to move toward the abolition of nuclear weapons in April 2009, replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was supposed to be the easy first step. (910 words) [Click here for full text.](#)

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United Nations, 08 January 2010, <http://www.un.org/>

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at a meeting with the heads of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO-PrepCom) in New York on 08 January 2010:

Happy New Year and welcome. Thank you for being here. As you know, one of my first acts as Secretary-General was to restructure the office responsible for disarmament. I wanted to generate greater momentum for the work of the United Nations in this vital area, and maximize the impact that I personally could play to advance this agenda.

Today there is a new window of opportunity in disarmament and non-proliferation. I am convinced there is much we can do to achieve our common goal of a world free of weapons of mass destruction. It is in that spirit that I wanted to bring all of you together.

I highly appreciate your valuable work to achieve our common objectives, and I look forward to your perspectives: the major challenges, existing gaps and how to bridge them, ideas on how we can foster greater understanding, cooperation and joint work.

Last year, we saw several encouraging developments. This year, we have much on which to build—and a heavy agenda going forward. Major events ahead include, of course, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference in May. The treaty is facing a number of challenges. A successful outcome would strengthen confidence not only in the treaty but also for the collective global effort to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

Each of you has a vital role to play. The International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] has made a considerable contribution to reducing the risks of nuclear proliferation and terrorism. Concerns over the dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation have highlighted the importance of the Agency's safeguards system and the need for universal adherence to the Additional Protocol.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW], for its part, continues to make significant progress.

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The Preparatory Commission of the CTBTO has laid the groundwork for the global verification regime to monitor compliance with the treaty. We need to continue our strong support so that it becomes effective without further delay.

I strongly believe in the mutual benefits of strengthened cooperation among our organizations, while fully respecting our distinct mandates and relationship agreements. For my part, I can assure you that disarmament and non-proliferation will continue to be a top priority.

In the coming year, I will continue to build support for my Action Plan for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I will promote the universality of the relevant treaties and conventions. Building on the historic Security Council summit last September, I will encourage the Council to provide political support for the full implementation of treaty obligations and the strengthening of the treaty organs. I will strengthen our outreach with civil society, including industries.

To advance these goals, I will attend the upcoming session of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva later this month—the third consecutive year in which I have participated. In February, I will attend the Global Zero Summit in Paris as well as the Munich Security Conference. In April, I will attend the Summit on Nuclear Security in Washington. These events will help generate momentum for the May NPT Review Conference.

In short, I pledge to continue to do everything in my power to advance the goal of a world free of weapons of mass destruction. I look forward to working with all of you to make this a reality. That is why I am so happy we are here together to strategize and think together. I welcome your views and insights.

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The new strategy outlines areas for federal, state and local government agencies and nongovernment groups to focus on over the next four years, the agency said in a press release.

"Whether it's a pandemic or a premeditated chemical attack, our public health system must be prepared to respond to protect the interests of the American people," HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said in the release.

The strategy describes 10 objectives aimed at reaching national health security. They include encouraging a strong countermeasures system that would develop, purchase and disperse medical treatments in the wake of a disaster; making "post-incident health recovery" a part of the planning and response program; and establishing and maintaining the personnel required for national health security.

Improved communications with the public, collaboration with international partners, and making sure that the most advanced scientific understanding is used for national health security efforts are other strategic objectives.

The strategy also recommends a new review of the country's current medical countermeasure system for producing and providing medical countermeasures.

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Chemical Materials Agency, 29 December 2009, <http://www.cma.army.mil/>

The Umatilla Chemical Depot has received approval from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) for the closure of the I-block storage facility. The closure went into effect December 7, 2009. The approval confirms that the closure process has met ODEQ's agent free determination requirements.

Mustard (HD) ton containers were stored in the I-Block area from 2001 to 2006, when they were safely transferred to the depot's Chemical Limited Area.

The approval marks a first for the depot and the Chemical Materials Agency [CMA] in closure of permitted chemical weapons agent storage igloos. Closure of the remaining igloos used to store chemical agent munitions will be conducted using the same planning as the closure activities for I-block.

The igloos that store chemical munitions at the depot are regulated according to requirements of the state of Oregon and federal government regulations. UMCD and ODEQ worked closely during the process. Personnel from the UMCD Environmental Division, Chemical Operations Directorate and contractors from Vista Engineering and RMCI contributed to the successful planning, execution and completion of the closure project.

