

The Dangers of Nuclear War: U.S.-Russian Nuke Deal no Cure for Real Threat

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BEIJING, April 2 –After nearly a year’s negotiations, the U.S. and Russian governments finally reached an agree-ment on further reduction and limitation of nuclear weapon arms. The agreement will be signed on April 8, limiting the total number of warheads to less than 1,550. Overall, it is good for world peace and stability as well as the prevention of nuclear proliferation, but we shouldn’t be over-optimistic about the treaty.

The motivations behind the treaty are clear. Russia is opposed to the U.S. missile defense system and its deployment in Eastern Europe. The U.S. continues to expand the scope of the missile defense system, which constitutes a real threat to Russia in Eastern Europe.

With 95 percent of the world’s total nuclear warheads, the U.S. and Russia are the world’s two largest nuclear powers. Russia has more than 14,000 missiles and the U.S. has more than 9,000. This remains one of the few areas where the former U.S.’s national strength is as great as ever, so the U.S. is active in working toward compromise in this field.

Yet the treaty has its problems. In the existing agreements, the number of nuclear warheads was limited to between 1,500 and 2,200. This new agreement itself has no new breakthroughs and has not met the expectations of the international community. Half a year ago, the limit of 1,500 was proposed, but in the end, it became 1,550, no big breakthrough at all.

The most fundamental problem is that the provisions do not eliminate nuclear weapons but instead change their level of readiness. Nuclear weapons have three states of readiness: fully equipped and ready to be fired, readied but with the head and body separated, and finally, in storage conditions with the warhead removed.

This treaty reduces the number of fully equipped nuclear weapons to less than 1,550, but the excess missiles will not be destroyed, only moved to a different state of readiness. They could be activated and re-weaponized in only a short span of time.

Despite the agreement, the U.S. also continues to work on developing new nuclear weapons itself. While some are being moved from the frontlines, lighter, more accurate weapons are being developed, as well as so-called bunker-busters designed to penetrate deeply into the Earth.

The U.S.-Russian agreement only limits bilateral development, but the real concern is the spread of nuclear weapons worldwide. The U.S. is planning to hold a nuclear safety summit on April 13 where the core issue is the nuclear non-proliferation.

Once nuclear technology spreads, and especially if terrorist organizations get their hands on nuclear materials, the consequences are unpredictable, and it is in every country's interests to prevent this.

U.S. standards on nuclear proliferation are also inconsistent. It gives tacit approval to Israel's nuclear weapons program, and makes no effort to discourage Japan from stockpiling raw materials that could, in theory, produce thousands of nuclear weapons.

In contrast, the U.S. has been particularly sensitive to Iran and North Korea. Iran has not tested nuclear weapons, but claims to be developing civilian nuclear facilities. However, the U.S. has been strongly working for sanctions against it as a consequence and even considering military actions.

Out of political considerations, the U.S. has adopted two completely different standards on the use of nuclear technology by various nations.

To make a convincing case for non-proliferation, the U.S. should apply the same standards to every country.

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