

Russia's Conditions for Strategic Arms Talks

Description

by Gilbert Doctorow via [Gilbert Doctorow](#)

Western media have mentioned Vladimir Putin's remarks a week or so ago that Russia will not enter into new negotiations on strategic arms limitations with the United States while the USA is doing everything possible to inflict a strategic defeat on his country in the Ukraine war. Strategic arms talks cannot be separated from the rest of the relationship between the countries, said Putin.

This position was amplified a day ago by a senior Russian diplomat, Dmitry Polyansky, first deputy permanent head of Russia at the United Nations. His statements have received little if any attention in our media, though they were broadcast on prime time news in Russia.

What is entirely missing in Western reporting, to my knowledge, is a context for these Russian position statements that goes back in time further than a few weeks. Let us try to address that lacuna here and now.

Contrary to what one might expect, pursuit of strategic arms treaties with the Soviet Union and then with Russia was never championed by doves in the USA, who were more interested in people to people exchanges, increased cultural, educational and commercial relations...in *détente* in its widest sense. Many of these doves even believed that Russia and the United States could and should be friends, acting in consort to address the problems of humanity.

No, the champions and chief negotiators of strategic arms treaties were always the hawks in United States political circles. It was they who saw in these agreements the possibility to continue trade, diplomatic and other policies that would prevent the USSR's economic development and reduce its more general threat to American global interests while providing guard rails against the relationship erupting into war threatening life on earth, and most especially life and prosperity in the US of A.

The last iteration of these American initiated arms control talks was the negotiation of the New START agreement in the presidency of Barack Obama. This took place against the background of the widely advertised "Reset" of relations, which was intended to move beyond the open hostility between the two countries in the summer of 2008 during the Russia-Georgia war under George W. Bush. At that time, armed conflict in the Black Sea was averted only by Turkish intervention, preventing entry through the Dardanelles of American naval vessels.

In that crisis atmosphere, 'wise men' from among active and retired U.S. Senators, former senior government officials and including the most notable celebrity of the time, Henry Kissinger, formulated a road map for bringing US-Russian relations back from the brink which they passed along to both candidates for the presidency, Barack Obama and John McCain. The underlying logic was to improve the atmospherics while doing nothing to change the substance of America's containment policies towards the Russian Federation in the spirit of Cold War I. Following Obama's inauguration in 2009,

this was rolled out as the 'Reset.' The logic given to the American public was that despite their adversarial positions, the United States would cherry pick those issues where a cooperative relationship with Russia would serve American interests and pursue them in the months ahead.

For those who wish to understand the origins and sense of the 'Reset,' there are several highly pertinent and detailed essays in my *Stepping out of Line: Collected (Nonconformist) essays on Russian-American relations, 2008-2012*.

One might well ask why the Russians played along with the American initiative in 2008 which fell far short of their hopes for a new détente? The answer is very simple: the Kremlin held a weak hand of cards, one that was as bad, possibly even worse than the Soviet Union held when it negotiated the first treaties on arms limitations with the United States in the 1970s. Its armed forces were still far from being restored from the self-destruction and chaos of the Yeltsin years. This was demonstrated to the glee of Western military analysts who commented on the performance of Russian troops in their engagements in Georgia. Moreover, even if Russia held some better cards, its then President, Dmitry Medvedev, was, shall we say, naïve and inexperienced in international relations. He hoped that gestures of good will towards the Americans would be reciprocated. Needless to say, they were not.

So what has changed now for Russia to declare arms limitations talks inseparable from negotiations on the full scope of US-Russian relations? The answer to that question goes back to 2018 and Vladimir Putin's announcement of his country's latest strategic arms systems which, for the first time in Soviet and RF history, placed Russia as much as a decade ahead of the United States in developing, producing and deploying strategic weapons. The hypersonic missiles and other state of the art systems that Putin presented at his State of the Nation address back then were said to be invincible and would nullify entirely the nuclear first strike capability that the United States under Bush had been investing hundreds of billions of dollars to achieve by its global anti-ballistic missile installations.

In 2018, Putin's announcements of strategic superiority over the United States were taken to be a bluff. There was the common belief among U.S. elites that the Russians could never produce these weapons in numbers sufficient to pose a threat to American superiority.

Now, in 2024, Putin has been proven right and the doubters and scoffers in the Collective West have been proven wrong about Russia's ability to put on standby, ready for launch, weapons that the USA still has not succeeded in passing trials. Moreover, the two years of the Russia-Ukraine war have demonstrated that Russia possesses conventional weapons which are equal to or superior to the best that NATO can bring to the battlefield.

Whereas a couple of years ago major media in the West spoke of China as the world's fastest rising military power, second only to the USA, and Russia was said to be just a spoiler, a star on the decline, today the *The Financial Times*, *The New York Times* and their *confrères* in the USA and Europe do not hesitate to admit that Russia is number two in the world's league of military powers.

This, my friends, is the proper context for reading Mr. Polyansky's declarations in the United Nations. The worm has turned.

For the full English translation text of Polyansky's address in the UN, see:
<https://russiaun.ru/ru/news/180324>