"Teamwork along with a focus on safety and protection of the environment facilitated this major accomplishment for the depot in its progress toward closure. The planning and proven methods used to close I-Block will form the backbone for eventual closure of the Chemical Limited Area," said Lt. Col. Kris Perkins, depot commander.

The I-Block contains 30 hazardous waste chemical agent storage units or igloos. The closure resulted from three years of closure planning under the depot's Hazardous Waste Storage Permit.

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"Each facility can undergo up to two such inspections every year. One inspection can continue for up to seven days and involve a group of eight inspectors," Kholstov said in an interview with the Rossiiskaya Gazeta newspaper published on Wednesday [30 December].

These checks are intended to verify the type and quantities of chemical arms disposed of at each facility liable for inspections, the official said.

OPCW representatives have been inspecting chemical weapons storage facility in Russia since 1998, he said.

Russia has completed the third stage of its international obligations as part of the Chemical Weapons Convention ahead of schedule, destroying 45 percent, or 18,000 tonnes, of its chemical arms stockpiles, Col. Gen. Valery Kapashin, head of the Federal Directorate for Chemical Arms Safe Storage and Disposal, said earlier.

The third stage of these obligations was supposed to finish on December 31, 2009.

Russia, as a signatory to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is required to dispose of all of its toxic agent stockpiles before the end of 2012.

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Significant progress has been made on construction of the primary chemical weapons disposal facility at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Kentucky, the Lexington Herald-Leader reported last week.

Steel and rebar are being put in position for the pilot building at the 50-acre site at the depot in Madison County. Preparatory operations began more than three years ago, followed by construction of the pilot plant in summer 2009. The chemical weapons destruction complex will eventually contain 11 buildings.

"Now that we're coming out of the ground with the steel, everybody's enthusiastic about that," site project manager Jeff Brubaker said in early December.

Congress for this fiscal year allotted more than \$500 million to the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives program for construction of chemical weapons neutralization plants at Blue Grass and at the Pueblo Chemical Depot in Colorado. The large appropriation means that construction on the Blue Grass disposal plant should finish by 2016—two years earlier than expected—though all of the machinery needs to be tested.

Destruction of the 523 tons of mustard agent and sarin and VX nerve agents stored at Blue Grass is expected to begin in 2018 and last until 2021, which does not meet either the April 2012 disposal deadline set by the Chemical Weapons Convention or the congressionally mandated destruction end date of 2017.

"We're continually looking for other avenues to accelerate the construction process," Brubaker said. "If we're successful in doing that, we should be able to start destruction sooner."

One possibility for speeding up the destruction process is to use explosives to eliminate a portion of the mustard munitions stored at Blue Grass.

The U.S. Defense Department says that method is the safest way to dispose of those weapons. A decision on the proposal is expected this month.

A congressionally mandated advisory panel has already raised objections to the Army's proposal to detonate 125,000 mustard munitions at the Pueblo Chemical Depot, the Associated Press reported.

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The Colorado Citizens Advisory Commission told Army officials in a December 14 letter that it did not approve of its plan to expand the use of explosives in destroying chemical munitions beyond 1,000 shells that are leaking mustard agent. Pueblo holds 780,000 munitions filled with 2,600 tons of the blister agent.

The advisory commission does not have the ability to halt the Army proposal.

"Why all of a sudden this change nobody heard about till the middle of November?" asked Irene Kornelly, chairwoman of the commission, in comments objecting to the detonation proposal. She said the commission also wants information on how waste produced in the detonation would be utilized.

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Anniston Disposal Facility Begins Short Maintenance Phase

Chemical Materials Agency, 05 January 2010, <http://www.cma.army.mil/>

Officials at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF) announced today the start of a scheduled maintenance phase. Chemical munition demilitarization operations will likely resume in 10 to 14 days. “Just as I have regular maintenance performed every 3,000 to 5,000 miles on the vehicle I drive, ANCDF employees have to stop periodically to tune up and adjust our equipment,” said Timothy K. Garrett, site government project manager.

Since the mustard agent disposal campaign began last July (2009), ANCDF employees have safely processed 83,112 mortars and 41,098 gallons (433,171 pounds) of mustard agent. That accounts for 32.1 percent of the mortars, 27.7 percent of all mustard munitions, and 21.9 percent of the mustard agent.

Site officials point out that scheduled maintenance allows the Anniston Team to keep equipment running efficiently and to help ensure the continued safety of the community, the environment, and the work force.

ANCDF employees will begin cooling the Deactivation Furnace System today to perform inspections and equipment calibration. They will also clean the Pollution Filtration System (PFS) for the furnace. The Liquid Incinerator will remain in operation but also will undergo inspection and calibration.

During the first five days of the outage, the Waste Management Department will use the Metal Parts Furnace to destroy some used site filters that had been changed earlier. The furnace will be cooled for inspection and calibration once the filters have been processed.

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Colorado has filed an appeal to a federal judge's determination that the state did not have the authority to require that the U.S. Defense Department meet a congressionally mandated deadline for destruction of chemical weapons, the Associated Press reported yesterday.

The September 2009 ruling was appealed in the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in December.

The state filed a lawsuit demanding that the Pentagon's Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives program meet the 2017 end date to finish disposing of the 2,600 tons of mustard blister agent held at the Pueblo Chemical Depot.

A telephone conference has been set for January 19 to determine whether an accommodation can be reached on the matter.

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), in cooperation with the European Commission, has reached agreement on arrangements to implement "integrated safeguards" in all non-nuclear-weapon states of the European Union with significant nuclear activities.

"This important milestone is the result of the constructive common efforts of all parties concerned. It is a clear signal of the importance attributed by the EU and its Member States, as well as the IAEA, to the reinforcement of the nuclear non-proliferation regime," said Andris Piebalgs, Member of the European Commission in charge of Energy.

"Once we have sufficient confidence that a state's nuclear activities are purely peaceful, we can apply safeguards measures in a less prescriptive, more customized manner. This reduces the inspection burden on the state and the inspection effort of the IAEA, while enabling the IAEA to maintain the conclusion that all nuclear material has remained in peaceful activities," said Olli Heinonen, Deputy Director General and Head of IAEA Safeguards Department.

Background

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the main international treaty prohibiting the spread of nuclear weapons. It entrusts the IAEA to verify that nuclear material is not diverted to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices through the application of "safeguards". IAEA safeguards include comprehensive safeguards agreements and additional protocols that enable the IAEA to conclude that all nuclear material has remained in peaceful activities in a state. Integrated Safeguards refers to the optimum combination of all safeguards measures available to the Agency under comprehensive safeguards agreements and additional protocols to achieve maximum effectiveness and efficiency in meeting the Agency's safeguards obligations.

In the European Union, nuclear safeguards are implemented on the basis of the Euratom Treaty and trilateral agreements between Euratom, its Member States and the IAEA.

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that Russia wants the U.S. to share detailed data about its planned missile shield under a new arms control treaty, signaling potential new difficulties in the ongoing negotiations between Moscow and Washington.

Putin's televised remarks set a defiant tone as negotiators try to hammer out a successor to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty [START] that expired on December 5. The two countries had hoped to reach a deal before the end of the year, but problems persist.

Putin also said that Russia will build new weapons to offset the U.S. missile defense system.

The U.S. State Department rejected Putin's call, saying the START successor treaty would only deal with strategic offensive arms.

"While the United States has long agreed that there is a relationship between missile offense and defense, we believe the START follow-on agreement is not the appropriate vehicle for addressing it," spokesman Ian Kelly said in Washington.

"We have agreed to continue to discuss the topic of missile defense with Russia in a separate venue," he said.

Putin's comments showed that the former Russian president is continuing to shape Russian foreign policy, which under the constitution should be set by his successor, Dmitry Medvedev.

He said that the arms control talks were proceeding in a positive way and added that Medvedev and President Barack Obama will eventually decide whether to strike an arms deal.

But Putin warned that a missile defense system would give the U.S. an edge and could erode the deterrent value of Russia's nuclear forces.

"The problem is that our American partners are developing missile defenses, and we are not," Putin said.

"But the issues of missile defense and offensive weapons are closely interconnected. ... There could be a danger that having created an umbrella against offensive strike systems, our partners may come to feel completely safe. After the balance is broken, they will do whatever they want and grow more aggressive."

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Obama removed a major irritant in relations earlier this year by scrapping the previous administration's plans to place interceptor missiles in Poland and radar in the Czech Republic, deployments Russia treated as a threat.

The Kremlin has praised Obama for the decision, but Russian officials have also said they want to know more about the sea- and land-based systems the U.S. plans to put in place instead.

Putin said that Russia has no intention to build a missile shield of its own, but will have to develop new offensive weapons to offset a future U.S. missile defense.

"In order to preserve a balance while we aren't planning to build a missile defense of our own, as it's very expensive and its efficiency is not quite clear yet, we have to develop offensive strike systems," he said.

Putin added that the U.S. must share information about their missile defense plans if they want Russia to provide data on its new weapons.

"They should give us all the information about the missile defense, and we will be ready then to provide some information about offensive weapons," Putin said.

U.S. officials have said the negotiations to replace START have become hung up over Russia's opposition to retaining the ban on the encryption of missile flight data. The 1991 treaty banned such encryption so each side could monitor missile tests from a distance and determine whether the other side was developing missiles restricted by the treaty.

Russia has little interest in monitoring such data because it is working to upgrade its missile arsenal, while the United States is not testing new missiles.

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OSC Report, 07 January 2010, accessed via Open Source Center

Russian officials remained publicly optimistic that agreement on a new arms control treaty to replace the 1991 START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] was near at hand, even as they missed deadlines including the expiration of START on 5 December, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barack Obama on 10 December, and a meeting between President Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev in Copenhagen on 18 December.

At the same time, officials speaking to the media, on condition of anonymity, became markedly less optimistic that a new agreement would be reached soon or, in some cases, at all. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who had not played a visible role in the process for most of December, gave a sharp-toned speech in Vladivostok on 29 December, and some media observers asserted that Putin has been undermining the negotiations. Both anonymous official sources and nonofficial observers pointed to the May 2010 UN review conference on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as a natural deadline for a treaty signing. Throughout December, most nonofficial commentators echoed the optimistic public official line that agreement on a new treaty was imminent.

Official statements over the month of December 2009 consistently anticipated agreement on the new START Treaty in the near future but were usually vague on specific dates.

- On 25 December, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov asserted that work on the treaty had reached "the final stage of the finishing line. I will say this: there is only a little bit left. The presidents have given the orders on principles, and it is a matter for the professionals, a matter for the experts, to put this on paper" (ITAR-TASS).
- On 24 December, Medvedev remarked that Russia and the United States had "coordinated practically everything, but it all must be reckoned to the last comma" (ITAR-TASS).
- On 21 December, Chief of the General Staff General Nikolay Makarov stated: "In the beginning of 2010, a new agreement should be signed. Although there are serious difficulties" (ITAR-TASS).
- On 21 December, Federation Council International Affairs Committee Chairman Mikhail Margelov said: "In the new year, it is completely obvious, a new Russian-American treaty on strategic-offensive arms will be signed; correspondingly, the task of ratification lies ahead" (RIA-Novosti).
- On 18 December, Medvedev stated: "Our positions are very close and almost all issues that we discussed in recent months have been closed. Certain technical details remain,

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which, in such an important agreement, require finishing all the same. I hope that we will do this in sufficiently short time, and the result that we achieve will reflect the character of good relations which have developed between us and the U.S. Administration" (ITAR-TASS).

- On 18 December, presidential foreign policy adviser Sergey Prikhodko said: "Coordination is required only for technical details. But a date for the future signing is not being named intentionally, so as not to put excessive pressure on the delegations." Prikhodko pointed out that negotiations on the previous START treaty had lasted several years (ITAR-TASS).
- On 18 December, Foreign Ministry spokesman Andrey Nesterenko commented: "The negotiating teams have done an enormous job. We expect that the basic issues will be settled in the very near future, and one could say, hours" (Regnum). ...

In contrast to public statements, comments made to the press, on condition of anonymity, have become less sanguine about the treaty's prospects since mid-December 2009.

On 24 December, respected business daily Kommersant assessed that "in Moscow and Washington now there is no clear conception of precisely what time frame will be required to finish work" on the new treaty. ...

With no agreement at year's end, observers pointed to the May 2010 UN review conference on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) as the natural deadline for a new treaty to be signed.

...

Pavel Zolotarev, deputy director of the Institute of the United States and Canada, told Vremya Novostey: "Russia and the United States are doomed to sign a new strategic arms treaty. In May 2010, the UN conference on execution of the NPT, which is conducted every five years, will take place, and the two leading nuclear powers would really like to agree on their own arsenals by that time" (21 December 2009).

Most nonofficial observers have echoed the optimistic official line, both before and after the treaty remained unsigned in Copenhagen on 18 December 2009. ...

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Obama's Nuclear Arms Pledge Hits Stumbling Block

TIME, 07 January 2010, <http://www.time.com/>

When President Barack Obama pledged to move toward the abolition of nuclear weapons in April 2009, replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was supposed to be the easy first step. But the 1991 agreement, which limits the number of long-range nuclear weapons in Russia and the U.S., expired on December 5, and a replacement has yet to be agreed upon.

An intricate kind of mimicry must be choreographed in arms reduction, requiring all sides to resist the urge to twitch as guns are lowered simultaneously, with parity maintained throughout. Nothing is easy. Yet State Department spokesman Darby Holladay told *TIME* that negotiators are making "significant progress" toward a START replacement. There may still be hope for a swift resolution to outstanding problems.

The primary stumbling block to START negotiations has been a disagreement on how to even measure a reduction in nuclear weapons, arms-control experts say. Long-range nuclear missiles and bombers have the capacity to carry multiple, independently targeted weapons. So the question is, should a treaty limit the number of delivery vehicles available to each country, the number of actual warheads or both?

Recently, the U.S. reduced the number of warheads armed on top of missiles and on its bomber bases—but less so the number of bombers or missiles themselves. On the other hand, Russia—out of economic necessity—has reduced the number of missiles and bombers, while maintaining parity by keeping them more heavily armed.

As a result, the Russians would like to limit the number of delivery vehicles the two sides keep in their arsenals. The U.S. and Russia both have thousands of warheads in storage, which the START treaty (and likely its successor) will not touch. The Russians fear that if the U.S. is allowed a vast force of half-empty missiles and bombers, it could in times of conflict quickly arm these delivery vehicles with stockpiled weapons—and thus have the capacity for an overwhelming "first strike" that could take out the more heavily concentrated Russian nuclear forces. That concern could breed distrust, and prove dangerous.

"This is a very important issue and one, I suspect, that has been the biggest cause of delays," says Hans Kristensen of the Federation of American Scientists. "We don't want Russian war planners deciding to put as many warheads as possible on their delivery vehicles—that is not a crisis-stable situation. It provides an incentive to launch first."

The new START treaty will probably skirt this issue by leaving both countries with robust nuclear forces—about 1,600 deployed strategic warheads, down from the 2,200 of the previous treaty,

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which is still more than enough to wipe each other off the map. But in the Strangelovean world of nuclear deterrence, the slightest threat to parity is a cause for major problems. Early on in the START negotiations last summer, Kristensen says, the Russians balked at a provision that would allow the U.S. to inspect the production facilities of its new RS-24 ICBM because they would not be able to inspect American ICBM construction sites. Kristensen says that's because the U.S. isn't building any new missiles. "It may seem absurd, but both sides are very edgy about maintaining parity in all respects," he says. "That makes negotiations very difficult."

Last week, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin added another irritant to the disarmament talks by claiming that America's planned missile-defense system was holding up the new treaty. Russia has long claimed that the missile-defense system, components of which Obama agreed to remove from Europe last year, would force it to increase its nuclear capability. "There is a danger that our partners, by creating such an 'umbrella,' will feel completely secure and thus can allow themselves to do what they want, disrupting the balance, and aggressiveness will rise immediately," Putin said.

Steve Andreasen, a former director for arms control on the National Security Council, says that Putin's comments were likely a negotiating ploy and that Russia will probably raise its continuing concern about missile defense in later talks. "They are making clear that further reductions in offensive weapons cannot take place divorced from the issue of missile defense—a long-standing Russian position," he says.

Meanwhile, even if negotiators reach a START agreement, it will still require ratification in the U.S. Senate. And in a recent letter, 40 Republican Senators and independent Joe Lieberman suggested that they would not support the agreement unless Obama pledged to allocate money to "modernize" America's nuclear arsenal—that is to say, refurbish old warheads and potentially build new ones. That decision, in turn, hinges on the findings of Obama's "Nuclear Posture Review," in which the President will decide the nuclear forces he feels the U.S. needs to maintain in order to remain secure.

Given his stated commitment to work toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, it's possible the review will call for aggressive cuts. That can't happen, however, without Russia's cooperation, and the current START negotiations are only the beginning. Until that happens, however, both sides will remain locked in a nightmarish anachronism, with nuclear annihilation of both sides always only minutes away. As Andreasen says, "Most experts agree: We will need to do more than the new START, with greater urgency and on a much broader front, to get ahead of the nuclear danger."

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